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Who Were They Working For? Sex Work, Working Girls, and Patriarchy in the Late Nineteenth Century

Grace Files

Democracy at War: The US Government's Fight Against Anti-War Dissent

Nicholas Langford

The Faustian Soul and the American West: The Turner Thesis in the Context of Spengler's Philosophy of History

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Gary Whittaker

The Rhodes Historical Review

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Who Were They Working For? Sex Work, Working Girls, and Patriarchy in the Late Nineteenth Century

Grace Files

In the late 1890s, Lil Lovell opened an upscale parlor house in Denver where she employed a number of working girls,¹ including her younger sister, Lois. An important businessman fell in love with Lois and proposed, but the woman knew she would not be able to marry him without destroying his reputation. Distraught, Lois poisoned herself. When her lover discovered that she had committed suicide, he shot himself in the head at her grave. Lil Lovell lived the rest of her life with the guilt of knowing that she was the one who invited her sister to come to Denver. She died a few years

¹ While today we might call these women sex workers, throughout this paper I will most often refer to them using the language of the late 19th century. It is through the lens of this language—working girls, fallen women, soiled doves—that these women would have understood their jobs and their positions in society. Any references to sex work should not be taken to mean that these women were all willingly engaged in the industry; rather, I use the term “sex work” to describe the industry because it is the simplest and most neutral description of the jobs these women had.

later with a fortune of about \$40,000.² The Lovell sisters' story contains many of the contradictions embodied in the lives of late nineteenth century sex workers. While successful financially, the sisters were ostracized socially and were both ultimately unhappy with the paths their lives took. Both knew that once they entered the world of fallen women—regardless of their motives—there was no going back. It was this fact that drove Lois to take her own life.

When faced with stories like these, many historians have traditionally responded by portraying working girls as hapless victims. Their lives as social outcasts were full of physical abuse, addiction, and financial strain. Oftentimes, desperate women were chewed up and spit out by a society that both demanded their work and condemned it³. More recently, historians have begun to push back against these victimization narratives. Many women who engaged in sex work, like Lil, became wildly successful financially. They transgressed social boundaries of the time, taking on roles in political and economic spheres that were typically reserved for men. These women cannot be viewed simply as victims; their challenges to gender roles helped pave the way for those women after them who demanded access to roles and rights previously accessible only to men.

² Anne Seagraves, *Soiled Doves: Prostitution in the Early West*, (Idaho: Wesanne Publications, 1994), 43-44; Jan MacKell, *Brothels, Bordellos, and Bad Girls: Prostitution in Colorado, 1860-1930*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 96.

³ Seagraves, *Soiled Doves*, xviii.

Neither of these narratives fully does justice to the situation of working girls in the late nineteenth century. Many women were victimized; many others were bold transgressors of gender norms. Oftentimes, their lives were a mix of both. These women did cross social boundaries in ways that helped to resist the patriarchal society they lived in, and their accomplishments and achievements in doing so must be recognized. However, their lives as working girls and madams ultimately served to reinforce the patriarchal structure of society, even as some of their actions confronted the norms that structure created.

Gender Roles and Relations in the Late Nineteenth Century

In the late nineteenth century, social norms were largely informed by the growing white middle class of Eastern cities. These norms centered Victorian gender roles, which located power, authority, and respect in masculinity. Women, on the other hand, were valued primarily for their purity and piety.⁴ These attitudes led to the creation of separate spheres; men belonged in the public and were meant to control politics, economics, and labor, while women were expected to remain in private and dedicate their lives to domestic tasks.⁵ Along with domesticity, women were

⁴ Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), xv.

⁵ Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and the Philippine-American Wars*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 3.

considered the guardians of virtue and morality in American society; it was their job to instill virtue and to “civilize” men.⁶ The Victorian standard of morality that women were in charge of gatekeeping held that “true” women were asexual.⁷ A woman’s honor was therefore entwined with her sexual virtue,⁸ and any woman who did not protect that virtue would quickly become an outcast from society.⁹ When it came to men, however, Jeremy Agnew describes that, “sex was considered to be a base form of male expression that had to be given periodic release in order to prevent dire consequences.”¹⁰ These conceptions of morality led to a double standard: sex work was considered by many to be a necessary evil, and men who visited working girls did not face devastating social stigma. The same men that created the demand for sex work, however, would only respect “good” women, because ultimately it was women’s duty to keep men moral; they couldn’t be expected to control their base sexual urges on their own.¹¹ In this way, women were placed on a “moral pedestal” which, while nominally proclaiming

6 Ibid., 19, 22.

7 Elizabeth Jameson, “Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West,” in *The Women’s West*, ed. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 150-151.

8 Hoganson, 24.

9 Michael Rutter, *Upstairs Girls: Prostitution in the American West*, (Helena, Montana: Farcountry Press, 2005), 2.

10 Jeremy Agnew, *Brides of Multitude: Prostitution in the Old West*, (Lake City, Colorado: Western Reflections Publishing Company, 2008) 17-18.

11 Rutter, 30, 32.

respect, allowed men to engage in non-marital sex while condemning women who did the same things.¹²

Victorian gender roles were additionally restrictive for women who were structurally barred from upholding them and were therefore trapped in the category of “bad women.” Victorian standards of “proper” womanhood automatically excluded women of color, as white society hyper-sexualized these women and therefore barred them from upholding Victorian sexual standards. Working-class women who could not remain in the domestic sphere and had to transgress into the male-dominated labor market in order to earn a living were also structurally barred from fulfilling Victorian standards of female domesticity. Their failure to live up to the impossible standards of femininity meant women of color and working-class women were largely marginalized and disrespected by white, affluent society.

Madeleine Blair, a woman who engaged in sex work in the late 19th century, exemplifies Victorian thinking in her autobiography. Madeleine, who published under a pseudonym, grew up somewhere in what she refers to as the “Middle West.”¹³ As a child, she was raised in a middle-class white family; she describes that, “My parents had many traditions of race, of class, of education, and of religion; they were looked upon as being rather peculiar in the principles

¹² Ibid., 101.

¹³ Madeleine Blair (pseud.), *Madeleine: An Autobiography*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1919), 4.

Based on Madeleine’s descriptions of her travels and the places she lived, she likely grew up in central Illinois or southern Iowa.

which they sought to instill into the minds of their children.”¹⁴ They further instructed her in morality based on what Madeleine characterizes as “a strict heaven-and-hell belief.”¹⁵ Although Madeleine herself was raised in a rural community, her class consciousness is evident in her disdainful description of her hometown. She states, “This community was new and crude, and its inhabitants were for the greater part persons of little education and few aspirations. If they had ever possessed ideals they must have left most of them behind in the older communities from which they came.”¹⁶ Her reference to education is a thinly veiled class reference, as Madeleine recognizes her own privilege in being one of the only children educated in her community due to her family’s affluence. Her disdain for the working-class based on her perception of their lack of “aspirations” remains with her throughout her autobiography, as she often describes working-class people she encounters as uneducated, lazy, or morally destitute.

