# RHR

## Rhodes Historical Review

VOLUME 20       SPRING 2018

# The Rhodes Historical Review

*The Rhodes Historical Review* showcases outstanding undergraduate history research taking place at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. Phi Alpha Theta (The National History Honor Society) and the Department of History at Rhodes College publish *The Rhodes Historical Review* annually. *The Rhodes Historical Review* is produced entirely by a three-member student editorial board and can be found in the Ned R. McWherter Library at The University of Memphis, the Benjamin L. Hooks Central Public Library of Memphis, and The Paul J. Barret Jr. Library at Rhodes College.

Submission Policy: In the fall, the editors begin soliciting submissions for essays 3,000-6,000 words in length. Editors welcome essays from any department and from any year in which the author is enrolled; however, essays must retain a historical focus and must be written by a student currently enrolled at Rhodes College. Submissions are reviewed in December, with a premiere date set in April.

# The Rhodes
# Historical Review

## CONTENTS

# The Creation of Meaning in Fascist Italy: History and Myth in Urban Reconstruction and Public Cartography

## Bonnie Whitehouse

Power must always be represented. Without visibility or representation of some form, power becomes obsolete. However, the representation and communication of power does not have to be logocentric. For instance, propaganda posters are a visual means of communicating a message and representing power, but communications of meaning and power can come in subtler forms. The era of Italian Fascism and the rule of Benito Mussolini have been the subject of many studies on how power can be aestheticized and visually represented. While much of the literature about Mussolini's role in shaping visual language and artistic culture in Rome focuses on his more obvious propaganda, or his exhibitions of ancient Roman art like the Mostra Augustea dell Romanita, this study will focus on his urban planning scheme and public art campaign centered in the ancient heart of the city. The ways Mussolini created, limited, and communicated meaning to the people of Rome through physical changes to the city are the manifestations

of a subtle but explicit aspect of his power - the rewriting of history. To see how Mussolini used the space and history of the city to imply meaning to his citizens, a theoretical understanding of the nature of communication would be advantageous. This study will use Wolfgang Iser's theory of communication to demonstrate how Mussolini created, limited, and communicated meaning in his regime through the propagation of a mythologized history, reinforcing these concepts through the reorganization of public spaces and the use of imperial Roman visual language.

In attempting to understand how Mussolini and the Fascist regime used visual language, historical myths, and urban planning to communicate their larger ideological goals to the public, it will be helpful to think generally about how meaning is communicated from a leader to the public. The process is similar to how meaning is conveyed from an author to readers via a text. Using Wolfgang Iser's literary reception theory to frame the communication of meaning, it becomes clear how Mussolini made use of art and history in the same way an author makes use of text to organize, structure, and suggest meaning. Using a reception theory is helpful, too, in seeing how Mussolini received the physical and mental landscape of Rome as it existed when he came to power and how he appropriated Roman iconography to communicate his own political message. This reception theory, titled Die Appellstruktur der Texte, was conceived by Iser in 1970 and focuses on "how and under what conditions a text has meaning for a reader" and the

"conditions that give rise to and govern text-reader interaction."[1] While this theory was written for literary criticism and has been applied to the reception of fine art; it is a theory based in the nature of communication and can therefore be used to describe how meaning is constructed, limited, and interpreted in a historical moment.

The application of Iser's theory to history is not as improbable as it initially may seem. Although Die Appellstruktur der Texte is a theory about fiction, literary reception theorists have come to consider the writing of history as a fictional construction.[2] The main tenets of Iser's theory that will be crucial to understanding Mussolini's construction of meaning are: the prestructuring of a text to imply and limit meaning, the idea of an "implied reader," the communicative situation as performative and involving common activities, and the amount of control exerted over the reader by the text. The importance of these parts of the theory for the creation and communication of meaning in Fascist Italy will be explained in relation to examples of Mussolini's physical, mental, and ideological restructuring of Rome.

---

[1] Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 83-84.

[2] There is a trend among literary reception theorists to view history as a literary construction. These beliefs have their origins in the work of Hans Robert Jauss, Jacques Derrida, and Hayden White, who want written history to be seen as a construction rather than objective fact because to write history is to interpret it via the subjective mindset of the writer. Even if we are unwilling to see history as fiction, these theories encourage the reader to recognize the proximity between history and literature (Holub, Reception Theory, 160-162).

Italy was under Fascist rule and the leadership of Benito Mussolini from 1922 until 1943. When Mussolini came to power, a consensus on Italian identity did not exist. Local identity prevailed over national identity despite the fact that the country had been unified for over 50 years.[3] While this sense of disunity within Italy was longstanding, it had had been highlighted and exacerbated by World War I. The war had been one of the few things able to unite the country on a common front; people could share the experience of national pride and of having sacrificed for their country. The realization that war was a stronger unifying force than government led to a general sense of disillusionment among Italians with their existing institutions.[4] During a time of political unrest, a new form of politics was called for—one that would continue the sense of heroic nationalism felt by people during the war. [5] According to Borden Painter, in responding to this call, "Mussolini transformed the [Fascist] movement into a political party that offered Italians hyper-nationalism and promised to give Italy new life through a program of internal unity and external strength." [6] Mussolini understood that to have a unified Fascist state, he, as a

---

[3] Harry Hearder, *Italy in the Age of the Risorgimento 1790-1870* (New York: Longman, 1983), ix.

[4] Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (University of California Press, 2000), 5.

[5] Ibid, 5.

[6] Borden W. Painter, *Mussolini's Rome: Rebuilding the Eternal City* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 1.

leader, would have to create an idea and history of Italy that could encompass all Italian people and that would respond to the growing nationalistic sentiments.[7]

Not only did the Italian people crave a new type of government with updated priorities, but they also unconsciously longed for a new version of Italian history. After World War I, the Italian people wanted a clear direction for their country, a simplified story about the past and future that could overcome recent political confusion, and a trajectory which they could follow into the future. A version of history written and taught under Fascism would not only be shaped by the existing zeitgeist of post-World War I Italy - trending towards nationalism and simplicity - but also by Mussolini's own high opinion of classical antiquity, and specifically ancient Rome, as the origin of Italian greatness. Jan Nelis observes the following:

"a need for simplified history, for simple stories, was voiced. Mussolini, himself a veteran of the great War, was no exception to this enthusiasm for oversimplification. He thought of history in largely mythical terms, as did in fact most of the intellectuals just before and under Fascist rule. His knowledge of classical Rome was very narrow and influenced by eighteenth-century Enlightenment and nineteenth-century revolutionary thinking."[8]

---

[7] Ibid, 1.

[8] Jan Nelis, "Constructing Fascist Identity: Benito Mussolini and the Myth of "Romanità" *The Classical World* 100, no. 4 (2007), 396.

The highly-constructed impression of ancient Rome in both history and popular conception had the potential to transcend the disunity of the Italian state and serve as a common origin for all Italian people. Mussolini did not need to associate himself with the real history of Rome, just with a convenient and unifying version of that history, which post-war Italy was ready to accept as true. This myth of Rome would serve as Mussolini's "inspiration and guiding principle" in his quest to create a unified state under his party.[9]

Mussolini borrowed the myth of Rome, the idea of romanitas or "Roman-ness," primarily from the period of Italian unification between 1815 and 1871 known as the Risorgimento. The Risorgimento, part of a tend towards romantic nationalism throughout the continent, is notorious for its emphasis on constructing a simplified mythological history for the new country and has since been called "the most mythologized political and cultural movement in nineteenth-century Europe."[10] This version of history is filled with myths about the preeminence of Italy under Roman rule as one of the first democratic civilizations and successful empires. During unification, romanitas was emphasized to give Napoleon II and King Victor Emanuel II a historic past of Italian excellence and empire in which to ideologically ground their expansionist policies. The

---

[9] Valentina Follo, "The Power of Images in the Age of Mussolini" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2013), 10.

[10] Alison Chapman, "On Il Risorgimento," (BRANCH, 2017), 3.

emphasis on Roman history gave their citizens a purposefully constructed, shared frame of reference against which they could favorably judge this new ruler.[11]

Romanitas had worked during the Risorgimento to unite a new nation, and now the Fascist party adopted it as their own. Mussolini's ultimate goal for appropriating this history was unity among the Italian people, one shared frame of reference which he could work within and organize the rest of his rule and propaganda around.[12] A general frame of reference or shared body of background knowledge makes it easier for those in power to anticipate how people will react. A consensus is necessary even in a dictatorial system; while Mussolini's Fascist regime held an enormous amount of power over its people, power alone cannot control the way people assign meaning. Mussolini therefore fostered a collective mindset in many ways, but principally by disseminating his rewritten history via the Italian school system – piggybacking on the frame of reference and organization of history established during the Risorgimento. The mythologized history taught under Fascism, which children started to learn in the third grade, focused on the supremacy of ancient Rome and on Italy as a bedrock of civilization, overlooking and undermining the role of Greek society and culture as necessary precursors.[13] The narrative

---

[11] Ibid, 3.

[12] Tracy Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight: Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy, 1922-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1945), 2.

[13] Koon. *Believe, Obey, Fight*, 2.

of the civilizing history of Rome continued with an emphasis on Rome's role in the establishment of Christianity. History under Fascism served not to document the past, but to construct a mythic notion of Italy throughout history. This history was almost completely Italocentric, virtually ignoring the role of other nations in Italy's history, and selectively chosen in order to further the goals of the party. The Fascists especially targeted children with history as propaganda, not only because it would be easiest to teach children a new history, but also because they were the regime's best hope for a Fascist future.[14] Schools under this dictatorial system thus became machines of propaganda instead of truth, critical thinking, and criticism.[15] By priming Italian citizens to see Fascism in reference to ancient Rome via public education, the Fascists managed to produce a "broad, albeit superficial, consensus among many Italian young people."[16]

While the idea of romanitas and the beginning of this constructed history came from the Risorgimento, Mussolini edited this version of history to better fit his own aspirations. Mussolini wanted to create a new Roman empire and spread Fascism across Europe. While the Risorgimento had focused on the more democratic, Republican period of Roman history, Fascists used imagery from, and references to, the

---

[14] Koon. *Believe, Obey, Fight*, 2.

[15] Herbert W. Schneider and Shepard B. Clough, *Making Fascists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), 83.

[16] Koon. *Believe, Obey, Fight*, 6.

Imperial period.[17] Fascist visual language especially favored images of the "good" [18] emperors, like Augustus, who exemplified the power and reach Mussolini wished to have while providing a positive moral association. Although this history was selective, inaccurate, and often confusing as it ignored many forces that had helped bring Italy to its current point, "the longstanding familiarity of Italians with the myth of Rome," their current nationalistic spirit, and the visible remnants of the Roman past made it easier for Mussolini to insert his Fascist conception of history into the minds of the Italian people.[19]

Mussolini's arrangement of historical associations through the education system can be understood in relation to Iser's theory of communication as the prestructuring of a text to imply and limit meaning. The author of a fiction, or in this case, a historic moment, constructs the text in two ways: to "prestructure" or predetermine the meaning the text can offer, and to order the way in which a reader can interact with and interpret that meaning. [20] By determining the associations Italian citizens would have with ancient Rome and with Fascism, Mussolini could anticipate the reactions of

---

[17] Follo, "The Power of Images in the Age of Mussolini," 12.

[18] Ancient Romans designated certain emperors as "good": Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antonius Pius, and Marcus Aurelius. Knowing that most modern Italians would have been aware of this custom but not necessarily which emperors were traditionally given this designation, Mussolini could appropriate this Roman tradition and reassign the title of "good" to power-driven and expansionist emperors like Constantine and Augustus.

[19] Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, 94.

[20] Holub, *Reception Theory*, 85.

people to his political actions and frame his rule to be seen as positive and constructive for Italy.

Mussolini's fascist regime was not only rewriting ancient and pre-modern history, but also simultaneously historicizing Fascist Italy. The real-time historicization of Fascism begins with the creation of the "Era Fascista" system, which changed how years were counted in Italy. The Fascists replaced the Christian tradition of counting years from the birth of Christ and instead insisted that years be counted from the March on Rome; the moment in 1922 which marks the Fascist takeover of political power.[21] With this new organization of time, 1922 became "year one," and the rest of Fascist history would continue from there. Mussolini wanted his movement not merely historicized, but to the ambitious extent of assigning it the same degree of historical significance given to the birth of Christ. The events surrounding the March on Rome and the way it was conceived as the beginning of Fascist history provide another example of how Mussolini used a mythologized history to create meaning during his regime. Mussolini and his party planned to stage a coup on October 28, 1922 that would include thousands of Fascist party members descending on the capital.[22] However, the march did not occur as planned when the king, Victor Emmanuel III, granted Mussolini the position of Prime Minister to avoid a

---

[21] Koon. *Believe, Obey, Fight*, 19.

[22] Ibid, 29.

major and potentially violent conflict.[23] Thus, the planned March on Rome resulted in the relatively peaceful transfer of power and a subsequent celebratory Fascist parade through Rome. Fascist rhetoric and later performances greatly mythologized the event, however, acting as if the dramatic, planned seizure of power resulting from thousands of Fascists descending on the capital had really happened. The anniversary of the March on Rome was performatively and publicly celebrated each year of Mussolini's rule. It becomes clear that Mussolini was not only concerned with how the history of the past was read, but also with how the history of the Fascist era would be read in the future. Mussolini's desire that Fascism would later be seen as a moment of monumental change in Italian history is also evident in the conception of Fascism as "the third Rome."[24] Fascist history, as printed in state distributed textbooks, organized Italian history into three parts: "Rome of the Caesars, Rome of the Popes, and Fascist Rome."[25]Chronologizing history in this way communicated to the people of Italy a promise that the Fascist regime would resemble, and even surpass, previous iterations of the nation which had lasted for centuries and been internationally influential. By placing Italy as the birthplace of empire and religion, Italian Fascism was then

---

[23] Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, 2.

[24] Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight*, 13.