Madeleine’s upbringing also instilled in her ideals of Victorian gender roles, exhibited when she describes her parents by saying, “My mother seemed to have been created for the expressed purpose of being a mother, for poise and common sense were her distinguishing characteristics. My father was the mainspring of our pleasant home life. Mother was the balance wheel.”¹⁷ She consistently describes her

¹⁴ Blair, *Madeleine*, 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

mother as a site of “balance” in the family who dutifully serves her domestic role in taking care of the children. Her father is the “wellspring,” the source of vitality who imparts education and knowledge to Madeleine when she is young. These descriptions exemplify Victorian gender standards that case women in domestic roles. Such gender roles also included an emphasis on female sexual morality which Madeleine deeply internalized.

As Madeleine grew older, her father became an alcoholic and stopped providing for the family, plunging them into destitution. However, Madeleine’s childhood instruction in Victorian social standards remained with her. When her family moved to a working-class neighborhood where their neighbors were so-called “fallen women,” Madeleine described them as “ignorant, corrupt women.”¹⁸ She maintained her belief that it was her moral duty as a woman to abstain from sex and describes her struggle to fulfill this duty, saying, “I made a terrific effort to keep above the level of my environment and that of my forbidden companions. My mother’s training and example, and my own inherent sense of decency, fought for the right. My environment and social isolation fought against it. The result was inevitable; I lost the battle.”¹⁹ Despite her eventual career as a working girl and, later, a madam—an owner and operator of a brothel—Madeleine held the view that sexual abstinence was of the utmost importance to female identity

¹⁸ Ibid., 7.

¹⁹ Ibid.

throughout her life, something that led her to grapple continuously with guilt over profession. Her beliefs about class, gender, and sex all illustrate the more widely held beliefs of Victorian society in the late 19th century.

Looking West

In the West, these Victorian moral standards held less weight. A significant proportion of women of color lived in the West in the late 19th century, from Mexican women along the Southern border to Chinese women along the west coast. Additionally, working-class women who needed to find a way to make a living were more likely to move west than comfortably affluent middle- or upper-class women in eastern cities. Because the lofty standard for womanhood was largely modeled off middle and upper-class white women, many western women could not fit the same standards due to their varying class or race.²⁰ The impossibility for these women to uphold the social standards of white, affluent society made it more acceptable to disregard those standards. Importantly, there was also a significantly skewed sex ratio in the early days of western settlement by non-natives.²¹ Without the “civilizing” influence of wives, mothers, and children to keep men in check, moral boundaries became more fluid. Largely out of necessity, women began to engage in what had previously been “men’s work” as they became involved in labor such as homesteading. Western women

20 Jameson, “Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers,” 147.

21 Seagraves, *Soiled Doves*, x.

additionally became more involved in government; western states and territories were the first to grant women the vote before the nineteenth amendment was passed.²² Despite the more flexible nature of western morality, however, western society still expected women to at least attempt to uphold Victorian standards. This was especially true in areas with a higher proportion of middle- and upper-class white families; as more middle and upper class white women moved west, they brought their own higher standards of femininity with them.²³ While the West provided unprecedented opportunities for women to engage in non-normative gender behavior, western women still often wanted to appear respectable,²⁴ and those who moved too far outside the realm of acceptable behavior typically faced social stigma and ostracism.

Work Girls' Place in Society

Working girls lived outside this realm of social respectability. Across the United States, sex work was publicly condemned;²⁵ the general consensus held that working girls were necessary, but they had no place in the social sphere.²⁶ While most Victorians were repulsed by the

22 Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 96-97.

23 Seagraves, *Soiled Doves*, xi.

24 Jameson, "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers," 154.

25 Michael McGerr, "Transforming Americans," in *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920*, (New York: Free Press, 2003,) 89.

26 Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 25-26.

work these women did, they were often sympathetic to the women²⁷ because they thought the “flesh trade” was the result of male desire which victimized women.²⁸ However, Victorian sympathy was often patronizing and did little good for the subjects of their pity. An unwillingness to deny male sexual urges²⁹ meant that the demand for sex work remained high, even as the trade was publicly abhorred.³⁰ Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, middle class campaigns against vice—including sex work—began to take hold.³¹ In the West, these crusades gained traction as more “decent” women and children began to arrive in the later decades of the century. Communities made increasing efforts to eradicate immoral behavior that they previously tolerated.³² However, these campaigns did little to fully eliminate sex work. Instead, their effect was typically one of increasing spatial segregation as laws forced working girls to move into separate districts or operate clandestinely.³³

The majority of these women were working class³⁴ and poorly educated, and many came from dysfunctional homes.³⁵ Lack of education or familial support systems made

²⁷ Mary Murphy, “The Private Lives of Public Women: Prostitution in Butte, Montana, 1878-1917,” in *The Women’s West*, ed. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 197.

²⁸ McGerr, 86.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁰ Agnew, *Brides of Multitude*, 16.

³¹ McGerr, “Transforming Americans,” 85.

³² Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 98-99.

³³ *Ibid.*, 79, 104.

³⁴ McGerr, 87.

³⁵ Rutter, 2.

them more vulnerable to exploitation. Madeleine, for example, did not become a working girl until economic and familial support from her father disappeared. When Madeleine eventually tried to leave sex work, a financial crisis made her feel it was necessary to go back to the trade in order to support her family.³⁶ Most women, like Madeleine, felt forced into sex work out of economic necessity.³⁷

Because working girls occupied a position outside the acceptable boundaries of womanhood in society,³⁸ they were kept strictly separated from “decent” girls.³⁹ Once a girl turned to sex work, she forfeited the division between private and public that was central to Victorian gender roles as her private life became the subject of public scorn.⁴⁰ Because these separate spheres still held moral weight, however, the more private a working girl kept her business, the more respected she was by the public.⁴¹ Within this context, a hierarchy of sex work emerged in the West that was largely class-based. At the top were parlor houses. The working girls were boarders in these houses, and they entertained wealthy, upper-class customers who were often prominent and well-respected men in the community.⁴² Parlor house girls might entertain only one or two clients a night; they lived the most glamorous

³⁶ Blair, *Madeleine*, 37-38.

³⁷ McGerr, 87.

³⁸ Murphy, “The Private Lives of Public Women,” 193, 195.

³⁹ Rutter, ix.

⁴⁰ Murphy, 194.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁴² Seagraves, *Soiled Doves*, 24.

lives of working girls in the West.⁴³ The next step down in the hierarchy were high-end brothels. Similar to parlor houses in many ways, these brothels were nice but not quite as luxurious.⁴⁴ Working girls made less money than parlor house ladies, and they had a faster turnover.⁴⁵ Brothels were also generally relegated to red light districts—designated areas for “vice”—in towns.⁴⁶ While this higher end of the sex work hierarchy afforded more privacy to the women and therefore more respect, working girls in parlor houses and high-end brothels were still typically spatially segregated in towns to emphasize their separateness from truly “respectable” women.

The same red light districts that might hold high-end brothels would certainly segregate common and high-volume brothels, which were more run down and typically serviced a working-class clientele.⁴⁷ Working girls in these brothels served a higher number of customers; depending on the quality of the brothel and the customer base, a woman might see up to twenty-five men in one night.⁴⁸ Common brothels were also more subject to legal troubles and had higher instances of venereal disease.⁴⁹ Even worse than the run-down brothels, however, were the “cribs.” Many crib women worked for pimps and operated out of tiny apartments, tents,

⁴³ Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 13-16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁴⁵ Seagraves, 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁷ Rutter, 19-21.

⁴⁸ Seagraves, 56.

⁴⁹ Rutter, 21-22.

or shacks. They might serve up to eighty men in one night,⁵⁰ although twenty or thirty was more common. These women were usually desperate, and they experienced higher rates of physical abuse. According to Michael Rutter, “venereal disease was the rule, not the exception.”⁵¹ The only thing worse than working from a crib was becoming a streetwalker.⁵² These women were often homeless with nowhere else to turn; many were serious addicts. If streetwalkers weren’t careful, they would typically be run out of town.⁵³

This hierarchy illustrates that the more publicly a working girl conducted her business, the more society scorned her. However, the hierarchy also shows how lower-class women were often forced to operate more publicly when they were unable to access the material goods, such as fancy clothes and beauty products, or social connections that got women hired in the higher-end brothels. The upper-class clientele that frequented such high-class brothels wanted to be serviced by only the “best” women, and many working-class girls found themselves unable to make the cut.

Madeleine worked largely in high-end brothels and parlor houses, at the upper end of the sex work hierarchy. She attributes her ability to make connections that allowed her to find these jobs to her educational background and upper-class manners. For example, Madeleine shares the story of her

⁵⁰ Seagraves, *Soiled Doves*, 60-61.

⁵¹ Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 22-23.

⁵² Seagraves, 63.

⁵³ Rutter, 23-24.

work at a brothel run by a French madam in Chicago. While there, Madeleine repudiated the advances of a man who wanted her to engage in an orgy—a repudiation that stemmed largely from her Victorian sensibilities. Her moral fortitude caught the eye of another man who asked how a “nice girl” like Madeleine had come to be in such a “notorious place.”⁵⁴ When Madeleine explained her situation, he tipped her off to another parlor house in Chicago that was more respectable—“the most exclusive trade in Chicago.”⁵⁵ Madeleine’s attempts to adhere to Victorian standards based in class were what would make her eligible for a place at this more “exclusive”—read: private and wealthy—employer. However, most working girls did not have Madeleine’s upper-class upbringing or her education in Victorian morality, and Madeleine acknowledges how this background distinguished her from many of the other working girls she encountered throughout her life.

One type of sex work that was uniquely Western and did not fit neatly into the above hierarchy were cottage girls. These women were independent contractors who worked out of their own homes. They typically lived in more rural areas and sometimes became well-respected members of their communities through charity work and financial support of community institutions. Small, rural communities in the West were often more open to accepting support from non-conventional sources, because their isolation from larger cities

⁵⁴ Blair, *Madeleine*, 40.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

meant they had to be more self-sufficient. This need for self-sufficiency meant that all members were expected to chip in, and cottage girls were therefore able to gain respect through both financial contributions and their roles as one of the only sources of female companionship for lonely men. While the cottage girls enjoyed a greater level of independence, their isolation also meant that they had less physical security, and their lives were typically not as glamorous as those of the high-end brothels and parlor house girls.⁵⁶ However, despite these drawbacks, cottage girls illustrate how the West was a site that often allowed for non-normative gender expression: while working girls who operated more publicly were typically scorned, many cottage girls were open about their professions and still gained some level of acceptance in rural, Western communities.

Working Girls' Challenge to Patriarchy

Regardless of whether she worked in a parlor house, a crib, or a cottage, the working girl transgressed one of the most important social boundaries of her time: she expressed her sexuality, a sexuality that—according to moral standards—was not supposed to exist. This act in and of itself resisted the gender roles and norms imposed on women; it forced Victorian society to confront the reality that female sexuality existed, when moral standards insisted that such sexuality was natural only in men.⁵⁷ This confrontation

⁵⁶ Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 22.

⁵⁷ Agnew, *Brides of Multitude*, 17-18.

challenged Victorian morality: if women had no sexuality, how could female sexuality exist? If one moral standard held no weight, what could be used to reify Victorian morality as a whole? Because of this challenge, society was forced to explain away sex work as a corruption of the natural order. This explanation went so far as to redefine gender boundaries, placing working girls in a position outside “true womanhood.”⁵⁸

Working girls were additionally placed in a category outside “true womanhood” by Victorian society when they refused to bind themselves to relationships with men through marriage. Through the slang word “tom,” which was often applied to working girls, these women were sometimes conflated with “masculine” women who preferred female to male company.⁵⁹ Some working girls enjoyed female company so much that they engaged in sexual relationships with other women and, in doing so, centered a female sexuality that was not supposed to exist in absence of male sexuality.⁶⁰ While such relationships were not entirely common, the fact that they existed goes even further to show how many working girls claimed ownership over their sexualities and had sex lives centered not only around the benefit of men, but also for their own enjoyment. In a society that ostracized and condemned women who did not suppress

⁵⁸ Murphy, “The Private Lives of Public Women,” 195.

⁵⁹ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 51.

⁶⁰ Seagraves, *Soiled Doves*, 117; Murphy, “The Private Lives of Public Women,” 199.

their sexuality and tried to silence those who provided evidence that such sexuality existed, these were all subversive acts.