[25] Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle*, 2.

framed as the logical beginning of a "third epoch of human civilization."[26]

　　Mussolini's rewriting of Italian history for the betterment of his own regime demonstrates how history can become a fictional construction. We know that Mussolini himself understood this concept as he often mentioned the group psychology theory of French polymath Gustave Le Bon in his writings.[27] Le Bon (1841-1931) understood that the true power of history comes from the belief that people have in it; that the validity of a historical narrative comes not from the inclusion of actual truth, but from its widespread acceptance. This faith, of course, must be constructed and encouraged by the ruling body propagating the history, but its force is undeniable. Le Bon claims that "all great historical facts are the... direct or indirect consequences of strong impressions produced on the crowd."[28] The role of historical myths, like the ones propagated by Mussolini, was to create and impose impressions on the populace, and create faith through repetition within children's textbooks, in propaganda posters, and even in the reorganization of the physical space of Rome. Because of Mussolini's utilization of Le Bon's theory, we can assume that most, if not all, of his actions in creating a new history of Italy were intended to

---

[26] Quote from Massimo Bontempelli essay published in *Critica Fascita*, 4.22 (15 November 1920). In Jeffery T. Schnapp, *A Primer of Italian Fascism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 219.

[27] Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight*, 4.

[28] Quote from Alice Widener, *Gustave Le Bon: The Man and his Works* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press. 1979), 71 in Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight*, 4.

create a shared frame of reference. If Mussolini's interest in Le Bon was not proof enough of his own understanding that history can be rewritten and used for political purposes, the same sentiment can be seen when he declared that "Today in Italy is not the time for history. Nothing is yet concluded. It is time for myths… Only the myth can give strength and energy to a people about to hammer out its own destiny."[29] Like the author of a text, Mussolini identified the meaning he wanted his citizens to gain from his rule and was aware of his own role in creating and communicating that meaning.

The people of Rome then, primed by the Risorgimento and post-World War I nationalism and manipulated by Mussolini's version of history, are what Iser would have considered the receivers of constructed meaning or "implied readers." Iser discusses how the identity of a potential reader is "firmly planted in the structure of the text"[30] and explains that "the term [implied reader] incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process."[31] Mussolini organized his rule and his associations with Roman history to take advantage of extant "implied readers," citizens primed by post-war nationalism, Risorgimento and Fascist

---

[29] Quote from Augusto Simonini, *Il Linguaggio di Mussolini* (Milan: Bompiani, 1978), 37 in Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight*, 9.

[30] Holub, *Reception Theory*, 85

[31] Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974), xii.

educational programs, and indoctrinated into a simplified narrative of Italian history that could be carried into the future by the Fascists. These "implied readers" were citizens Mussolini knew he could communicate with and inspire by appropriating imperial Roman visual language and history, taking advantage of their current frames of reference. In writing his own history in textbooks as well as physically across the face of Rome itself, Mussolini as the author could control meaning for this real world "implied reader," and we can, in retrospect, better understand his choices.

Not only did Fascism change the general conception and history of Rome, but it also made monumental physical changes to its landscape. As part of his propagation of romanitas, Mussolini sought to physically and thus ideologically link his own regime with well-known landmarks of Rome's imperial past. Andrea Giardina explains how this myth was further communicated by the Fascists to the populace outside of schools by using images already present in the collective idea of Rome and present in the physical landscape of the city:

"The Italians made contact with romanity essentially by means of a visual approach, by means of the rich emission of images, emblems and signs, taken from the culture of Rome, that could support the hermeneutics of romanity at the level of the masses. The repetition and frequency of the symbol-image allowed that, outside a cultural reading, the fasci, eagles, columns, triumph arches acted on the public with an

immediate and primary perceptive relationship, similar to the one of the advertising slogan."[32]

These symbols and images evoking ancient Rome were reinforced by their constant repetition in state-run media, supported by party rhetoric, public speeches, and rituals, and by the strict control of power and information held by Mussolini. Images and symbols referencing the Roman past became much more grounded and visible during Mussolini's reorganization of the city.

The Fascists had a large urban renewal plan which involved many new building projects as well as the destruction and reconstruction of what Mussolini considered to be less important or unsightly parts of the city.[33] Jeffery T. Schnapp breaks down the Fascist reshaping of public spaces into four principal forms: "the building of new iconographically 'fascist' buildings…the strategic alteration of city plans…the 'fascistization' of existing structures, and carefully-planned, but ephemeral mass choreographies."[34] In other words, Mussolini used city planning as a way to redefine, expose, reframe, and exhibit the past, and he punctuated these changes with frequent and visible public rituals. This planning program especially targeted the ancient Roman city center for building and restoration projects as this area included the physical remains of the

---

[32] Andrea Giardina, "The Fascist Myth of Romanity," *Estudos Avancados* 22 (2008), 71.

[33] Painter, *Mussolini's Rome*, 24.

[34] Jeffery T. Schnapp, "Fascinating Fascism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 2 (1996), 241.

history Mussolini was attempting to appropriate.[35] One of the best examples of Mussolini's urban planning program, which exemplifies how the Fascists used physical spaces to reiterate the ideology of their regime, is the Via Dell'Impero (figure 1). In constructing this monumental processional way, Mussolini turned the physical city of Rome into an artistic medium though which he would create, legitimize, and perform Fascist history. The Via Dell'Impero is the ultimate physical manifestation of Mussolini's wish to associate himself and his rule with the history of the Roman Empire through urban reconstruction. This 30-meter-wide thoroughfare with broad sidewalks cut through the center of ancient Rome in a straight line from the Renaissance Piazza Venezia to the Imperial Colosseum and completely changed the landscape and character of the historic heart of the city.[36] While conceived as a road that would seamlessly fit into its surroundings, quietly inserting Fascism into the visible

---

[35] Katherine Turro, "Aesthetics Under Mussolini: Public Art & Architecture, 1922-1940" (History Honors Paper, Connecticut College, 2012), 9.

[36] George P. Mras, "Italian Fascist Architecture: Theory and Image," *Art Journal* 21, no. 1 (1961): 7-12 and Painter, *Mussolini's Rome*, 9.

physical history of Rome, the concept of a wide boulevard that provides constructed views of a city was a modern one and is thus not original to the area.
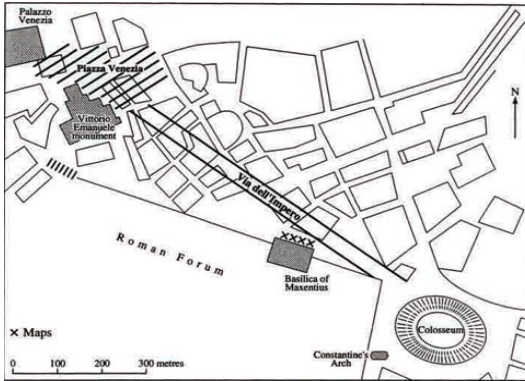
During its 11-month construction, the 850 meter-long Via Dell'Impero cut through a residential neighborhood as well as five Medieval and Baroque churches. [37] Unsurprisingly, the architecture of periods which did not serve Mussolini's writing of history as well as that of the Roman Empire were rarely preserved. However, Mussolini's preference for ancient Roman structures and for the period of the Roman Empire did not leave even the most famous landmarks untouched. The Via Dell'Impero cut through the Fora of Trajan, Augustus, Nerva, and Vespasian and separated them from the Forum Romanum. The decision to take the imperial road straight through these fora instead of going around them and preserving them as ancient monuments and archaeological sites must have been a conscious one by Mussolini. He was physically inserting his own projects into

Figure 1. Map showing path of the Via dell'Impero though the Ancient City Center. By Heather Hyde Minor, *Mapping Mussolini*.

---

[37] Painter, *Mussolini's Rome*, Pg. 22. and Heather Hyde Minor, "Mapping Mussolini: Ritual and Cartography in Public Art During the Second Roman Empire" *Imago Mundi*, Vol. 51 (1999): 147-162.

those of the Roman emperors and appropriating their physical presence to his own ends. By following the Via Dell'Impero from its start at the Colosseum, one is taken through the history of Rome's "good" emperors on a trajectory that leads to the Piazza Venezia, where Mussolini had moved his state offices in 1929 and which would become the heart of Fascist political performance. [38] Mussolini exploited Rome's past for his own contemporary political vision, reshaping the physical space to reflect the history he had written about Rome and his Fascist regime.

The propagandistic value of this construction was not only to connect the Fascists to Imperial Rome, but to posit Fascism as an active and progressive force, revitalizing the ancient city center and giving visitors better views of the monuments they had ostensibly come to see. The idea of a road that would go from the Piazza Venezia to the Colosseum was not originally a Fascist one: the plan was proposed in 1873 by Alessandro Vivani in a master plan for city development but was never completed. [39] As an actualization of an older project, the Via Dell'Impero gave the Fascists an opportunity to show that their party was one of action and not only of promises - a complaint often raised against the Italian government after unification and through World War I. By destroying and rebuilding crowded, dirty, parts of the city, Mussolini was positioning Fascism as a

---

[38] Joe Inish, "Fascism and The Via Dei Fori Imperiali." (Honors Program in Roman Studies, University of Washington, 2005), Section 2.

[39] Painter, *Mussolini's Rome*, 22.

progressive political force and "liberating" the preserved ancient monuments from "parasitic constructions" which had been cluttering the city landscape.[40] The monuments that the people of Rome and tourists were meant to see after the construction of the Via Dell'Impero were now freed from the less important, less instructive spaces that had previously existed around them. Ignominious parts of history were wiped from view and the historical record, and Fascism was positioned as both the liberator and the inheritor of the history of these great monuments.

The idea that Rome's reputation had been tarnished by thoughtless construction and that necessary work had been done in the reorganization of these spaces was not only held by the Fascists. A paper read at the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1934 commended Mussolini in his work cleaning up the historic center of Rome:

"Today modern life [in Rome] comes into contact and runs its course side by side with ancient monuments. Until three years ago, the traveler arriving in Rome … although he crossed half the city, never encountered any classical monuments. But now, through the Via Nazionale [the Via Dell'Impero], he can see the majestic ruins of the Hall of Trajan's markets and from the Piazza Venezia he can have a view of the Basilica of Constantine and of the Colosseum."[41]

The positive reception of Mussolini's changes to the city shows that his framing of Fascism and creation of meaning

---

[40] Painter, *Mussolini's Rome*, 22.

[41] Guido Calza, "The Via Dell'Impero and the Imperia Fora," *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* (March 1934), 491.

were working, and not only for those living in Rome and experiencing his iteration of the city first hand. The Via Dell'Impero project was criticized for disregarding historic sites and dislocating people who had previously lived in that neighborhood, but these complaints were easily answered by assurances of the road's ability to clear up traffic, provide vistas of ancient monuments, and bring Rome into the modern world.[42] The fact that the destroyed neighborhood was notoriously unsightly and that the displaced people were able to move immediately to more attractive, newly constructed residential areas outside the city helped Mussolini remain mostly unchallenged in these massive changes.[43]

---

[42] Painter, *Mussolini's Rome*, 24.

[43] Ibid, 24.

Figure 2. Opening parade on the Via Dell'Impero. "Rome: Duce Opens 'Europe's Finest Street.'" 1932. Bettmann.

However, the Via Dell'Impero was more than just a beautifying road to link ancient and contemporary Rome. It was the principle avenue for propagandistic parades within Mussolini's Rome. Thus, the Via became the site of many Fascist performances, which came first in the form of ritual marches through the city.[44] The opening celebration for the road, on October 28, 1932 was a march especially steeped in history, as it was meant to recreate and celebrate the anniversary of the 1922 March on Rome. This inaugural march on the Via involved 17,000 Fascist soldiers and most famously included "the mutilate," wounded veterans from the first world war (figure 2).[45] This march, then, was a performance, orchestrated by Mussolini and acted by troops, on a road built to tie Fascism to the Roman Empire, to

---

[44] Ibid, 25.

[45] Painter, *Mussolini's Rome*, 25. and Minor, "Mapping Mussolini," 152.

celebrate a fabricated moment in history. Here Mussolini created political meaning with constructed history, the manipulation of urban spaces, and performance, to be interpreted by witnesses of the event, the "implied readers," the citizens of Rome.

The Piazza Venezia, to which the Via Dell'Impero led, was also a significant space for the Fascist regime. The piazza was the site of most public speeches made by Mussolini and would become the performative center of Fascist power in Rome. Besides being surrounded by the fora of Mussolini's admired imperial predecessors, the piazza was next to the Monument to Victor Emmanuel II, who became the first king of unified Italy in 1861. Mussolini was again spatially linking himself to great leaders of Rome and Italy to organize the associations people would have with his regime. Architecturally, Mussolini's appropriation of the Renaissance buildings in the Piazza for his state offices and as a public stage fits into Schnapp's break down of Fascist reshaping of public space, specifically the "'fascistization' of existing structures."[46] Mussolini had two large, stone fasces attached to the balcony of the building.[47] The fasces, a Roman symbol of strength and unity, was the symbol most widely appropriated by the Fascist regime. This symbol not only referenced a deep history, but also expressed the unity and power Mussolini saw in the rule of emperors and which he wished to have for himself. It was

---

[46] Schnapp, "Fascinating Fascism," 241.

[47] Mras, "Italian Fascist Architecture," 10.

from this balcony, appropriated and rendered Fascist by the addition of fasces, that Mussolini delivered his propaganda-filled speeches to massive audiences.

By spatially linking the Fascist state to the Roman Empire, the unification of Italy, and the Renaissance with the Via Dell'Impero and the Piazza Venezia, Mussolini created a physical and visual space which validated his dictatorial control and situated himself among great rulers in the minds of Italian citizens and visitors to Rome. Through the purposeful construction of these spaces, Mussolini placed the people of Rome in a "communicative situation" with the city, similar to the relationship between a reader and text in Iser's theory. In this case, Mussolini was the author of the text, the creator of the city and the visual language through which the public would find meaning. In Iser's theory, the reader of fiction is placed in a "communicative situation that is likened to the illocutionary act… This division of linguistic utterance is defined in terms of performance rather than meaning."[48] The fact that Iser frames communication in terms of performance rather than meaning is of special importance in the context of Fascist Italy - both Mussolini's style of rule and in particular his restructuring of the city - were clearly very performative. The construction of the Via Dell'Impero and the restructuring of the Piazza Venezia as a ritual space demonstrates this performativity. Mussolini's construction of Roman history can also be "defined in terms of performance rather than meaning." Mussolini was not

---

[48] Holub, *Reception Theory*, 86.

concerned with conveying a historically accurate version of Roman history; he was interested in constructing a history that would benefit his rule and legitimize his dictatorship. This deliberate construction of a falsified historical narrative was performance on a grand level.



Figure 3. Contemporary photo of the four original maps as they remain. 2009. Yair Haklai.

To further legitimize this connection to the Roman empire and to deepen the communicative situation between citizen and regime, in 1934 Mussolini commissioned four large marble maps to be placed on the Basilica of Constantine facing the Via Dell'Impero (figure 3). These maps depicted the extent of the Roman Empire at different points in history and supported Mussolini's imperial and colonial ambitions - placing his state as a natural continuation of the empire. The maps' position on the basilica of a beloved emperor is no accident either. As pieces

of public art created by artists working under the fine arts branch of the Fascist government, it is not surprising that these maps had formal and historical properties which connected Mussolini's visual language and political motivations to the Roman past.[49] The maps are each about 4.6 square meters and "show Europe as far north as the British Isles and the southern tip of Scandinavia, the Middle East as far as the Caspian Sea and the head of the Persian Gulf, and North Africa."[50] All of the maps use the same three colors of stone. Areas of water are marked by green veined marble; white travertine marble shows the extent of the Roman empire at each point in time; and black marble denotes land outside the empire. Latin rather than Italian names are inscribed on all the landmasses and seas, and no boundaries are drawn outside of the Roman empire. The maps thus portray everything that is not Roman as one unincorporated mass, ignoring the existence of other nations. The easily readable color scheme suggests that the land within the Roman empire had been enlightened and saved, differentiating it from the dark, seemingly unexplored land outside the boundary. The stark black/white contrast of the maps' color scheme supports contemporary Fascist rhetoric that colonization would bring civilization to unenlightened regions of the world.[51] The propagation of this reading was indeed the intended

---

[49] Minor, "Mapping Mussolini," 149.

[50] Minor, "Mapping Mussolini," 149.

[51] Minor, "Mapping Mussolini," 149.

function of the maps from their inception; Antonio Munoz, the Fascist Inspector General of Antiquities and Fine Arts is quoted saying that the maps were meant to

"represent in an obvious way to the eyes of the people, both learned and uncultivated, the development of the domination of Rome… The Duce himself wanted these lapidary maps to be displayed in this location, teaching and providing a lesson for all; remember our pride, hope for our future."[52]

These maps, then, are visually echoing the Fascist rewriting of history. The history of Italy taught under Fascism virtually ignored the roles of other nations, and these maps dismiss the importance of other nations in an equally disinterested way. Just as the function of historical study under Fascism was "primarily to construct the myth of the divine civilizing mission of Italy throughout history," the color scheme of the maps supports the same myth, with the area of the empire expanding and literally enlightening "uncivilized" spaces.[53]

---

[52] Minor, "Mapping Mussolini," 149. And Antonio Mufioz, *Roma di Mussolini* (Rome: Fratelli Treves, 1935), 221-22; 150.

[53] Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight*, 4.
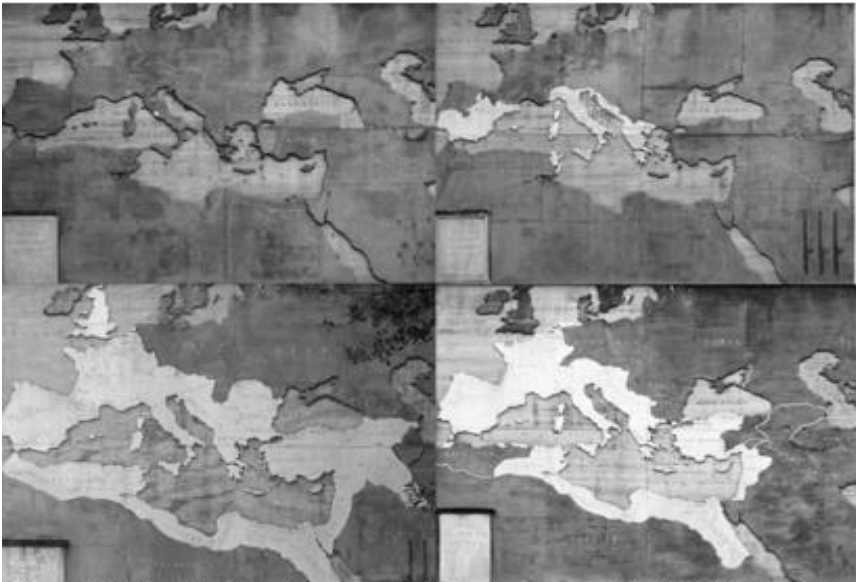
Figure 4. Details of the four original maps. Clockwise from top right. Media Center for Art History, Columbia University.

The maps on the Basilica are arranged in chronological order, starting with the first one titled "The Beginning of Rome. 8th Century B.C." [54] This first map includes only a small white dot labeled "Roma," isolated in a sea of black marble. The maps then continue with, "The Territory of Rome after the Punic Wars in the year 146 B.C.", "The Empire at the Death of Emperor Augustus in the year A.D. 14," and "The Empire at the time of of the Emperor Trajan A.D. 98-117," with the area of white stone representing the Roman Empire expanding in each consecutive map (figure 4). These maps display a narrative

---

[54] Minor, "Mapping Mussolini," 149. All titles originally in Latin, translated by the Heather Hyde Minor.

of Roman expansion—a track record of global domination into which Mussolini placed himself by adding a fifth map. This fifth map showed the range of the Fascist empire as of October 1936 after the conquest of Ethiopia (figure 5).[55]
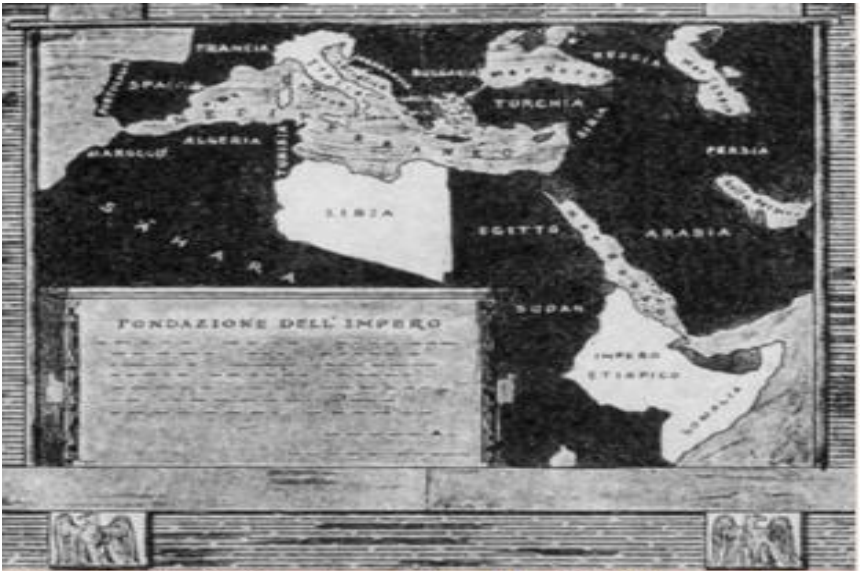


Figure 5. Antonio Munoz's project sketch of the fifth map, showing "The Second Roman Empire." From L'Urbe, (1936). In *Mapping Mussolini*. Heather Hyde Minor.

The addition of the fifth map validated Mussolini's colonial expansion into Africa by situating it at the end of a narrative about Italian empires. These maps existed not only to

---

[55] While the other four maps remain on the Basilica to this day, the Fascist empire map was defaced and taken down after World War II in an act of counter-propaganda. Minor, "Mapping Mussolini," 155.

reinforce and commend an Italocentric view of the Roman past, but also to posit a trajectory of empire that Fascism would follow into the future. The fifth map looked quite different from the original four, however. While the other maps were centered around Italy and focused on Europe, the fifth map places Italy at the top of the composition so that the view could be extended into Africa, where the colonies now were. The difference in view between the original four maps and the fifth betrays an obvious break: Mussolini's empire was not actually a continuation of the historic Roman Empire and did not include any of the original territory other than the country of Italy itself. This fifth map is also slightly bigger and has a lengthier inscription in its title block than the other maps, seemingly needing to justify its place on the basilica. Just as the Via Dell'Impero exists as an obvious Fascist insertion into the city of Rome, here too the hand of the Fascists constructing meaning is visible. By including a fifth map showing current events with four other maps that depict moments of history, Mussolini historicized his empire and made his rule seem grounded and eternal in the eyes of the public. Not only did Mussolini insert himself into history books and the minds of his citizens, but also into the visible history of Rome. In true performative Fascist fashion, the dates surrounding the maps have symbolic significance to further ground the regime and its actions in history. The four original maps were commissioned in 1934 while Mussolini was planning on invading Ethiopia and starting his own empire and were

unveiled on April 21, the date recognized as the founding day of Rome.[56]

The use of cartography in public spaces as a propagandistic art is, yet again, a borrowed practice. This precedent was well established in ancient Rome, and the remains of one precursor for Mussolini's maps existed just down the Via Dell'Impero in Vespasian's Forum. In this space, partially preserved during the reconstruction of the city center, lies Severus's marble Forma Urbis Romae, a depiction of the city of Rome between 205 and 208 A.D.[57] The functions of public cartography in ancient Rome were vast and differed depending on the commissioning body and the place where the map was to be. However, most of these public maps had administrative and propagandistic value.[58] The most famous examples of public cartography come from Augustus, Vespasian, and Severus, all emperors Mussolini saw as exemplars. Through these maps, the emperors narrated their accomplishments of expanding empire or of rebuilding Rome, also precedents that Mussolini could relate to.[59] Public maps were not just early examples of map-making but were also commemorative monuments serving the same purpose as columns or

---

[56] Minor, "Mapping Mussolini," 155.

[57] Minor, "Mapping Mussolini," 159. and Liba Taub, "The Historical Function of the "Forma Urbis Romae" *Imago Mundi* 45 (1993): 9.

[58] O.A.W. Dilke, *Maps in the Service of the State: Roman Cartography to the End of the Augustan Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 205.

[59] Taub, "The Historical Function of the "Forma Urbis Romae," 12.

coinage.[60] Just as the narrative content of these maps was a history Mussolini wished to emulate, so too was the act of creating public cartography a reenacting of the visual language emperors used to create such a history. The Forma Urbis Romae, which now exists only in fragments, shows only the most important public buildings and streets and exaggerates the size of landmarks which Severus wished to highlight.[61] More than realistically representing how Rome looked, the map represents how Severus wanted Rome to be seen, constructing a mental image of the city both for those who saw the map when it was created and those who saw it as a historic object. This example illuminates how artistic freedom in things like maps or a city plan can affect the meaning gained by contextualizing and organizing them to be read in a certain way.

Another ancient public map which serves as a helpful comperandum for locating Mussolini's artistic choices in history is Agrippa's World Map. While actual remnants of this map do not exist, it was written about extensively by visitors to ancient Rome, including Pliny. Augustus commissioned this map of the world as the Romans knew it to encourage trade and colonization and to show Rome as the "benevolent head of a vast empire."[62] We know from the literature that this map was made of carved or painted

---

[60] Ibid, 15.

[61] Ibid, 12.

[62] Taub, "The Historical Function of the "Forma Urbis Romae," 16. And Dilke, *Maps in the Service of the State*, 207.

marble and included measurements of most major landmasses. Here we can see the nature of public maps changing in the hands of a Fascist dictator versus a Roman emperor. While both rulers were concerned with propagating a specific vision of empire, Augustus included information on the area outside the Roman Empire, drawing boundaries and giving measurements. Mussolini's maps ignored everything outside the Roman Empire, marking those areas black without boundaries. Stylistically, Mussolini's maps are simple and evoke the classical era, much like his writing of history. And while the Severan Plan is simple, it still shows streets and monuments - Mussolini's maps only differentiate between Rome and not-Rome. As with his simplification of Italian history, the style of his maps is simplified to an unrealistic level. With all of these examples, it is important that the maps were placed in visible areas around the city so the public could see and be influenced by them.

The meticulous control over the ideological and visual specifics of his rule seen in Mussolini's refusal to include other nations in his maps and his history, as well as his attention to historicizing dates and spaces, show the extent to which meaning was purposefully constructed in Fascist Italy. A central tenant of Fascism is that the power of the state extends into all aspects of everyday life. Mussolini's regime controlled the media, school systems, public visual language, and even the physical landscape of the city of Rome. The Fascists' power was so total that the

communication of their ideologies could be accomplished even on these small, everyday levels. While the fact that Mussolini was consciously showing his rule in a specific light and linking it to specific parts of Roman history matters, what was more impactful in controlling the reception of his regime was the force and prevalence with which he made these decisions. Iser explains that,

"the reader must be guided and controlled to an extent by the text, since it [the text] is unable to respond spontaneously to remarks and questions by the reader. The manner in which the text exerts control over the dialogue is thus one of the most important aspects of the communicatory process."[63]

Thus, Fascism's foray into public and private life, and the totality of dictatorship under Mussolini, exerted an incredible amount of control over the dialogue between ruler and citizens. Communication within Fascist systems is not so much of a conversation, as Iser conceives the reading of a text to be, as it is a lecture by the leading party to the subjected people. Since the state in Fascist Italy controlled almost every source of patronage for art and architecture, their message could be total and its meaning controlled.[64]  In Mussolini's Rome, the masses became powerless to vocalize other perspectives via art or writing. The narrative of the Fascist regime was not at risk of being interrupted, adding to

---

[63] Holub, *Reception Theory*, 92.

[64] Mras, "Italian Fascist Architecture," 7.

the one-sidedness of the communication between state and citizen.

By making the communication process heavily, if not completely, one sided, the potential conclusions that could be drawn by the people of Italy (or anyone witnessing Mussolini's construction of Fascist history) about the historical position or importance of Fascism were limited. Iser insists that that an essential part of the illocutionary act is that it has "potential effect or an 'illocutionary force' and invites an appropriate response on the part of the recipient."[65]   This "appropriate response," in Mussolini's mind, was derived from deliberate control of how the regime would be received by the public on all possible levels of perception. Citizens gathering meaning from political leaders have free will and interpret subjectively, but the controlling and censoring nature of Fascism turned traditional political dialogues into monologues, leaving citizens much less space to interpret different meanings. Iser's theory has been criticized for implying that meaning is decided by the author before the interaction between reader and text even occurs, but this deterministic aspect of Iser's theory makes it even more applicable to Mussolini's Italy. Everything, even aspects of life not normally thought to be imbued with political meaning like the organization of cities, maps in public spaces, or the way people greeted each other in Fascist Italy with the Roman salute, pushed people to think a certain way. Jan Nelis maintains that while the

---

[65] Holub, *Reception Theory*, 86.

repetition of Roman imagery, customs, and myths may seem harmless, "when used and seen on a daily basis, such elements can infiltrate the collective memory and profoundly alter the perception of public life, especially when implemented over a long period of time." [66] The element of power in Mussolini's creation of meaning allowed that meaning to be absorbed on subconscious level, leaving citizens unaware of how indoctrinated they had become.