Going even further to challenge this norm of nonexistent female sexuality, some working girls actually enjoyed the work they did.⁶¹ Big Nose Kate, a working girl who was involved in a love affair with the notorious Doc Holliday, is reported to have said that she enjoyed her job; she certainly had multiple opportunities to leave the line of work, yet consistently returned to brothels.⁶² Madeleine describes in her autobiography additional instances of women who willingly chose and seemed to enjoy sex work. The women that Madeleine describes were middle or upper-class; many were engaged to respectable men and studying at conservatories of art or music. While they kept their jobs secret, they still chose to engage in sex work not out of economic necessity, but rather to earn additional spending money.⁶³ This choice indicates that they preferred sex work to other lines of work that were both available to women at the time and considered more socially respectable, such as jobs in department stores or factories. In fact, despite hiding their sex work—which indicates an awareness of the public ostracization the work could cause—these women chose to become so-called “soiled doves.” Since their choices did not come out of necessity, they could not have hated sex work

⁶¹ Seagraves, 57.

⁶² Rutter, 149.

⁶³ Blair, *Madeleine*, 67-68.

enough to choose other available employment, and they may have even enjoyed the work if they willingly chose to risk becoming social outcasts.

The respect that many working girls accrued in the West additionally speaks to the abilities they had to challenge social norms. Especially in the earlier days of western settlement, many communities accepted working as part of their societies.⁶⁴ One example of this acceptance can be seen in Tascosa, a Texas town where working girls were not spatially segregated the way they were across most of the country.⁶⁵ Anne Seagraves describes, "The dance hall girls and prostitutes were included in the community. Their children went to school and played with the other children, without a hint of discrimination. No one in Tascosa asked questions, for it was not that kind of a town."⁶⁶ Despite the reigning social norms that insisted working girls were "fallen women," and the social ostracization that Victorian morality demanded for such women, in Tascosa working girls were simply treated as members of the community, fully integrated into town life. And Tascosa was not the only town in the West where working girls could live harmoniously within a larger community; some places established legal "vice zones" that lasted for up to a decade, where working girls were simply another part of the community.⁶⁷ While the spatial segregation of "vice zones" still marginalized these women

⁶⁴ Seagraves, *Soiled Doves*, 149.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁶⁷ Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 29-30.

by physically restricting the space where they were allowed to conduct business, the legalization of these zones was a unique occurrence that indicated a level of acceptance not typically found in the urban “vice zones” of the East.

Even in towns where sex work remained illegal, many women became integral members of their communities. Julia Bulette, a cottage girl who worked in Virginia City, Nevada, was held in high esteem for her charity and support of the city’s firefighters.⁶⁸ When she was suddenly murdered, the town came together to hold a funeral that was “the largest and the grandest in the history of Virginia City.” The local authorities also thoroughly investigated her murder, until they eventually caught the culprit and sentenced him to death by hanging.⁶⁹ In a society where crimes against working girls and marginalized members of society were typically ignored by law enforcement, the effort of Bulette’s community to hold her murderer accountable is unusual and goes to show how integral Bulette was to Virginia City: a crime against her was a crime against the community.

Julia Bulette’s story also illustrates a wider theme of social acceptance across the West. Despite their status as fallen women and their transgressions of Victorian moral codes, many western citizens still viewed working girls as assets to their communities. This acceptance challenged the stereotypes of the day that fallen women were either victims or perpetrators of sin—instead, they were people who had

⁶⁸ Ibid., 111-114.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 117-119.

important contributions to make to western society. The sheer lack of women in the West can explain some of this acceptance; the expectation that men should treat women well meant that if the only women around were working girls, they were sometimes regarded as women first and soiled doves second.⁷⁰ However, this explanation is not sufficient on its own. The fact that working girls could break a cardinal rule of “respectable” society and still manage to earn places as productive and valued members of their communities speaks to their abilities to challenge ideas about why women deserved respect and the possible routes available to women looking to find a place in a community. Working girls helped carve a larger space for women in society by insisting that they be respected for reasons that held no weight under the pretext of Victorian morality, but that made sense for western communities, and in doing so they further undermined the foundations of Victorian morality and helped lay a new foundation for rethinking gender roles in American society. If a working girl could become a respected part of a western community, perhaps the only “respectable” options available to women were not just virginity or motherhood—maybe women could explore other roles and create new options.

There is perhaps no greater testimony to working girls’ abilities to challenge notions of respectability than those who eventually married. Despite her status as a fallen woman, a working girl in the West had a chance of marrying and becoming a respectable member of society, particularly in

⁷⁰ Tong, *Unsubmissive Women*, 5.

smaller, more rural towns.⁷¹ For Chinese working girls across the West coast, this was especially true due to the fact that Chinese women were largely banned from entering the country. Thus, most Chinese women were smuggled into the United States through the illegal sex trade. Chinese men looking to marry, then, often turned to these women. Chinese culture was also somewhat more accepting of working girls, because much of Chinese society considered sex work to be natural and inevitable.⁷² During the 1870s a large number of Chinese working girls left their trade for matrimony, and those who got married rarely returned to sex work.⁷³ The life of Lalu Nathoy is a particularly poignant success story when it comes to challenging social norms. Born in 1853 in the Canton region of China, she was sold by her impoverished family to a Western saloon keeper in 1866, at age thirteen. After engaging in sex work for some time, Nathoy married a Euro-American man—an interracial union that the laws of the time prohibited.⁷⁴ The two lived together on a homestead, which Nathoy eventually took over and ran after the death of her husband.⁷⁵ Throughout her life, Nathoy crossed racial, social, and economic barriers. She married a white man—something only white women were supposed to do. She left sex work for marriage—something only “respectable”

⁷¹ Seagraves, *Soiled Doves*, 58.

⁷² Tong, *Unsubmissive Women*, 29.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 159, 175.

⁷⁴ Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 137.

⁷⁵ Tong, *Unsubmissive Women*, 22-23.

women were supposed to do. She ran a homestead by herself—something only men were supposed to do. Clearly, she found ways to carve her own path in a society where her life should have been strictly regimented by social norms.

Above all, working girls broke down social boundaries in their trespasses into the masculine economic sphere. Many women, like Julia Bulette, used sex work to become economically independent.⁷⁶ In an era when women were almost universally dependent on fathers, brothers, or other male relatives to survive, female economic independence was subversive in and of itself; it challenged the notion that a woman had to depend on a man to survive. While some working girls became financially successful independently, the greatest amount of success came from being a madam. Many fallen women worked their way up and saved money until they could open their own businesses—which quickly became integral to the nineteenth century Western economy. Seagraves describes, “Collectively, their businesses employed the largest group of women on the frontier. They supplied a home for thousands of females who would have otherwise been forced to live on the streets.”⁷⁷ The majority of western madams owned real estate, paid taxes, bribed corrupt town officials and law officers, and donated to charity; the money they made went back to their communities, in one way or another.⁷⁸ Sex work provided one of the only avenues

⁷⁶ Seagraves, *Soiled Doves*, 62.

⁷⁷ Seagraves, 87.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

through which women could become not only financially independent, but successful. By transgressing moral norms of the time, women were able to enter into the public economic sphere that had been previously reserved for men.

Patriarchal Constraints on Working Girls

Working girls confronted the Victorian social norms of their time regarding class, race, and gender; Undoubtedly, working girls confronted the social norms of their time. The work they did and the lives they led helped question long-held convictions about what roles were socially acceptable for women in society, and their accomplishments in breaking down social barriers should not be overlooked. However, at the end of the day, sex work operated within a patriarchal society. Although many working girls challenged the ways that patriarchy was instituted, few—if any—directly challenged the patriarchal structure itself. While some working girls enjoyed their work and found personal empowerment in sexuality, sex work was ultimately a business centered around male sexual pleasure. There is nothing subversive or revolutionary about the use of female bodies for male pleasure in a patriarchal society that already insists that the primary purpose of women is to please men. Additionally, though some women willingly chose to become working girls, the vast majority were forced, often out of economic necessity.⁷⁹ In her autobiography, Madeleine describes her attempts to leave sex work only to be forced to

⁷⁹ Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, x.

return in order to make enough money to support her family.⁸⁰ This was the case for many women, who had few economic opportunities in a labor market dominated by men.⁸¹ Other women were kidnapped or trafficked;⁸² this was the case for almost all Chinese working girls in the West.⁸³ Forcing women to sate male pleasure did nothing to undermine a patriarchal structure in which women were expected to dedicate themselves to attending to the needs of men.

Once in the business, working girls lived with the constant threat of physical violence. Some suffered at the hands of abusive pimps,⁸⁴ while others were subject to cruelty from madams; there are a number of recorded cases in which madams beat working girls to death.⁸⁵ Ah Toy, a ruthless and wealthy Chinese trafficker, encouraged the crews on voyages across the Pacific to “break” the girls by raping them.⁸⁶ Working girls additionally encountered violence from each other—competition was fierce, and disputes often erupted.⁸⁷ Above all, however, these women lived under the threat of physical abuse from clients.⁸⁸ Anne Seagraves explains, “The woman was considered fair game and required to do as he

⁸⁰ Blair, *Madeleine*, 37-38.

⁸¹ Rutter, 7.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 90-92.

⁸³ Tong, *Unsubmissive Women*, 54.

⁸⁴ Murphy, “The Private Lives of Public Women,” 196.

⁸⁵ Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 63.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁸⁷ Murphy, 198; Rutter, 61.

⁸⁸ Rutter, 63.

[the male client] wished. She could never hurry the man she was entertaining. No matter how humiliating or painful it became, she had to pretend she was enjoying her job.”⁸⁹ Many working girls suffered physical and sexual abuse as well as rape at the hands of these men.⁹⁰ The risk of violence existed regardless of what type of sex work a woman engaged in. Julia Bulette, a woman highly respected in her community, was still brutally murdered: she was found strangled, shot, suffocated, and severely beaten.⁹¹ Other working girls suffered similar fates; in 1867 the working girl Ellen Fary was beaten to death by four men in Virginia City, the same place where Julia Bulette was killed.⁹² Two years earlier, Lizzie Hayes’ skull was fractured, and two years before that Jessie Lester was shot in the arm, which subsequently had to be amputated. She died of infection shortly after the surgery.⁹³ Women like Jessie Lester had little to no legal recourse for the violence they suffered; working girls essentially forfeited their rights to physical protection.⁹⁴ According to Michael Rutter, “Most prostitutes owned a knife or a pistol for protection.”⁹⁵ The best they could do was fend for themselves. Aside from physical violence, most working girls also lived in a state of frequent physical insecurity and mobility. The reasons to move were varied — sometimes legal issues caused

⁸⁹ Seagraves, *Soiled Doves*, 25-26.

⁹⁰ Tong, 147-148.

⁹¹ Seagraves, 62.

⁹² Rutter, 66.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

a woman to leave, other times business might be too slow in a particular town—but if she wanted to stay in business, the nineteenth century working girl had to move around.⁹⁶ This state of physical insecurity was compounded by threats; in a recounting of her experience with sex trafficking, the Chinese girl Rose describes how threats of deportation and death from her owner were used to make her obedient; both physical mobility and physical violence were used as tools against her.⁹⁷

In addition to physical violence, the nature of sex work meant that working girls' health was continuously put at risk. Sexually transmitted diseases were a frequent occurrence and could sometimes be lethal.⁹⁸ Madeleine explains how a venereal disease put her in the hospital and prevented her from traveling;⁹⁹ doctors also told her the disease had made her sterile, although she later discovered this was untrue.¹⁰⁰ STDs, however, were simply a matter of course for most working girls. When Madeleine was hospitalized, she found herself bedfellows with a fallen woman who had the same disease but “looked upon the disease as a matter for jesting.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁹⁷ Rose (pseud.), “Experiences of ‘Rose—A Slave Girl,” in Social Science Institute, *Oriental and Their Cultural Adjustment*, (Nashville: Fisk University, 1946), 36.

⁹⁸ Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 11, 73.

⁹⁹ Blair, *Madeleine*, 20.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 58.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 21.

While STDs may have been a matter for jesting, pregnancy was no joke. A disease could be treated; a child was not so easily dealt with.¹⁰² Moreover, pregnancy was dangerous, and the medicine of the time could do little to help difficult births.¹⁰³ Madeleine describes her first pregnancy, at seventeen years old, as one of the most difficult times in her life, saying, “I had grown very nervous and irritable, and cried almost constantly for my mother. I was sure that I would not live through the coming ordeal.”¹⁰⁴ Madeleine was right the birth nearly killed her.¹⁰⁵ Working girls also could not use the most common forms of birth control—abstinence and withdrawal—so they had to turn to other methods.¹⁰⁶ Although there were many alternative forms of birth control in circulation, they were rarely effective.¹⁰⁷ More often, working girls had to rely on illegal and unsafe abortions if they wanted to avoid becoming mothers.¹⁰⁸ Five years after her first pregnancy, when she was twenty two, Madeleine discovered that she was pregnant for a third time. Her young son had just died and, unable to bear the thought of having another child, she terminated the pregnancy herself. The abortion nearly cost Madeleine her life; she writes, “When peritonitis set in he [the doctor] sent me to the hospital, and for the second time in a few weeks I heard from his lips the

¹⁰² Seagraves, *Soiled Doves*, 62.