Though Mussolini was able to order the way people saw his rule, the nation of Italy, and the city of Rome while he was in power, his structure did not last. Gaps between the Fascist version of world events and the actual happenings of mid-twentieth century Europe began to widen, and the myths Mussolini used to legitimize his rule began to crumble. What remains ironic in Mussolini's reconstruction of Rome is that while cutting through the remains of an empire that had ultimately fallen and rewriting the history of that fall from glory, he did not foresee himself suffering the same fate. Just as Mussolini had reorganized the city to exhibit and impose Fascist will, post-World War II Rome worked to erase the presence of Fascism. Road names were changed, the 5th map on the Basilica of Constantine taken down, and the history of Italy again rewritten to privilege fact over myth.

While the propagandistic value of urban planning and public cartography may seem less than that of

---

[66] Jan Nelis, "Constructing Fascist Identity," Pg. 410.

propaganda posters or of the textbooks distributed by the state, I argue that these elements must be considered when thinking about how the Fascists created and controlled meaning in Rome between 1922 and 1943. If it were not for the construction of the Via Dell'Impero and the reorganization of the ancient city center, including the Piazza Venezia, the Fascist marches and performative speeches would have not been so grand or easily visible, and the history rewritten by Mussolini not so physically grounded in the imperial monuments. And although public maps may not, for the modern viewer, spark any musings on the nature of empire, the appropriation of a historically based visual form and of the motivations of past emperors allowed Mussolini to both concretely and artistically create a narrative about Italian empire by placing himself at the end of it. The necessity of analyzing a larger picture, beginning with the Romantic construction of history in Italy in 1861 and extending into the post-war period, becomes clear when attempting to understand the total creation and reception of meaning in the Fascist historical moment. While these manifestations of Fascist communication may be largely disregarded by the literature, an understanding of their intended and realized function as well as the contextualization of Mussolini's actions with a theory of communication can add depth and artistry to the discussion of propaganda in Mussolini's Italy and clarify the reception of Rome as a city and of Fascism by Italian citizens.

# The Unspoken Demands of Slavery: The Exploitation of Female Slaves in the Memphis Slave Trade

## Sarah Eiland

Within the domestic slave trade of the southern United States, the role of the female slave had a dual nature. Female slaves played an important role in the daily operations of domestic life and provided labor in areas that were not extremely physically demanding. Beyond their role as domestic laborers, enslaved women were acquired for the role their bodies played in the perpetuation of slavery. The inherent value of enslaved women came from the exploitation of their reproductive ability. White slave traders and white slave owners exploited female slaves for their own monetary or personal gain. As part of this exploitation within the Memphis slave trade, young women garnered prices higher than their older or less "desirable" counterparts and were subject to mistreatment by white slave owners due to their young age. Utilizing records from the Bolton Dickens and Company and Nathan Bedford

Forrest's involvement in the Memphis Slave trade, the abusive and exploitative nature of the Memphis slave trade emerges, explicitly, through the high prices for particular female slaves, the growth of the mulatto population in Memphis, and the existence of mulatto children from prominent local figures.

Memphis, Tennessee had a large market for slave trade due to its prime location in a fertile, cotton-producing region on the Mississippi River and therefore was home to a large population of women held in urban slavery. Its location on the city's river made it easy to transport slaves from Upper South states to the slave markets in the states further south. Planters from surrounding areas would come to these Memphis markets to purchase them.[1] In addition, Memphis's growing population bolstered a thriving local urban slave market. From 1850 to 1860 the white population of Memphis nearly tripled, growing from less than 7,000 in 1850 to less than 19,000 by 1860.[2] In tandem with the growth of the white population, the slave population also rose, increasing from around 2,500 to almost 4,000.[3] This growth in the slave population goes against the trends seen in other southern urban areas, such as New Orleans, Mobile, and Richmond, during the same time period. Demonstrated by the decrease of slave populations in other southern cities,

---

[1] Frederic Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (Baltimore: J.H Furst Company, 1931), 250.

[2] Bancroft, *Slave Trading,* 250.

[3] Marius Carriere Jr., "Blacks in Pre-Civil War Memphis," *Tennessee Historical Society,* (Spring 1989), 33.

Richard Wade argues that the institution of slavery and its existence in urban centers were incompatible. However, the trends in Memphis run contrary to that argument, suggesting that the institution of slavery thrived despite the urban threat.[4]

In the antebellum South, exploitation and mistreatment characterized the plight of the female slave. The survival of slavery as an institution depended upon the ability of the domestic slave population to sustain itself through the forceful impregnation of the female slave population. White slaveholders perceived enslaved women as "breeders," and their value in the slave trade directly reflected their ability to reproduce.[5] Their femininity was reduced to reproduction.[6] When searching for slaves to purchase, buyers searched for young slaves of child-bearing age to act as a self-renewing labor force. The most sought-after female slaves were aged sixteen to nineteen and were "large enough to nurse," demonstrating that the female slaves who carried the most value were those of peak reproductive fitness.[7] According to Walter Johnson, the most prized slave men were those aged nineteen to twenty-four, the ages in which they would be the most useful to

---

[4] Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 243-281.

[5] Wilma King, "Mad Enough to Kill: Enslaved Women, Murder, and Southern Courts," *The Journal of African American History* 92, no.1 (Winter 2007): 37-56.

[6] Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999) 144.

[7] Johnson, *Soul by Soul,* 144.

production. The age of a woman not only affected her ability to bear children but also determined her chance of getting sexually assaulted. A former slave who wrote about her experiences reported that "black female slaves were usually sexually assaulted when they were between the ages of thirteen and sixteen."[8] Diana Berry, in "In Pressing Need of Cash," recounts how one slave owner did not want to pay full price for an enslaved woman's "services" once he realized that his slave had a "disease of the womb" and was not capable of reproducing and providing more slave property.[9] The services affected by a "disease of the womb" would have been the woman's ability to bear children or perform other sexual acts. In a 1932 essay entitled "Black Folk and Birth Control," W. E. B. DuBois, an early prominent civil rights actor, commented on the role slave women had of increasing the labor force in order to demonstrate the multi-generational societal ramifications the mistreatment of enslaved females had on the African American population. He stated that "as slaves, every incentive was furnished to raise the largest number of children possible" and named the "chief surplus crop" of the southern region to be the "natural increase of slaves."[10] The physical health and reproductive value of bondswomen, another term to denote an enslaved woman, were the most important factors in the trading of

---

[8] Bell Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto Press, 1982), 24.

[9] Diana Berry, "In Pressing Need of Cash: Gender, Skill, and Family Persistence in the Domestic Slave Trade," *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 1 (Winter 2007), 32.

[10] William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, "Black Folk and Birth Control," *Birth Control Review* 16, no. 7 (June 1932), 166-167.

female slaves. The belief that bondswomen were natural breeders combined with the accessibility of enslaved females, subjected them to sexual violence and exploitation.[11] The exploitation of female slaves was so ingrained into the institution of slavery that the continued existence of the slave trade relied upon the guarantee of ritual and continual rape occurring.

Male buyers perceived the "delicate" bodies of lighter skinned females, often associated with being mulatto (or mixed race), as not well suited for strenuous labor and therefore were valued in domestic jobs. "Lightness" of skin tone was associated with feminine and domestic attributes, and slaves with lighter skin were often described as delicate.[12] As a result, lighter skinned females were favored over their darker counterparts and were more likely to be placed in a visible role.

The practice of buying slaves for sex or companionship occurred openly. Walter Johnson makes the argument that the high prices of female slaves revealed the sexuality of the slave market. The role that female slaves held in a household dictated their monetary value in the slave trade. The owner paid according to what he expected from the slave. Louis Hughes, a former slave who lived in Memphis and the surrounding area, spoke about the pricing of female slaves in his autobiography. He states that "servant women sold for $500 to $700, and sometimes as

---

[11] King, "Mad Enough to Kill," 39.

[12] Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 152-153.

high as $800…A house maid, bright in looks and well formed, would sell for $1,000 to $1,200." [13] Hughes' description shows what was desirable and important to male slaveholders. The focus on physical appearance and the importance of being "well formed," perhaps meaning sexually mature, alludes to the mistreatment of bondswomen by the buyers. The high prices paid by men were not only measures of desire but also of dominance. The ownership of a slave "mistress," or "fancy," gave slave owners and traders a reputation of power. Of course, when describingthe slaves, slave owners would describe their property as "cooks," "domestics," or "seamstresses."[14]
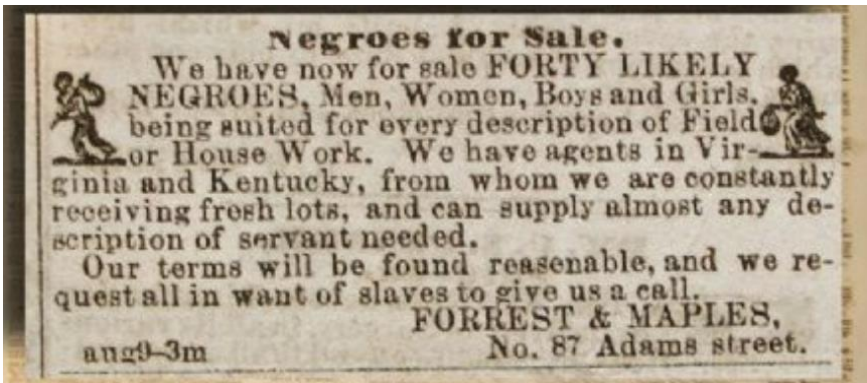


Figure 1: Advertisement from an 1855 edition of the Memphis Eagle and Enquirer

The trend in prices for female slaves, as described by Hughes, can be seen in the 1856-1858 slave ledgers of

---

[13] Louis Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave: From Bondage to Freedom* (Milwaukee: South Side Printing Company, 1897), 15.

[14] Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 114

Memphis based slave trading company Bolton, Dickens and Company. The company ledger keeps records of their business transactions during those years, including the names of the slaves, the acquisition prices, and the prices the company sold them for. As seen in the advertisement from the Memphis Eagle and Enquirer, slave traders in Memphis consistently advertised their slaves as desirable or "likely negroes…suited for housework." [15] In the sample of the ledger analyzed, the prices indicate a trend towards the purchase of slaves for domestic use. Due in part to advertisements from the time, it can be assumed that slaves sold by large slave trading companies were of the most desirable qualities, and therefore were sold for a price that reflected those qualities. Between 1856 and 1858, the average price for a female slave at Bolton, Dickens and Company was $1,126. The price of $1,126 is well within the $1,000 to $1,200 price range described by Hughes in which "well-formed" housemaids were sold for. [16] However, female slaves were sold between the prices of $887 and $1,300, further demonstrating that many aspects went into consideration for the purchase price of a female slave.

Although women who could provide further services were valued monetarily more than servant women, male slaves were still valued the most. In the same slave ledger from Bolton, Dickens and Company, the average price for a

---

[15] *Memphis Eagle and Enquirer,* October 25, 1855.

[16] Bolton Dickins and Company Slave Ledger, 1856-1858, Memphis and Shelby County Room collections, Memphis, Tennessee.

male slave was $1,262 with prices ranging from $950 to $1,450.[17] While these prices alone do not show much about the gender differences in the slave trade, the higher average price combined with the fact that only 39% of the slaves analyzed were female, show a higher demand for and value of the manual labor male slaves could provide. The prices for male slaves were consistently higher than female slaves due to the need for manual labor in the city and on plantations, and due to a society where women, black or white, were not valued or treated as highly as men.

Bills of sale from the time provide a more detailed look at the sale of enslaved females in mid-nineteenth century Memphis and demonstrate that, in particular, young women sold for higher prices than other female slaves. Many bills of sale provide the age of the woman being sold, a very important factor in determining her reproductive potential and therefore her monetary value to the buyer. An 1836 Shelby County bill of sale records a sale for "one thousand dollars…bargained sold and delivered…one Negro woman named Mariah twenty-five years of age."[18] Considering this sale occurred in 1836, twenty years before the Bolton, Dickens and Company ledger sales, it can be assumed that with slight inflation due to the time difference, a sale of $1,000 for a female slave was a large investment. The expensive price is notable considering that Mariah is

---

[17] Bolton Dickins and Company Slave Ledger

[18] Bill of Sale, 1836, The Britton Duke Papers, Memphis and Shelby County Room collections, Memphis, Tennessee.

recorded as being young and within child-bearing years. She had the potential to perpetuate her master's wealth by having children, justification for her high price.

Another 1836 bill of sale to the same man, Britton Duke, records the sale of a "mulatto girl aged about 12 or 13 years named Jane for… the sum of seven hundred dollars."[19] The sale of such a young girl for the price of $700, in 1836, was most likely due to her lighter skin, thought to be more desirable. Slave owning men tended to pay more for mulatto women because their lighter skin, desirable for its perceived whiteness, was appealing to them.[20] The higher prices for young, mulatto women, therefore, may be an indicator of future sexual exploitation and abuse.

In 1836, Britton Duke purchased another female slave. This bill of sale does not state the age of the woman, but it does include the sale of her son as well. The bill of sale states "that this day I have bargan[sic] sold and delivered unto Britton Duke asertin[sic] negro woman by the name of Ceala and her son…for the sum of one thousand dollars."[21] The price paid for Ceala, with a child, is the same price paid for Mariah, who was of childbearing age. These prices indicate the value of procreation in the slave trade. Both women promised the possibility of a self-sustaining slave population. The high prices that white men paid for alluring

---

[19] Bill of Sale, 1836, The Britton Duke Papers, Memphis and Shelby County Room collections, Memphis, Tennessee.

[20] Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 155.

[21] Bill of Sale, 1836, The Britton Duke Papers, Memphis and Shelby County Room collections, Memphis, Tennessee.

and fertile women, and the profits that slave traders made from the sales, exploit the existence of female slaves' womanhood. The slave trade reduced the value of female slaves to their worth as sexual objects.