¹⁰³ Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 67.

¹⁰⁴ Blair, *Madeleine*, 30.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰⁶ Seagraves, 62.

¹⁰⁷ Rutter, 68.

¹⁰⁸ Seagraves, 63.

words, “There is no hope.” She goes on to say, “Within two months I was sound and well physically, but the dark veil of sorrow which had settled down upon me shut out all the joys of life. I was twenty-two years old, and life seemed over for me,” emphasizing that the emotional toll of her ordeal was as great—if not greater than—the physical toll.¹⁰⁹

In addition to violence, disease, and unwanted pregnancy, working girls experienced a greater incidence of addiction, whether it be to drugs, alcohol, or gambling.¹¹⁰ In her lifetime, Madeleine struggled with both a gambling addiction and alcoholism. She writes, “I placed upon myself shackles which held my soul in bondage for many years.”¹¹¹ Both addictions were a direct result of the pressure she felt in her work, first as a working girl and then, later, as a madam of her own brothel.¹¹² This was not uncommon; many madams and working girls fell into substance abuse and gambling as a result of stress, depression, or simple bad luck.¹¹³

Clearly, sex work was extremely harmful to a vast majority of women who entered the business. The demand to satisfy male pleasure came at the expense of the lives of countless women. Whatever boundaries working girls may have crossed in making their sexualities public, physical subjugation kept these women firmly in place in their

¹⁰⁹ Blair, *Madeleine*, 70-71.

¹¹⁰ Murphy, “The Private Lives of Public Women,” 200.

¹¹¹ Blair, 83.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 101.

¹¹³ Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 17.

patriarchal society. Similarly, even those women who became financially successful from sex work did so in an industry that forced them to depend on and cater to men. Because of the nature of sex work, these women were working in an economy where they had to submit to men or risk losing their jobs; thus, even the wealthiest, most successful working girls were still ultimately economically dependent on men.

Madeleine, who was unusually successful and sheltered compared to many of her fellow working girls, describes the trauma that resulted from this forced economic dependence when she writes about a doctor's appointment, "His hands made me shudder, for I had grown very sensitive in the matter of hands. Whenever I had been forced to submit myself to customers I looked at the hands that were to touch my bare flesh before I looked at the face of the man who was buying the right to handle me at will."¹¹⁴ While some women were able to thrive in this system, most were not. Many women had little control over the money they earned, as it ended up in the pockets of brothel owners or pimps—this was especially the case for trafficked Chinese women.¹¹⁵

Additionally, men profited heavily from sex work. Male pimps could live off the earnings of the women they employed, who they often manipulated and abused.¹¹⁶ Chinese gangs—called tongs—played a large role in the trafficking of Chinese women, and the men in these gangs

¹¹⁴ Blair, *Madeleine*, 31.

¹¹⁵ Tong, *Unsubmissive Women*, 13, 104.

¹¹⁶ Seagraves, *Soiled Doves*, 57-58.

were typically the ones enjoying the financial success of their working girls.¹¹⁷ Even “respectable” men profited from sex work; sometimes wealthy businessmen would secretly do business with madams,¹¹⁸ and city officials made money from taxing and fining working girls.¹¹⁹ Corrupt city officials also made money from bribes; Madeleine recounts in her autobiography how she had to pay off both the municipal and mounted police in Canada when she opened her own brothel.¹²⁰ Michael Rutter summarizes, “Most lawmakers were publicly opposed to prostitution; it was political suicide not to be. Privately, however, not all the town fathers wanted it to disappear. The flesh trade was a boon to the economy because of the fines, taxes, and bribes.”¹²¹ Although the economic independence of individual women was subversive in a society where women were expected to be directly dependent on men, the personal economic freedom of wealthy working girls and madams was gained within an economic sphere that remained male-dominated, making even financially successful working women indirectly dependent on men for their money. This market structure ultimately did nothing to undermine the larger patriarchal structure in which women were kept dependent on men.

Furthermore, while men often profited from sex work, the financial success that women in the flesh trade

¹¹⁷ Tong, 10-13.

¹¹⁸ Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 13.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹²⁰ Blair, 96-97.

¹²¹ Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 79.

experienced—although an important achievement under the social conditions of the time—was an anomaly. Many madams, brothel owners, pimps, and tongs purposely kept women indebted so that they would not be able to save up money and leave the business.¹²² Madams and working girls alike often died in poverty.¹²³ One example can be found in the story of Calamity Jane; originally driven to become a crib girl out of desperation, Jane eventually became a celebrity.¹²⁴ However, even her fame could not guarantee her economic security; Rutter describes, “the money she made was quickly spent, and she didn’t have the ability to build a career on her legend. She found herself employed as a sporting woman, usually in low-end dives.”¹²⁵ While men could consistently profit from sex work, the women generating the profit had little economic security even if they managed to become celebrities. This pattern typically held true; oftentimes, both the sexuality and the money of working girls benefited men more than they helped the working girls themselves. And, while some western working girls managed to garner respect from their communities, the vast majority remained ostracized from the same communities that their work helped to support. No matter how wealthy or upscale a brothel was, the vice almost always remained segregated within towns to specific districts, clearly distinguished from polite society.

¹²² Seagraves, *Soiled Doves*, 25; Rutter, 45.

¹²³ Rutter, 58.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 160-168.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

Towns like Tascosa were abnormalities that had virtually disappeared by the beginning of the twentieth century.

When a woman became a working girl, she was not only scorned by her community; she often forfeited her chances at having a family. If a woman who entered the profession had family, they often disowned her. Pearl Starr was a wealthy, successful madam who ran an upscale parlor house and used her earnings to bail her brother out of jail when he fell on hard times. Even after her kindness, her brother refused to speak to her or acknowledge their relation because he was so ashamed of her work.¹²⁶ When Madeleine's family discovered that she had become a working girl to support them, she writes, "they cast me out of their lives, and none but my mother remembered that there had been another sister."¹²⁷ When working girls were shunned by their families, they rarely had the opportunity to start new ones. Although some working girls—particularly Chinese women—were able to find husbands, marriage was typically out of the question, especially under Victorian moral strictures.¹²⁸ Madeleine exemplifies this perspective when she writes of a man who proposed to her, knowing she was both pregnant and a working girl, "Surely it was not I who was mad; it was he, that he should be pleading for the privilege of marrying a woman of my kind, and be ready to fill the place of a father to a child who might even be the offspring of a man like the

¹²⁶ Ibid., 180.

¹²⁷ Blair, *Madeleine*, 61.

¹²⁸ Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 8.

'Beast.' That this man had lost his mind was quite evident to me. No sane man would do this thing."¹²⁹ Madeleine's insistence that a man must be out of his mind to want to marry a girl of "her kind"—a fallen woman, a soiled dove—exhibits how Victorian morality of the time led many to believe that once a woman had engaged in sexual sin, there was no turning back. Additionally, those working girls who had children were often unable to provide the care needed and had to give the child to relatives or other families.¹³⁰ Many working girls' children ended up in poor farms or orphanages.¹³¹ This isolation of working girls served to keep them subjugated—they might cross social boundaries and break down social barriers, but those actions could have little impact if they were shunned from wider society.

Working girls felt the burden of their ostracization. Some tried to prevent other girls from following in their footsteps. In 1898, Veronica Baldwin, a successful madam, turned away a girl who had come to her looking for work. Veronica pleaded with the girl to return to her home and family before sending her away to a "respectable dwelling." The girl was later brought to the police and sent back to her relatives.¹³² Veronica Baldwin's actions are not entirely surprising; many working girls and madams felt ashamed of their work. Wong Ah So, a Chinese girl who was tricked into sex work, tried to hide her situation from one of her father's

¹²⁹ Blair, 60.

¹³⁰ Murphy, "The Private Lives of Public Women," 197.

¹³¹ Seagraves, *Soiled Doves*, 116.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 46-47.

friends when he attempted to help her. She writes, “Under the circumstances, I refused to admit that I knew my own parents, for fear that I would disgrace them.”¹³³ Wong Ah So was afraid of bringing shame to her family or blame to her mother, even though she had been forced into sex work without any say in the matter. Madeleine also expresses guilt throughout her autobiography, both for her time as a working girl as well as her work as a madam. She writes about her time as a brothel owner, “It made me heartsick to feel that everything that I had ever touched had been corrupted by my touch.”¹³⁴

The result of this guilt and shame was that most working girls—even those who were wealthy, famous, or well-respected—did not want to be viewed publicly as fallen women. Calamity Jane concealed the fact of her sex work.¹³⁵ Julia Bulette once refused to sit in a theater box for fallen women and dressed like a “decent” woman in public throughout her life; she did not want people to be able to discern her line of work based on her appearance.¹³⁶ Madeleine took pride in the fact that those who were not aware of her profession were unable to recognize her “fallen” status; even at her lowest point, she writes, “I walked over and looked at my own face in the mirror, searching for the signs of vice and dissipation which should have been there.

¹³³ Wong Ah So, “Story of Wong Ah So—Experience as a Prostitute,” in Social Science Institute, *Oriental and Their Cultural Adjustment*, (Nashville: Fisk University, 1946), 32.

¹³⁴ Blair, *Madeleine*, 104.

¹³⁵ Rutter, *Upstairs Girls*, 166.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

My eyes looked very weary, and in repose my face was so inexpressibly sad that it was a subject of much comment, but it did not bear the scarlet brand."¹³⁷

As Madeleine's description shows, happiness eluded even those who were successful in sex work. Ella Wellington, a financially successful madam who ran a thriving business in Denver, left her husband to enter sex work and later regretted her decision. Upon hearing that her husband had remarried, she is reported to have said, "I'm so happy. Oh, so happy. I'll just blow out my God damn brains!" Immediately after her outburst, she went upstairs and shot herself.¹³⁸ Suicides like Ella Wellington's were unfortunately common among working girls and madams alike. Girls would often overdose on opiates or, if that didn't work, shoot themselves.¹³⁹ These negative feelings—guilt, shame, anguish—served to prevent working girls from significantly challenging social norms. Desperate, depressed women often struggled to find the will to live, much less to acknowledge or fight back against patriarchal strictures in any concerted effort.

The despair felt by so many working girls is palpable in the story of Wong Ah So. In recounting her experiences, she writes, "I can't help but cry."¹⁴⁰ When writing to her mother, she says, "Your daughter's condition is very tragic, even when she is sick she must practice prostitution (literally do

¹³⁷ Blair, 107.

¹³⁸ Rutter, 10.

¹³⁹ Seagraves, *Soiled Doves*, 58, 117-119.

¹⁴⁰ Wong Ah So, "Story of Wong Ah So—Experience as a Prostitute," 33.

business with her own flesh and skin.)”¹⁴¹ The girl goes on to express resentment, saying, “When I was at home, Mother, you looked down upon me as a daughter. Since daughter came to California by right she should forsake you.”¹⁴² Wong Ah So’s letter shows a startling recognition of the unfair condition of women; she criticizes her mother for looking down upon her daughter when she does not look down upon her son. However, she then goes on to write, “But in thinking it over, the greatest virtue in life is reverence to parents, so I am keeping a filial heart.”¹⁴³ Despite her awareness of the disparity between how men and women are treated in society, Wong Ah So accepts her fate without questioning the patriarchal norms that have contributed to her forced sex work. This failure to challenge the larger patriarchal structure which they lived within holds true for most—if not all—western working girls during the latter half of the nineteenth century. While they transgressed social boundaries and challenged gender norms of their time, the nature of sex work was such that it reinforced the dominance of men over women even when it called into question the ways in which that dominance had traditionally been exerted.

¹⁴¹ Wong Ah So, “Letter from Wong Ah So to her Mother Found in Suitcase After Arrest in Fresno, Feb. 7, 1924,” in Social Science Institutes, *Orientalism and Their Cultural Adjustment*, (Nashville: Fisk University, 1946), 34.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

This is not to say, of course, that it was the responsibility of working girls to interrogate the patriarchy. Rather, it is an attempt to reconcile two historiographical narratives that have been placed in tension. Working girls were not merely hapless victims of the patriarchy that they lived under; in many ways, they pushed back against their victimization. Neither is it true that all working girls were somehow empowered or posed significant challenges to the patriarchy. Instead, we must acknowledge both the ways that these women pushed back against specific patriarchal norms even while they were simultaneously victimized by a larger patriarchal structure that they did little to challenge. Susan Armitage insists that when writing about western women, "Whatever our final opinion of their lives, we must start with their own self-explanations."¹⁴⁴ Working girls were by no means a homogenous group; their self-explanations were varied. Some insight, however, can be gained from the words of Madeleine Blair, who writes, "Few women, indeed, love the life, but many love the ease and luxury, the power over men, the idleness and freedom from responsibility, which they enjoy...But there are thousands of women who hate the life with such bitter loathing that nothing money procures can compensate them for their suffering. They are the ones who strive to prove to themselves that a woman with a past is not

¹⁴⁴ Susan Armitage, "Through Women's Eyes: A New View of the West," in *The Women's West*, ed. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 14.

a woman without a future.”¹⁴⁵ Any historical account of sex work must take into account both these women as well as all those who fall in between, and those accounts must give credit to their defiance of social norms as well as blame to the larger patriarchal society under which they were subjugated.