The exceptional prices paid for particular slaves is very indicative of alternative motives for their purchase, as these high prices did not constitute the norm in all slave transactions. An 1862 bill of sale states that "Mary Ann" was bought for "about $400."[22] There is no indication of age or skin coloration included in this bill of sale, but due to the significantly lower price it be assumed that Mary Ann was bought for reasons more purely relating to the labor she could provide. A bill of sale for "Nathan" also helps to contextualize the prices seen in previous bills of sale. Nathan, a 45-year-old man, was sold for "about three hundred and thirty-six dollars."[23] Men, typically, sold for more than women due to the perceived greater value of the labor they provided. It shows that white male buyers were willing to pay more for the possibility of female companionship than for guaranteed manual labor. This sale helps to demonstrate the value of sexual desirability in the slave trade.

An 1854 bill of sale by the Bolton, Dickens and Company slave trading firm sheds light on the pricing of slaves in the 1856-1858 slave ledger from the company,

---

[22] Bill of Sale, 1862, Driver-Hunt family papers, Pink Palace Museum Collections, Memphis, Tennessee.

[23] Bill of Sale, 1841, Driver-Hunt family papers, Pink Palace Museum Collection, Memphis, Tennessee.

analyzed previously. This bill of sale details a payment of "nine-hundred dollars in full for a negro girl by the name of Mary, between the age of 13 or 14 years of age."[24] In the slave ledger for the company, created solely as business records, no mention of age is recorded with each listing of a slave. This 1854 bill of sale from the company allows for a better understanding of their pricing of slaves in the slave ledger. As stated earlier, Louis Hughes wrote that the price range for a typical "well-formed" housemaid varied from $1,000 to $1,200.[25] Also as previously stated, the term "housemaid" or "domestic" carried with it the insinuation that sexual relations between the enslaved woman and slave owner may have occurred.[26] Due to the sexual connotations associated with domestic housemaids that sold for $1,000 to $1,200, or even more, it can be assumed that the "well-formed" enslaved women were of at least the age of sexual maturity, meaning at least 16 to 19 years old.[27] Mary, the previously mentioned girl sold for $900, garnered $200 to $400 more than the price for a typical servant while only being 13 or 14 years old.[28] The price indicates that despite having not yet reached peak maturity, the intentions of her buyer may have still been sexual in nature. The monetary

---

[24] Bill of Sale, 1854, Bolton, Dickins, and Company file, Memphis and Shelby County Room collections, Memphis, Tennessee.

[25] Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 15.

[26] Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 114.

[27] Hughes, *Thirty Years a Slave*, 15 and Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 113, 144.

[28] Hughes, *Thirty Years*, 15. This point makes use of the numbers provided in Hughes's autobiography.

value of 13-year old Mary also sets a price benchmark for the Bolton, Dickins and Company slave ledger. Since the average price for a female slave was $1,126, many female slaves being sold were likely older than Mary and at the age of sexual maturity, therefore worth more to male buyers.

Many aspects of Memphis's slave population did not follow the trends seen in other prominent southern cities. Richard Wade argues that by 1860, most of the big cities of the South were "shedding slaves" and that less people had any stock in the system of slavery. He also argues that the introduction of slavery in the cities along with the widespread practice of "living out," caused the authority of the master to begin to break down. "Living out" removed slaves from the authority and constant supervision of their master.[29] Neither of these trends took place in Memphis. By 1860, the slave population in Memphis had grown to the highest levels the city had seen, increasing by 56% in the 10 years leading up to 1860, unlike other southern cities.[30] Kathleen Berkley refutes Wade's argument concerning the effects of slaves living out of the house. She states that due to strict local ordinances, slaves in Memphis did not have much intermingling with free blacks and other groups that would lead to a breakdown in the master's authority. In fact, Berkley uses an "Index of Dissimilarity" to measure the degree of segregation of a certain population against the rest

---

[29] Wade, *Slavery in the Cities,* 21; 82.

[30] Carriere, "Blacks in Pre-Civil War Memphis," 33.

of the population.[31] She found that in 1850 slaves in Memphis were the "least residentially segregated group", meaning that slaves lived in very close proximity with their masters.[32] The rise in the slave population coupled with the close proximity in which slaves and masters lived, explains why the amount of sexual exploitation rose in Memphis during the same period of time.

In southern slave-owning households, the presence of mulatto slaves was the tangible evidence of the abuse of enslaved females. The close proximity in which owners and slaves lived in Memphis allowed for easier access to female slaves and therefore more opportunities for sexual abuse to occur.[33] It was in the white domestic household where "sexual exploitation of young slave girls usually occurred."[34] In her diary, Mary Chestnut expressed the attitudes towards sexual relations between master and slave. She wrote that sexual relations between slaveholding white men and their female slaves "was the thing we can't name." "Every lady," Chestnut stated, "tells you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody's household, but those in her own she seems to think dropped from the clouds or so

---

[31] Berkeley, "Like a Plague," 47-48.

[32] Kathleen Berkeley, "Like a Plague of Locust: Immigration and Social Change in Memphis, Tennessee 1850-1880" (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 1980), 47-48.

[33] Berkeley, "Like a Plague," 48.

[34] Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 25.

pretends to think."[35] Chestnut's statements on the treatment of female slaves prove that white slave-owning males did take advantage of their female slaves in the household. While the presence of slave mistresses was very prevalent in society, its effects were not talked about by the families affected.

Unlike other prominent cities in the South, the population of slaves in Memphis increased 56% from 1850 to 1860. The need for labor during this period of growth in Memphis during the 1850s fueled this continued reliance on slavery. White Memphians, enjoying the new wealth and growth associated with the city's growth, valued the social status and distinction that being a slave owner provided.[36]

The growth in both population and wealth during the 1850s caused the evidence of sexual exploitation of slaves to increase and become more visible. The 1850 and 1860 census slave schedules are useful when examining the prominence of sexual exploitation of female slaves, because included in the documents is the race of each enslaved person. The number of mulatto slaves at each period in Memphis's history can therefore be determined. A high percentage of the slave population being classified as mulatto would indicate that sexual abuse of enslaved females by white men was very prevalent in Memphis. It can be inferred that most sexual contact between white owners and their female slaves

---

[35] *Mary Chestnut's Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 29, quoted by Johnson, *Soul by Soul,* 115.

[36] Carriere, "Blacks in Pre-Civil War Memphis," 33.

was not consensual due to the power dynamics that existed. An enslaved woman was nothing more than property that could be used, or abused, as the owner wished. Any women who did not "willingly respond to the sexual overture of masters and overseers were brutalized and punished."[37]

The data from the slave schedules show that as both the slave population and Memphis grew, so did the amount of sexual abuse of female slaves. In 1850, in the 1st ward of Memphis, the percentage of slaves who were labeled as

| Memphis Ward | 1850 Mulatto Percentage of Population | 1860 Mulatto Percentage of Population | Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1st Ward | 30.27% | 34.4% | 4% |
| 2nd Ward | 24.4% | 29.6% | 5% |
| 7th Ward | 3.15% | 30.67% | 27.5% |

Figure 2: Data from slave schedules showing the change in the percentage of mulatto slaves present within the city

"mulatto" totaled 30.27%. In 1850, in the 2nd ward of Memphis, 24.4% of the slave population were recorded as being "mulatto." In 1850, in the 7th ward of Memphis, 3.15% of the slave population were recorded as "mulatto."[38] A change can be seen in the data from the 1860 slave schedule. In the 1860 slave schedule for the 1st ward of Memphis, 34.4% of slaves were labeled "mulatto", an increase of over 4%. In 1860, the percentage of slaves recorded as "mulatto" in the 2nd ward was 29.6%, an increase of over 5%. In the 7th

---

[37] Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, 26.

[38] United States Seventh Census, 1850, Slave Schedule, Shelby County, Tennessee.

ward, in 1860, the percentage of slaves labeled as "mulatto" reached 30.67%, an increase of 27.5% in 10 years.[39]

The growth in the population of mulatto slaves in the 7th ward of Memphis is the most significant for demonstrating an upward trend of the sexual abuse of female slaves in the mid-nineteenth century. Per the 1865 Memphis census, the 7th ward had the highest population of both whites and blacks in the entire city. 39.95% of the black population, 4,393 people, lived there in 1865, 5 years after the 1860 slave schedule was created. 4,361white people, 26.1% of the white population, lived in the 7th ward in 1865.[40] The large growth, an increase of 27.5%, in the number of mulatto slaves in the most populous ward of the city, shows that with the growth of urban slavery in Memphis the prevalence of sexual abuse also grew.

The slave population of Memphis grew in part to the large number of slave traders that operated in the city once the interstate slave trade became legal in 1855.[41] They profited from Memphis's booming economy in the 1850s by selling slaves to those in need of labor in or near Memphis and people traveling via the Mississippi River. The Bolton Dickens and Company and Nathan Bedford Forrest's slave trading companies held a large portion of the slave trading enterprise in Memphis and the surrounding areas. Forrest grew in prominence when the Bolton Dickens and Company

---

[39] United States Eighth Census, 1860, Slave Schedule, Shelby County, Tennessee.

[40] United States Census, 1865, Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee

[41] Lester C. Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee, 1791-1970* (University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 22.

slave trading business closed in 1858 due to an internal feud. He became one of the wealthiest men in Memphis and gained greater notoriety after his time as City Alderman, involvement in the Civil War, and involvement in the Klu Klux Klan.

In 1853, Nathan Bedford Forrest, just entering the Memphis slave trade market, made his first recorded purchase as a slave trader.[42] On November 10th, 1853, Nathan Bedford Forrest paid "twelve hundred and fifty dollars in full for a negro woman named Catherine aged seventeen and her child named Thomas aged four months."[43] The exact purpose Forrest had in mind while purchasing Catherine is impossible to know. The high price of $1,250 would seem to indicate that there was some alternative motive behind the purchase of Catherine, but Jack Hurst poses the theory that perhaps Forrest was simply making an investment with this purchase. The rising values of women of child bearing age would have caused the purchase of Catherine to be a smart investment at the start of his Memphis business ventures. An 1864 article published in the Chicago Tribune makes a mention of a slave named Catherine, 11 years after the original bill of sale for "Catherine" was drawn up. The article, entitled "The Butcher Forrest and his Family", begins by sharing the news of the capture of Fort Pillow by General Forrest and continues on to describe his family life and his business

---

[42] Jack Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest: A Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 36-37.

[43] Shelby County Register's Records, Book 16, 125.

ventures as a slave trader. The article claims that Forrest had two wives, "one white, the other colored (Catherine) by which he had two children. His 'patriarchal' wife, Catherine, and his white wife had frequent quarrels or domestic jars."[44] Hurst argues that if it were not for the emphasis of the name Catherine, with the same spelling as the 1853 bill of sale, due to the brief and biased nature of the article the claims would have been completely dismissible.[45]

In the 1870 Memphis census, there is one entry that seems to prove many of the claims made by the 1864 article. In the 1870 census, in the 4th ward of the city there is a listing for a female Cath. Forrest, age 36, from Tennessee, labeled as mulatto.[46] With just one name separating them and listed as being in the same tenement, there is a listing for a girl named Narcissa Forrest, age 13, also from Tennessee and also labeled as mulatto. The evidence strongly suggests that the Cath. Forrest listed in the 1870 census and the Catherine bought in 1853 at age 17, rumored to have been Forrest's mistress in 1864, is the same woman. Many of the names in this particular census were abbreviated, furthering the argument that the "Cath. Forrest" listed is the shortened version of "Catherine Forrest."

The 13-year-old girl, therefore, may have been one of the children mentioned in the 1864 article. The Catherine bought in 1853 aged around 17 years old, would have been

---

[44] Chicago *Tribune*, May 4, 1864.

[45] Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest*, 37.

[46] United States Ninth Census, 1870, Fourth Ward, Memphis, Shelby County, Tennessee.

around 36 years old in 1870, making the timeline correct and any disparity in time likely to the unavailability of exact birth dates and ages. The labeling of "mulatto" may also be accurate. In the original bill of sale there is no indication of the exact color of her skin besides referring to her as a "negro woman," typical of all bills of sale. If the Catherine in the 1853 bill of sale were actually mulatto, or had light mulatto-like skin, then the unusually-high original price of $1,250 could be explained due to her more desirable skin tone. Lighter skinned women typically held more monetary value in the slave market. The presence of a child, also with the surname Forrest, further solidifies the argument that these two women were indeed the mistress and child of Nathan Bedford Forrest. The child, Narcissa, is recorded as being mulatto. Thus, this proves that her father most likely was white. If Catherine was, in fact, mulatto and had a daughter with a man who was not white, the resulting child would not have been labeled as mulatto. Also, the birthdate of Narcissa would most likely be sometime in 1857, well before the 1864 publication of the article that named Catherine, Forrest's "colored wife" and mentioned two children that resulted from their relationship.[47] The presence of a slave mistress in a prominent household was a common occurrence for the time. Due to the societal status that slave owning represented, it would have made sense for Forrest, at the start of his Memphis ventures, to buy a slave through which to gain status. Taking the relationship a step further

---

[47] Chicago *Tribune*, May 4, 1864, p.3

would have been a natural move for the period. It was "so common for female slaves to have white children, that little or nothing is ever said about it."[48]

Memphis, a booming slave trading town, created an atmosphere surrounding slavery that perpetuated the exploitative nature of owning slaves longer than other southern cities. In many ways Memphis was not very different than other cities important to the cotton industry, but the growth of the city and the continued growth of slavery made it unique in its region. The evidence that the sexual exploitation of enslaved women persisted, and even increased, until the eve of the Civil War, shows how deeply engrained into popular attitudes the acceptance of the abuse of women was in Memphis. The growth in the amount of mulatto slaves, the high prices for female slaves, and the existence of mulatto children from prominent local figures are specific ways in which the exploitative and abusive nature of the Memphis slave trade surfaced. In the mid-nineteenth century, Memphis's particularly unique construction of urban slavery caused its deviant trends and led to the continued exploitation of slave femininity, that occurred until slavery ended.

---

[48] Theodore D. Weld, *Slavery as It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (New York, 1839), 101, accessed through John White, "Whatever Happened to Slavery in the Old South?" *Journal of American Studies* 8, no. 3 (December 1974), 383.

# Direct from Congo: Nathan Bedford Forrest's Involvement in the Illegal African Slave Trade

## Austin Wall

Born in what is now Bedford County, Tennessee in 1821, Nathan Bedford Forrest and his twin sister, Fanny, were the first children born into their family on the Tennessee frontier. They and their two brothers, Aaron and William, had a modest upbringing with little formal education. Their parents worked the land and made a living in the livestock trade. Shortly before his death, Nathan Bedford's father moved the family farm to Northern Mississippi. After his father died in 1837, Nathan Bedford assumed the role of head of household, trading cattle and other livestock to support his family. He worked, as his father did, with his uncle Johnathan Forrest who ran a livestock and slave speculating business. He was about 16 years old at the time. Five years later, Forrest left home after his mother remarried. Forrest's uncle Johnathan was later murdered, and Nathan took his place as the head of the modest livestock and slave speculating business.[1] This is the beginning of Forrest's involvement in the slave trade.

---

[1] Jack Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest: A Biography* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1994), 19-28.

While he continued to trade in livestock, slave trading was more profitable and therefore took up increasingly more of Forrest's attention. Trading in slaves eventually became the main organ of his business ventures. Dealing in livestock and mercantile allowed Forrest to create relationships with planters. These relationships allowed Forrest to become a trusted name for planters who wanted to invest in slaves. Due to Memphis' proximity to Forrest's previous business location in Hernando, Mississippi and its growth as a major slave trading city, Forrest moved his operation from Northern Mississippi to Memphis, Tennessee.

Memphis was geographically and socially ideal for Forrest to grow his slaving operation. Located on the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff, Memphis sits right next to the Mississippi River while remaining free from the fears of flooding. This important trading avenue afforded Memphis the opportunity to serve as a major trading post with what was then the American frontier.[2] Incorporated in 1826, Memphis was the largest city Forrest had lived in. Memphis' youth and frontier identity gave Forrest advantages because Forrest had very little in the way of formal education. It is joked that he could hardly even write his own name before he moved to Memphis.[3]His lack of education would have been an impediment for his success in the business realm if he were trying to make it in older trading cities in the South

---

[2] Gerald Capers, *The Biography of a River Town, Memphis: Its Heroic Age.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 102-103.

[3] Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest: A Biography,* 27.

like New Orleans or Savannah, where large firms were already established.

As his slaving operations grew, Forrest and his younger brothers, William and Aaron, began to expand deeper into the Mississippi Delta. An 1864 Chicago Tribune article titled "The Butcher Forrest and His Family," attributed to the New York Tribune, mentions the slaving operations of Bill and Aaron. The article, written after the Fort Pillow Massacre, shows the infamy in the North that Forrest gained as a result of the war. As to his brothers, the article reads, "Bill Forrest, an extensive negro trader at Vicksburg; and Aaron Forrest, general agent and soul driver (a term used at the time to describe slave transporters and traders) to scour the country for his older brothers."[4] Though the Tribune article mentions William as the primary trader at the Vicksburg operation, the name of the business was A.H. Forrest and Company. This business, which was operational from 1858 to 1860, worked in tandem with the Forrest family business in Memphis.[5] Forrest was known to come and supervise his younger brothers in especially important sales, highlighting the hand in hand relationship of the two firms during the Vicksburg location's short lifespan.[6]

---

[4] Eddy Davidson, *Nathan Bedford Forrest: In Search of the Enigma* (Gretna: 2007), 253. *Chicago Tribune*. May 4, 1864.

[5] George Bolm (Director and Curator of The Old Warren County Court House Museum), e-mail message to the author, October 24, 2017.

[6] Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest: A Biography*, 58.

Federally, the United States Congress was restricted by the U.S. Constitution in terms of immigration policy, including the slave trade. While individual states could and did criminalize the international slave trade in their state, Article 1 Section 9 of the U.S. Constitution restricted congress from doing so until 1808. [7] Spearheaded and enacted by Thomas Jefferson, the Act to Prohibit the Importation of Slaves was enacted by the U.S. Congress on the first day of January, 1808. The act states in explicit detail that persons to be held as slaves may not be allowed to enter the United States, and that outfitting a boat for this purpose is against federal law. The punishment for this offense is $20,000. The act goes on to say that those found guilty of breaking this federal regulation will have to pay each illegally imported person $800. The act was signed into law by President Jefferson on March 2, 1810. [8]

After the 1808 embargo on transporting people held as slaves to the United States, the slave rich eastern states began to trade with the states in the West. Business trends also helped to create the east to west interstate slave trade. As the American frontier expanded westward, taking land from Native American nations and converting it into farmland, demand for slave labor grew. Labor intensive crops like cotton produced in America were able to have a competitive edge in European markets because they were

---

[7] U.S. Constitution. art. 1. sec. 9. cl. 1.

[8] U.S. Law. *An act to prohibit the importation of slaves into any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States … March 2, Approved. Washington, DC, 1810.*

produced with slave labor, and much of this revenue was used to increase cotton production, thus creating an even bigger demand for enslaved laborers. Interstate slave traders had a knowledge of both the frontier and eastern markets; throughout the 19th century enslaved people nearly doubled in price when they were brought to the Deep South from Atlantic markets like Virginia and North Carolina.[9] Slave traders like Forrest knew that slaves sold in Memphis or New Orleans promised much greater returns than those sold on the eastern seaboard. This opportunity for profit further demonstrates the importance of Memphis' geographic location.

Forrest quickly learned how to use print advertisements to generate interest and to brand his name as synonymous with the slave trade. In his book, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism 1815-1860*, Calvin Schermerhorn describes the process of becoming a well-known slave dealer in the early 1800s. Forrest used many of these tactics when establishing his own company in Memphis. By overstating the amount of enslaved people he wanted to buy to manipulate his audience, he would gain a reputation of having wealth. If the public thought he had the money to purchase 500 slaves, often the number stated in his ads, it gave legitimacy to his operation. In many of his ads, Forrest promised to pay top dollar for people already held as slaves. Providing 'types' of slaves that are be sold was

---

[9] Calvin Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism 1815-1860* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2015), 37.

another common advertising tactic used by Forrest.[10] By advertising certain attributes based on geographic origin, the Forrest operation made it seem as if they had the highest quality cargo.

While it is not clear whether Forrest personally advertised the illegal African slaves, the presence of slaves from an exotic place would have played into the prestige factor of the Forrest operation.[11] We know from newspaper articles that the presence of supposed Congolese slaves at the Forrest slave lot in Vicksburg piqued the interest of potential slave buyers. Highlighting the African origins of these slaves was a purposeful advertising technique used by the slave traders, coded language designed to highlight the working ability and supposed general temperament of the enslaved. One wanted ad for Congolese slaves mentioned that, "We want a genuine, wild African. An (sic) habitual inclination to eat babies would be no objection as we are not interested in the proprietorship of any of the little 'innocents'." [12] The savage connotation that the name 'African' came with was enough to convince slave purchasers of their ability to work. These Africans were in such high demand that newspapers had to start running ads when all the Congolese people had been sold. One article in the Vicksburg Sun, picked up by the Memphis Daily Appeal

---

[10] "A Card." *Memphis Daily Appeal*, Nov. 29, 1859, Memphis, TN.

[11] Calvin Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism 1815-1860,* 36-37.

[12] "Wanted." *Prairie News.* (Okolona, MS: Jun. 6, 1859)

on March 2, 1859 mentions that though the anonymous author of the ad wished they had more 'Congo Negroes' to sell, they didn't have any. The article continues to say that those interested can "address a certain good-looking gentleman who formerly represented the county of Claiborne in the Legislature, at Port Gibson, they can obtain information."[13] This article exemplifies the fact that the sale of Africans in the late 1850's was not an unheard-of event, that people who have held public office even are involved in the smuggling of people illegally held as slaves. The anonymous author is likely Aaron or William Forrest, seeing as reports from that year indicate that the Forrest lot was the only one in that city that was selling Africans as slaves.[14]

      Slave trading was widely seen as an integral part of the culture of the South during the time in which Forrest was illegally engaging in the African slave trade. This explains why newspaper articles referencing Congolese slaves on Forrest lots did not result in legal action being brought against Forrest. This media attention was likely helpful to the business by spreading the word that they had acquired these highly sought-after slaves. These blatantly illegal actions were, if not explicitly approved by the society around Forrest, implicitly supported, as evidenced by the lack of legal action taken against Forrest for his actions.

---

[13] "Congo Negroes." *Memphis Daily Appeal.* (Memphis, TN: Mar. 2, 1859)

[14] Robert Ralph Davis, "Buchanian Espionage: A Report on Illegal Slave Trading in the South in 1859," *The Journal of Southern History* 47, no. 2 (1971), 277.

Traveling through the Mississippi delta in search of slaves to fill his Adams street slave lot in Memphis, Forrest gained immense wealth by buying slaves cheap and selling them at an increased price to desperate planters in what was then the American Southwest. Making substantially more profit than if he had stuck to real estate and livestock, Forrest was also able to run a cotton operation very efficiently due to his inroads with the real estate and slaving industries. Forrest was able to have hold even more influence on the slave trade in Memphis due to the collapse of the Bolton and Dickens Company in Memphis.[15]

However, evidence suggests that Forrest did not stop at merely profiting from the interstate slave trade. Like many in the South at the time, Forrest apparently either believed that the Embargo on the African slave trade was unconstitutional or chose not to follow it for business reasons.[16] The Act Prohibiting the Importation of Slaves went into effect in 1808, outlawing any transatlantic or other slave trade from foreign states into the United States. This legislation in part prompted the interstate slave trade as a means of filling the demand for enslaved laborers in the Deep South to work newly claimed frontier land. As previously stated, a native African was understood as the

---

[15] Frederic Bancroft, *Slave-Trading in the Old South* (Baltimore, MD: J. H. Furst Company, 1931), 262-265.

[16] Hon. Jefferson Davis and the African Slave Trade," *The Weekly Mississippian* (Jackson, MS: Aug. 24, 1859).

most preferred geographic category of slave.[17] Descriptions of the enslaved found in Forrest lots highlight physical differences from people born into slavery in the United States.[18] Black people were seen as both cost-effective workers and as symbol of upward mobility to their owners, and these factors increased when the enslaved person's origins were African. These circumstances pushed the Forrest family towards involvement in the international slave trade.

The most famous illegal slave importation of the late 1850's was the slave ship *Wanderer*. Traveling from West Africa to Jekyll Island, Georgia, the *Wanderer* brought a cargo of over 400 people to be sold into lifelong servitude in the United States. While the list of investors who partially financed the *Wanderer* is lost to history due to the fact that none of them were brought to trial for their federal crime, it is known that Charles Lamar, a wealthy planter and outspoken proponent of decriminalizing the African slave trade, purchased the *Wanderer* for the purpose of slaving. This was not Lamar's first attempt at the illegal importation of Africans as slaves. After two failed attempts at obtaining a slaving ship, Lamar hired William Corrie to acquire the *Wanderer*. This importation had two goals, both to make

---

[17] "N. B. Forrest: Some Extraordinary News Respecting the Negroes," *New York Times* (New York, New York: May 15, 1869).

[18] "A Rare Importation," *The National Era* (Washington, D.C.: May 12, 1859).

Lamar wealthier and to act as a divisive issue to add fuel to the growing fire of tension between the North and South.[19]

The task of stopping these international slave importations fell to the "African Squadron," a squadron responsible for intercepting slave ships headed to the United States from Africa and the costal and port officers who regularly inspected suspected slave ships. Lamar's ship was able to deceive coastal and port officers by posing their trip to Africa as a leisurely cruise as a part of a yacht club. The *Wanderer* stopped off in Trinidad and falsely reported they were visiting St. Helena to create a believable alibi. Along the West coast of Africa and the Congo River, the *Wanderer*'s crew acted as socialites, touring the landscape and visiting wealthy white colonizers. The time of year chosen to perform this crime was also important, since many slavers did not operate in September due to the risk of illness among cargo and crew. The *Wanderer*'s decision to operate slaving operations during this time allowed for a less detectable operation. When the Wanderer's slaves reached American shores, however, their existence became public knowledge.[20]

The *Wanderer*'s cargo set off a news frenzy when the illegal operation became known to the public. Both the North and the South were interested in the outcome of the affair, for different reasons. In the South, the enforcement of the Act Prohibiting the Importation of Slaves had long been

---

[19] National Archives Southeast Region, "The *Wanderer*: a finding guide" (Atlanta, GA), 1.

[20] Tom Henderson Wells, *The Slave Ship Wanderer* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1967), 1-16.

seen as an affront to the Southern way of life. Southern secessionists used the *Wanderer* as a litmus test to see how the government would uphold the Act. The intent of radical secessionists like Charles Lamar was to use the latent tensions over the slave trade to bring about the division of the nation.[21] To the North, the fact that the African slave trade was still operational was shocking.

In February of 1859, the House of Representatives began a trial in in Savannah, Georgia in order to ascertain who was involved in the smuggling operation and where the now infamous "*Wanderer*'s Negros" were.[22] Charles Lamar was "Indicted for holding African Negros" in the United States Circuit Court in Savannah, GA in 1859. Lamar's hired partner in this crime, William Corrie, was brought to court on charges of piracy in the District Court in Charleston, South Carolina. Others involved in this affair, including J. Edgar Farnum and Nicholas Brown, were brought to court on charges of "holding and abetting in the holding of African Negroes as slaves" and other similar crimes.[23] Even the most mundane information on the *Wanderer* and its cargo was reported on. This is evidenced in the article "The *Wanderer* Case" from the Richmond newspaper The Daily Dispatch which says, "Six witnesses in the *Wanderer* (slave ship,) case were examined yesterday."

---

[21] National Archives Southeast Region, "The *Wanderer*: a finding guide," (Atlanta, GA), 1.

[22] "Congressional," *Savannah Daily News* (Savannah, Georgia: Feb. 17, 1859).

[23] National Archives Southeast Region, "The *Wanderer*: a finding guide," (U.S. Circuit Court, Savannah, GA Mixed Cases, 1790-1860 & U.S. District Court, Charleston, South Carolina Minute Book, 1849-1860), (Atlanta, GA), 2-3.

The article ends saying, "Nothing new was elicited."[24] In the same paper, the article "Trial of Slavers" states that a jury was assembled for the federal case.[25]

This national attention prompted the Buchanan Administration to create a report on the Illegal slave trade in the American South. The United States Government appointed Ben Slocumb to investigate potential sites of illegal slave trading. Slocumb traveled through North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. On his way back to Washington, D.C. from Texas, he was "directed to visit Vicksburg and Memphis." Upon arriving at Vicksburg, Slocumb was told on "good authority" that 30 of the *Wanderer*'s slaves had been sold in the past year by Forest & Co Slave Dealers (sic). This could only be a reference to A.H. Forrest & Co. Slave dealers. As the government agent moved into Memphis, he was informed of another sale. Byrd Hill, a former partner of Nathan Bedford Forrest's in the slave trade, told Slocumb that, "7 Africans had been sold there by one Forest (sic)." In either city, he was not told of any other sale of African slaves by any other slave trading firms. This shows that somehow the Forrest's were uniquely able to procure enslaved Africans. This number, 37, is a remarkably high amount considering that at its Jekyll Island docking the *Wanderer* contained a little over

---

[24] "The *Wanderer* Case" *The Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia: Nov. 29, 1859).

[25] "Trial of Slavers" *The Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia: Nov. 29, 1859).

400 slaves. This means that the Forrest family was somehow able to acquire almost a tenth of the *Wanderer*'s total cargo.[26]

Newspapers of the time also made explicit reference to the fact that the brothers Forrest engaged in the illegal slave trade. As previously mentioned, newspaper ads were extensively used by the Forrest brothers. The first mention of enslaved Africans in the Forrest lots was on April 27, 1859 in the *Memphis Daily Appeal*. The Article, "A Rare Importation," invites "persons feeling any interest to see the genuine native African" to come to Forrest's lot on Adams Street. The article references 7 slaves "direct from Congo" that are being sold along with other people held in slavery. The Africans are then thoroughly described by the author, detailing their size, shape, complexion, even the slenderness of their fingers. Most of these descriptions are shown in contrast with the slaves that were born in the United States with whom the reader would be familiar. All but one of the slaves are described as a youth. The author's final remark is on their attraction to the other female slaves, making note that they are more attracted to dark skinned women. Newspapers of the time portrayed the arrival of African slaves onto Nathan Bedford Forrest's lot as a story of general interest and novelty, demonstrating the fact that the writers of these newspapers were not concerned with the legality of the importation. The Forrest family's influence in the interstate slave trade and lack of public outcry against the importation

---

[26] Robert Ralph Davis. "Buchanian Espionage: A Report on Illegal Slave Trading in the South in 1859,"271-278.

of slaves made engaging in the illegal slave trade a profitable and relatively safe investment. As previously mentioned, enslaved Africans were portrayed as completely different than the slaves that were born in the United States. The profitability for these slaves was very high because they were purchased in Africa for much less than they were to be sold for in the United States.[27]

These enslaved Africans were known about in the South as well as other regions of the country. Forrest's name had already become nationally synonymous with the slave trade, and papers from Nashville, North Carolina, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. carried the story "A Rare Importation." In Southern states this story was almost certainly a piece of local color. The descriptions of the Africans were written as a story of general interest, not carrying much moral weight. In the North, however, these types of stories were often compiled into groups and published along with abolitionist commentary. These compilations carried a primarily partisan slant. The commentary often was negative toward Southern Democrats as a group and not against the institution of as a morally wrong concept.[28]

An Article in the Okolona, Mississippi paper, *The Daily Southern Reveille* from May 6th, 1859 also mentions the African slaves in Forrest's Memphis lot. In a story picked up from the *Memphis Avalanche* from the 29th of April, "Three of the six native Africans brought here a few days since, were

---

[27] "A Rare Importation," *The National Era* (Washington, D.C.: May 12, 1859).

[28] "A Rare Importation," *The National Era* (Washington, D.C.: May 12, 1859).

sold yesterday at the mart of Mr. Forest (sic), and brought respectively $750, $740, and $515." The Forrests made an astounding profit from the sale of these enslaved children held as slaves. When the *Wanderer* was loaded in West Africa, each body was valued at from 1 to 3 dollars.[29] Even with the most liberal estimates of the cost of the Trans-Atlantic voyage, the Forrest family was making a remarkable profit. Later in the article, the author corroborates the fact that, "These negroes are part of the cargo of the *Wanderer*, [which] landed some months ago." It was public knowledge that these people were illegally placed into slavery in the US. The Buchanan Administration's report sought answers for this national scandal, but no protection or justice was offered to the cargo of the slave ship *Wanderer*.[30]

One of the most unambiguous pieces of evidence that points to Forrest's involvement with the international slave trade is his own insinuation that he invested in the operations of the *Wanderer*. In an interview published by the *New York Times* in March of 1869, four years after the end of the Civil War, Nathan Bedford Forrest admits to his connection to the illegal smuggling of African slaves. Speaking to Forrest about how the South will be able to recover from the war, the interviewer asks how it could ever be repopulated from the massive casualties and destruction of the war. Forrest replies, "With negroes." This response is

---

[29] Ana Lee Prieto, "Charles Augustus Lafayette Lamar: Southern Gentleman and Owner of the Slave Ship *Wandere*," *The Savannah Biographies Volume* 21 (1992): 8.

[30] "Congo Negroes," *Daily Southern Reveille* (May 6, 1859).

then backed with a compliment towards his slaves that he would not try to enslave them again. Forrest positions himself as a benevolent man who treats black people kindly and is then treated kindly in return. He uses his infamous actions in Fort Pillow to prove his point, saying that he did everything he could to prevent the bloodshed. His plan for repopulate the South goes as follows; "Get them from Africa, … They'll improve after getting here; are the most imitative creatures in the world, and if you put them in squads of ten, with on experienced leader in each squad, they will soon revive our country." He follows this plan with a lament that Europeans are not up to the challenge of rebuilding the South. His plan culminates in the idea that African nations should provide the United States with their prisoners of war so the US can utilize them for revitalizing the South. It is after this story that he frankly says, "I had an interest … in the *Wanderer*, and we bought over 400; only six percent died." An interest is not a definite legal term but the fact that Forrest references himself as one of the funders of this excursion explains why the Forrest brothers ended up with almost a tenth of the slaves that were illegally smuggled into the country in the slave ship *Wanderer*.[31]

Forrest's business relationship with Sam Tate, Owner of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, would have made transporting slaves disembarked from the *Wanderer* a

---

[31] "N. B. Forrest: Some Extraordinary Respecting the Negroes," *New York Times* (New York, New York: May 15, 1869).

relatively straightforward task. [32] Forrest forged that business relationship by selling Tate slaves on multiple occasions, the earliest of which in 1854.[33] As an alderman, Forrest often strongly advocated for policies that benefitted the Memphis and Charleston Railroad. [34] These actions included selling public land to the railroad company, advocating for a market house to be built near their depot, and advocating for the city of Memphis to retain the $500,000 in stock that they had in the company. When the city decided to sell the stock, Forrest bought up $50,000 of it, ostensibly to prove that it was profitable. He later cited that he made a $10,000 profit off of this stock. In 1859, the year of the African slave sale, he again defended his purchase of the stock in Tate's company when the legality of the purchase was almost investigated by the council. [35] Forrest is described as being the "spokesman for the Memphis & Charleston, bringing to the [alderman's] board several communications from Tate." [36] These favors for Tate undoubtedly would have allowed Forrest to make requests of Tate as well. As the Memphis and Charleston railroad connected with many regional lines during the late 1850s, the ability to haul cargo efficiently from Georgia to

---

[32] Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest: A Biography*, 43.

[33] Ibid, 45.

[34] Ibid, 61.

[35] Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest: A Biography*, 61.

[36] Ibid, 55.

Vicksburg and Memphis became more and more simple.[37] With the help of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad, Forrest could have asked Sam Tate to engineer a way for illegally enslaved people to be transported from Savannah, Georgia to Memphis, Tennessee.

The illegal slave dealings of Nathan Bedford Forrest have been mostly swept under the rug in the popular biographies of Forrest from Hurst and Wyeth. Tom Henderson Wells' book *The Slave Ship Wanderer* mentions Forrest's involvement only in the conclusion and with inconclusive language, denying the government reports and multiple newspaper articles written which confirm the Forrest family's involvement in the sale of people from the Wanderer.[38] Even when there are published accounts of his foray into the illegal slave trade, the accounts mention only that he invested in the *Wanderer*, not mentioning the legality of the investment.[39] In his home state of Tennessee, Nathan Bedford Forrest is memorialized as a state hero. There are "32 different historical markers, far more than any other person in any other state" dedicated to Forrest in Tennessee. He has statues, obelisks, state parks, until recently a city park in Memphis, and numerous plaques throughout the state. There are more historical markers for Forrest than

---

[37] Aaron Marrs, *Railroads in the Old South* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 189.

[38] Wells, *The Slave Ship Wanderer*, 86.

[39] Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest: A Biography*, 330.

there are for all three Tennessee presidents combined.[40]The mythos surrounding the name Forrest in Tennessee would suggest that he was a benevolent and gracious victor, an upwardly mobile southern champion who was able to achieve what eluded so many poor whites. A self-made and fabulously wealthy man who succeeded without the help of the government or a formal education. What is often left out of the story, however, is the whole truth of how he sustained his wealth, and the legality of the actions that increased that wealth. Nathan Bedford Forrest proudly engaged in the trafficking slaves from Africa decades after this act was deemed    illegal    by    the    United    States    Congress.

---

[40] James Loewen. *Lies Across America: What American Historic Sites Get Wrong* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1999), 237.

# The Myth of Nixon's Opening of China

## Nick DeMaris

On February 21, 1972, Air Force One descended through Beijing's early morning haze as the highly-trained pilots navigated the Boeing VC-137C, nicknamed the "Spirit of '76", towards the runway. Inside sat the 37th President of the United States, Richard M. Nixon, nervously awaiting the imminent meetings with the leaders of the Communist Party of China, including Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai.[1] In the context of Cold War-era international relations and geopolitics, perhaps the single most historically significant and decisive event was President Nixon's establishment of official (and public) diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. His trip to Beijing in early 1972 marked the beginning of a certain rapprochement between these two countries and signaled the evolution of the relationships between China, the United States, and the Soviet Union.

---

[1] Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao: The Week that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2007) 19.

In the aftermath of World War II, as the Japanese threat to China ceased to exist, the two competing factions within the country, the Guomindang led by Chiang Kai-Shek, and the Communists led by Mao Zedong, were able to focus their efforts and resources on defeating each other instead of defending against Japanese occupation. This resulted in a bloody civil war between the Guomindang, the government that led the Republic of China, and the People's Liberation Army that lasted until the Communists claimed victory in 1950. At this point, the Nationalists were forced to retreat to the island of Taiwan, and the CCP was able to take full control and declared the existence of the People's Republic of China.[2]

During the Civil War, the United States Government threw its support behind Chiang Kai-Shek and the Guomindang in hopes that they would be able to defeat the Communists, remain in control of China, and stem the spread of Communism around the world. Despite American support however, the Guomindang was defeated, stoking fears inside the U.S. Government that communist controlled China would "therefore, significantly affect the world balance of power, since it would make that country a satellite of the Soviet Union."[3] The perceived threat of a Soviet controlled China was front of mind for many in the U.S. government, as is apparent in the language of a

---

[2] Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 94-109.

[3] John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries Into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 77.

memorandum drafted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff towards the end of the Chinese Civil War. "A Soviet position of dominance over Asia, Western Europe, or both, would constitute a major threat to United States Security. United States security interests require that China be kept free from Soviet domination; otherwise all of Asia will in all probability pass into the sphere of the USSR." [4] The language of this memo represents an explicit statement of the fundamentals of the United States' Policy of Containment during the Cold War. That is to say that the United States government believed that above all else, Soviet power had to be contained and communism had to be prevented from spreading. An effort at containment resulted in the United States government cutting off contact to mainland China, and only engaging in diplomacy with Chiang Kai Shek's government in Taipei in response to the loss of China to the CCP in 1950. The resulting freeze in relations between the United States and People's Republic of China remained until the two governments began hosting talks under the Nixon administration. [5]

Since the communist victory in the Chinese Civil War, the United States had not officially recognized the People's Republic of China on the international stage, and this frigid rivalry manifested itself in political and military clashes during the wars in Korea and Vietnam. Eventually, the

---

[4] NSC 22/1, "Possible Courses of Action for U.S. with Respect to the Critical Situation in China," August 6, 1948, FR: 1948, VIII, 133.

[5] Ibid., 94-109.

allure of their steadily aligning geopolitical and diplomatic interests in Asia presented an attractive middle-ground that allowed for the governments of China and the United States to officially reconcile. That being said, the representations of the historic and diplomatic implications of this rapprochement have been habitually mischaracterized. While the opening of diplomatic relations with China was historically significant, it was not the complete paradigm shift of Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy that it has been made out to be. Rather, it represented a recognition of the evolution of post-War bipolarity, a continuation of the policy of containment concerning the Soviet Union, as well as the United States' willingness to engage with a communist regime in order to project American influence.

Based on these observations, this paper will deal with several different issues. Firstly, it will explore the foreign policy style of President Nixon and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger in order to establish a grounding from which it is easier to understand the broader policy decisions that were made. The paper will also deal with the evolution of the international context within which the US-China rapprochement took place, and what this development meant in regard to the traditional containment strategy. Finally, it will detail how the characterization of Nixon's opening of China as an about face on years of foreign policy represents a fundamentally flawed understanding of Cold War policy.

One of Richard Nixon's most iconic qualities as a historical character was his complicated persona. Historians and political satirists alike have gone to great lengths describing and re-litigating Nixon's personality traits, from the quirky and benign to the sinister and paranoid. Even as a young congressman, Nixon revealed his penchant for paranoia in a House speech that he made on January 26, 1950. The speech was a commentary on the Alger Hiss case, which had to do with State Department official who was accused of being a spy during the campaign led by Senator Joseph McCarthy to root out alleged communists in the United States Government.[6] In his speech, Nixon describes communist influence in the government as a "sinister conspiracy" that "disarms and dooms our diplomats to defeat in advance before they go to conferences."[7] This address to the House of Representatives shows a conspiratorial mindset that would come to be one of Nixon's most recognizable traits. Additionally, it displays a tendency to mistrust certain areas of the government that would evolve into a hyper-paranoid and controlling approach to the presidency.

One specific manifestation of this approach was Nixon's disdain-filled relationship with what he called "the bureaucracy", especially within the State Department. He shared this contempt for the State Department bureaucracy

---

[6] Richard Nixon, "The Hiss Case—A Lesson for the American People," (January 26, 1950), 19-59.

[7] Nixon, "The Hiss Case—A Lesson for the American People," 59.

with his National Security Advisor, and partner in his foreign policy tour de force, Henry Kissinger. It was because of this mutual hatred for the State Department that "they developed a conspiratorial approach to foreign policy management", as Lawrence Eagleburger, a Kissinger aide and Secretary of State under the first President Bush, remarked. [8] In President Nixon's opinion, "you need a President for foreign policy; no Secretary of State is really important; the President makes foreign policy." [9] For the most part, Nixon and Kissinger excluded or kept the State Department in the dark on a large portion of important decisions of foreign policy. In her book, Margaret MacMillan notes that Nixon believed the Department to be filled with "egghead liberals", and as Kissinger put it "our basic attitude was the hell with the State Department; let them screw around with the little ones."[10] In the same vein, the Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy style had an "emphasis upon maneuver and manipulation, with its unprecedented centralization and secrecy (raising thorny constitutional questions of accountability)." [11] This way, Nixon and Kissinger were able to circumvent the slow and inefficient bureaucracy that plagued the decision-making process of

---

[8] Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 58.

[9] Roland Evans and Robert D. Novak, *Nixon in the White House: The Frustration of Power* (New York: Random House, 1971), 11.

[10] MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao*, 59.

[11] Robert S. Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine: American Foreign Policy and the Pursuit of Stability, 1969-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 50.

foreign policy and consolidate power for themselves within the White House.

This consolidation of power was made official in the "Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs-Designate to President Elect Nixon", in which Kissinger outlines an updated structure of the National Security Council ("NSC") system. In this document, approved by President Nixon in December of 1968, Kissinger proposed an expanded role for the NSC in the decision-making process of foreign policy. He argued that "the National Security Council should be the principal forum for issues requiring interagency coordination, especially where Presidential decisions of a middle and long-range nature are involved."[12] Furthermore, Kissinger asserted that the NSC should be involved in the process of decision making when it comes to vital areas of foreign policy in Europe, the Middle East, as well as in East Asia.[13]

All of this is to say that throughout his tenure as President, Nixon continually consolidated the power of foreign policy decision making in the White House, with the help of his National Security Advisor. This power grab came as a result of Nixon and Kissinger's mutual contempt and mistrust for the State Department, and for government bureaucracy in general. As the prime movers of United States foreign policy, Nixon and Kissinger had the

---

[12] Henry Kissinger "Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs-Designate to President Elect Nixon," *Foreign Relations*, Vol. II (1968-1976), 4.

[13] Kissinger, "Memorandum from the President's Assistant," 8-9.

prerogative to make changes to the China policy as they saw fit. One such change, was the evolution of the post-War ideology of bipolarity. While this marked disdain for the State Department and subsequent consolidation of power in the realm of foreign policy may seem like another bit of Nixon trivia, it is vital to take these factors into account when assessing whether or not the diplomatic opening of China was a paradigm shift.

In the aftermath of World War II, two nations emerged as the unequivocal world powers: The United States and the Soviet Union. The rivalry that developed between these two nations typified the landscape of geopolitics and international relations during the early years of the Cold War. As such, a certain bipolarity defined the post-War relations, not only between the United States and the Soviet Union, but also between their allies and the countries that were used as staging zones for the perpetuation of their respective ideologies and influence, such as the nations of Southeast Asia and Central America. Undoubtedly, the philosophy of bipolarity shaped the early Cold War, but as the relations between international powers evolved, so too did the landscape of international relations. The process of international evolution deserves a paper unto itself to fully explicate, but suffice it to say that a combination of domestic and foreign crises led to Nixon and his administration reevaluation of how they looked at the Cold War and the United States' role in the world order. In Kissinger's words;

"For twenty years, Wilsonian idealism had enabled American leaders to conduct their global role with missionary vigor. But the America of the late 1960s-- stalemated in Indochina and torn by domestic conflict-- required a more complex and nuanced definition of its international enterprise...Nixon inherited a society rent by frustration, whose future would depend on its ability to frame attainable long-term goals and to persevere in those goals even in the face of adversity without yielding to self-doubt."[14]

This passage perfectly exemplifies the situation in which Nixon and Kissinger found themselves during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Not only was the crisis in Vietnam coming to a head, but the United States' very credibility was beginning to take damage on the international stage. In this way, Nixon was forced into a situation that called for a large degree of adaptation and evolution. Additionally, the shifting international atmosphere was further complicated by one of the watershed moments of the Cold War, the Sino-Soviet split.

This rift between the two supposed leaders of the communist world, caused by military clashes along the Soviet-Chinese border in 1969, not only shook the foundations of the international order, but also deconstructed the myth of monolithic communism. The deconstruction of this myth called into question the foundational theories of American anti-communism set forth in documents like Kennan's Sources of Soviet Conduct, and

---

[14] Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 704.

the Truman Doctrine. Ultimately, the combination of these changing factors in the realm of international relations forced Nixon and Kissinger to face an international system that was becoming more heavily based on a plurality of powers as opposed to the strictly bipolar relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union of decades past. In his study of Nixon-Kissinger foreign strategy, Robert S. Litwak describes the situation in the post-1969 period as "the ongoing dilemma of reconciling continued (indeed revitalized) military bipolarity with the new conditions of global pluralism." [15] Thusly, the growth of international pluralism, and the Sino-Soviet split that aided in its exacerbation, also acted as a catalyst for the Nixon-Kissinger China policy that would eventually become rapprochement.

One popular historical argument concerning Nixon's foreign policy and his trip to Beijing in 1972 is that it represented a complete 180 degree turn away from the previous decades of Cold War containment policy that had been adopted by every President since the end of World War II, beginning with President Truman and spanning through President Johnson. This policy of containment was largely founded upon and inspired by the ideas put forth by George F. Kennan in his article, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct", published in 1947. Kennan articulates what would eventually become the central doctrine of the containment policy when he wrote that "Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the western world is something that can be

---

[15] Robert S. Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine,* 56.

contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy, put which cannot be charmed or talked out of existence." [16]    This sentiment expressed in Kennan's writing was a foundational aspect of the United States' foreign policy going forward.

While China's opening did represent a new era in Cold War international relations, it was not as dichotomous as the traditional view suggests. In reality, the opening was rather in line with the previous decades of the containment of Soviet power, as well as the President's adherence to a realist/realpolitik view of international relations. Nixon believed that in order to promote a successful and stable foreign policy, the United States must act deliberately with its interests as well as the interests of other nation states in mind. The conception of political realism that Nixon subscribed to was very much in line with the pioneering works of prominent international relations realists of the 20th century like Hans Morgenthau. In his work, Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace, he wrote, "The statesman must think in terms of the national interest, conceived as power among other powers. The popular mind, unaware of the fine distinctions of the statesman's thinking, reasons more often than not in the simple moralistic and legalistic terms of absolute good and

---

[16] George F. Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (July, 1947), 576.

absolute evil."[17]  In the context of the Nixon Administration, this foreign policy stance placed less importance on what Kissinger called "American idealism", or ideological motivations, in other words. In his first annual report on foreign policy, President Nixon wrote:

"Our objective, in the first instance, is to support our interests over the long run with a sound foreign policy. The more that policy is based on a realistic assessment of our and others' interests, the more effective our role in the world can be. We are not involved in the world because with have commitments; we have commitments because we are involved. Our interests must shape our commitments, rather than the other way around."[18]

For a Cold Warrior like Nixon, this heavier focus on national interests as opposed to ideological concerns came as a shock to many people, and he would suffer attacks from the Right as a result.[19]  That said, understanding Nixon's foreign policy framework does aid in understanding the necessary conditions that allowed for the opening of diplomatic relations with China. Namely, the Sino-Soviet split of 1969 presented an opportunity for Nixon to not only continue a policy of Soviet containment, but also to de-emphasize ideological motivations for the sake of the promotion of national interests. This Split also brought about

---

[17] Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 165.

[18] First Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy for the 1970s, February 18, 1970, in *Nixon Papers*, 1970 vol.,  119.

[19] Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 712.

a phenomenon that has come to be known as Triangular Diplomacy between the United States, China, and the Soviet Union. While Triangular Diplomacy as a conceptual framework has had its fair share of detractors over the years, it is useful in that it helps us to explicate how Nixon's realist foreign agenda took shape, as well as showing how the opening of China was a continuation of the Containment Policy. Specifically, the opening of China allowed for the United States to promote the PRC as a counterbalance to Soviet power in East Asia as well as creating a so called "China card" that could be played in negotiations with Moscow. In other words, "this was also the opportunity for Washington to exploit concretely the Sino-Soviet schism to its geopolitical advantage. By playing the 'China card'...the United States could exert pressure on the Soviets for greater responsiveness in the superpower détente process and in trying to find a negotiated settlement in Vietnam."[20] For Nixon and Kissinger, the opening was the perfect opportunity to promote détente as well as serve the national interests of the United States abroad. In Kissinger's own words, "I would begin a dialogue with communist China. In a subtle triangle of relations between Washington, Peking, and Moscow, we improve the possibilities of accommodations with each as we increase our options toward both."[21] Diplomatic relations with China acted as a

---

[20] Evelyn Goh, "Nixon, Kissinger, and the 'Soviet Card' in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971-1974," *Diplomatic History* 29, no. 3 (June 2005): 475.

[21] Speech Written for Nelson Rockefeller, July 1968, quoted in Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston 1979), 165.

bargaining chip and was leveraged against Moscow during negotiations and was also used as a counterbalance to Soviet power and expansionism, especially in East Asia.

Taken collectively, the evidence provided suggests that Nixon's opening of China was not the paradigm shift that it has been touted as and was rather in line with the decades-old policy of Soviet containment. Despite the previous analysis, however, the question remains; why were Nixon and Kissinger so willing to engage with a revolutionary communist regime that imprisoned political dissident and oppressed its own people? Nixon's realist philosophy goes a certain distance in explaining this willingness, but this is likely a grand oversimplification. With the growing fissures between Beijing and Moscow and the subsequent demise of the myth of monolithic communism resulting from them came the potential for a projection of American power. China represented an attractive opportunity to Nixon and Kissinger to engage with a communist regime, and potentially use the power of diplomatic and economic relations to project American influence. Beyond just promoting a peaceful relationship with the PRC and stability in East Asia, establishing direct relations with China opened the door for the introduction of American free-market and democratic ideals into a communist nation. As early as 1967, Nixon supported the idea of a relationship with China for purposes other than merely having a diplomatic connection. In a piece that he wrote for Foreign Affairs, he said; "Taking the long view, we

simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors. There is no place on this small planet for a billion of its potentially most able people to live in angry isolation."[22] Not only does Nixon mention the country of China itself, but also expresses hope that the Chinese people may one day be brought out of "angry isolation" and into the international (presumably Western-dominated/neoliberal) fold. This goes a step further than merely having a diplomatic relationship with the government of the People's Republic of China, but also with the people of the People's Republic of China.

Additionally, there were definite signs that a "moderate line" was beginning to emerge within the CCP, promoted by Zhou Enlai. This new direction was characterized by a more moderate foreign policy, and a de-emphasizing of political radicalism in favor of economic pragmatism for the sake of modernization.[23] China had suffered from economic stagnation and famine for years as a result of its isolationist policies when it came to international trade. Zhou Enlai identified this and saw the need to engage economically with non-socialists nations.[24] To mitigate these

---

[22] Richard M. Nixon, "Asia After Viet Nam," *Foreign Affairs,* vol. 46, no. 1 (October 1967), 121.

[23] Lorenz Lüthi, "Chinese Foreign Policy, 1960-1979" *The Cold War in East Asia: 1945-1991* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011) 156-163.

[24] Zhou Enlai yu Zhongdong: Jinian Zhou Enlai zongli shishi 30 zhounian" [Zhou Enlai and the Middle East: The 30th anniversary of Zhou Enlai's passing]. *Dangshi Zongheng,* no. 1 (2006), 8.

crises, China opened up trade with countries like the United Kingdom, West Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, Japan, and Italy by the mid-1960s.[25] From Washington's perspective, the willingness of Beijing to open itself to Western markets presented an opportunity to project American influence through free-trade and economic relations. Along these lines, there is definite evidence of a socio-economic and cultural exchange that took place between these two countries after the opening. "Wester Union established direct telegraph services, AT&T linked the two countries with direct telephone service, and RCA built three satellite receiving stations so that China would have instant contact with all continents. More than 50 delegations were exchanged by 1976. The Chinese have studied American industry, medicine, science, and agriculture."[26] Another example of the introduction of American ideals in China is through open trade and economic exchange. For example;

"U.S.--Chinese trade increased from zero in 1970 to 1.06 billion in 1976...Since 1972, the U.S. has sent more than $1.6 billion worth of agricultural products and $200 million worth of machinery. Boeing sold ten 707 commercial jets with spare parts, and United Aircraft shipped eight 707 engines. Most of the equipment has been used to develop China's infant oil industry. Since China has an estimated 70 billion

---

[25] Lorenz Lüthi, "Chinese Foreign Policy," 157.

[26] Harry M. Joiner, *American Foreign Policy: The Kissinger Era,* (Huntsville: Strode Publishers, 1977), 89.

barrels of oil, it will probably purchase considerable oil technology from the United States."[27]

Ten, or even five years prior to Nixon's election, the idea of trading billions of dollars' worth of goods with the most populous communist nation on Earth would have been unheard of. However, as a direct result of Nixon and Kissinger's opening, the United States was able to introduce the spoils of American free-market capitalism into the heart of "red China."

While Nixon's opening of China was certainly one of the most historically momentous events of the Cold War, it has been repeatedly mischaracterized over the years as a total foreign policy paradigm shift, away from post-War containment and stringent anti-communism. In reality, the opening was a manifestation of Nixon and Kissinger's recognition of the evolution of the international order, from post-War bipolarity to an international system heavily based on pluralism. Rather than operating as a shift away from post-War containment of the Soviets, Nixon's China policy actually served as a counter to Soviet power and expansionism in East Asia with China operating as an extension of the United States' policy of Soviet containment. The willingness of Nixon and Kissinger to engage with a communist regime signified the breakdown of the myth of monolithic communism. It also allowed for the United States to project the influence of its free-market economy and

---

[27] Harry M. Joiner, *American Foreign Policy*, 90.

democratic principles into a nation that was previously completely isolated. Ultimately, as with most historical events, it is vital to nuance the conceptions of Nixon and Kissinger's foreign policy in order to craft a fuller understanding of the President's visit to China and its consequences.