¹⁴⁵ Blair, *Madeleine*, 114.

Democracy at War: The US Government's Fight Against Anti-War Dissent

Nicholas Langford

“Must I shoot a simple-minded soldier boy who deserts, while I must not touch a hair of a wiley agitator who induces him to desert? This is none the less injurious when effected by getting a father, or brother, or friend, into a public meeting, and there working upon his feelings, till he is persuaded to write the soldier boy, that he is fighting in a bad cause...”

Abraham Lincoln, 1863

“The working class has never yet had a voice in declaring war. If war is right, let it be declared by the people – you, who have your lives to lose.”

Eugene Debs, 1918

When Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to declare war against Germany in 1917, he proclaimed that America's

role in the Great War was to ensure that “the world must be made safe for democracy.”¹ The United States then faced the enormous task of mobilizing an expeditionary force and supplying them with munitions, food, and other resources to win the war. Because of America’s prior stance of neutrality, few steps were taken to enact initiatives to prepare the economy and military for emergency action. Throughout the early years of the war, neutrality was extremely popular in America and was one of the foremost reasons why Wilson was reelected. While the Federal Government frantically tried to mobilize the armed forces, public opinion was steeply divided on entering the war. Particularly, the United States entrance into World War I put the country’s largest immigrant group into a peculiar situation. German-Americans were naturally skeptical of the United States’ war aims and found it difficult to rally behind potential destruction to their native land. Throughout the war, German-Americans, Socialists, Pacifists, and other opponents were seen as a threat to the success of the war effort. Thus, Wilson believed that in addition to mobilizing material resources for warfare, the federal government would also have to take domestic measures to control the public. Immediately, the American government instituted a number of policies and organizations to increase patriotism and help garner public support for the war effort. These policies and organizations greatly restricted the freedom of expression

¹ Woodrow Wilson, “Wilson’s War Message to Congress,” (speech, April 2, 1917) https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Wilson's_War_Message_to_Congress

and imprisoned hundreds under the guise of patriotism, marking one of the most repressive eras in American history.

I argue that the United States government responded to anti-war dissent with laws that significantly limited the freedom of expression and violated fundamental American Constitutional values. Even before the United States entered the war, President Wilson took a strong stance against any form of disloyalty and urged Congress to enact laws that punished such acts. Expansive readings of the Espionage and Sedition Acts by the Department of Justice, Postmaster General, and President silenced socialists, pacifists, German-Americans, and others deemed injurious to the United States war effort. When faced with the task of adjudicating over the constitutionality of the wartime legislation, the Supreme Court and multiple lower courts supported the Federal Government's measures, further limiting the scope of free speech. Disloyalty was not measured in terms of sympathy for the enemy; instead, it was termed to mark anyone not fully committed to the American war effort. What was meant to be a conflict fought abroad turned into a civil war between the federal government and anti-war dissenters. The war to make the world safe for democracy abroad restricted the freedom of expression for American citizens.

Fear of the American Hun, Pre-1917

As a nation founded by immigrants, the United States had a sizable German population. At the outbreak of war, foreign-born Germans constituted the largest foreign

nationality in the United States. The 1910 census reported over two and a half million foreign-born Germans living in the United States.² In reality, the number of people of German ancestry far exceeded this figure, as children of German parents born in the United States were considered American citizens. A closer estimate to the actual "German" population exceeded well over two and a half million, meaning about nine percent of the American population either was born in Germany or had German parentage. Germans did not fit into a homogenous group.³ With German unification only forty years prior, a multitude of people from varying ethnic blocs had differing views of German patriotism and loyalty. To the United States government, however, this did not make a difference. Those of German ancestry were viewed as potential enemies of the state.

Tensions between the United States and Germany at the turn of the century were somewhat questionable. America saw Germany as a threat to U.S. industry and power. In 1913, America was behind Germany in world trade.⁴ Additionally, the Kaiser's militaristic policies and attitudes were not well received by the United States. This was most evident when tensions between the US and Germany flared in the

² U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1913), 781.

³ Katja Wüstenbecker, "German-Americans During World War I" In *Immigrant Entrepreneurship: German-American Business Biographies, 1720 to the Present*, vol. 3, edited by Giles R. Hoyt. German Historical Institute.

⁴ David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 298.

Philippines in 1898 after the Spanish-American War. The United States particularly wanted to annex the territory of the Philippines as a preventative measure against Japanese or German colonial expansion. Both the United States and German government were well aware of the growing animosity between the two nations. As a measure to enhance Germany's reputation in the United States, the Kaiser sent his brother Heinrich to America on a "goodwill tour."⁵

The events that transpired in Europe during the summer of 1914 paved the way for the government's crusade against anti-war dissent. The outbreak of war greatly divided Americans, with support for the Allied and Central Powers falling largely along ethnic lines.⁶ Americans of English descent tended to favor the Allied powers, while Americans of German descent and foreign-born Germans seemed sympathetic to the cause of the Central Powers and suspicious of the Allies' war motives. Although Wilson firmly proclaimed neutrality, the United States was partial to the Allies. The government helped the warring nations with munitions, but the Allied powers were the sole beneficiaries of U.S. neutrality: Because of an Allied naval blockade, the Central powers were left without resources from the West. Some German-American and pacifist groups argued that if America wanted to remain truly neutral, they would cut off

⁵ Wüstenbecker, "German-Americans During World War I."

⁶ William H. Thomas, *Unsafe for Democracy: World War I and the U.S. Justice Department's Covert Campaign to Suppress Dissent* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 16.

supplies of *all* munitions to the belligerent nations.⁷ As tensions were rising, Americans of English descent were wary of the support of German-Americans for their native country. A 1915 *New York Times* article warned, "Never since the foundation of the Republic has any body of men assembled here who were more completely subservient to a foreign Power and to foreign influence, and none ever proclaimed the un-American spirit more openly."⁸ Thus, although the Federal Government proclaimed neutrality, factions were beginning to divide public opinion that foreshadowed later irreconcilable differences that would be made apparent once the United States entered the war.

Numerous acts of espionage and conspiracy committed by Germans and German-Americans during the early years of the Great War furthered distrust among Americans. In the 1917 *Annual Report of the Attorney General*, Attorney General Thomas Gregory cited thirty-one pertinent criminal cases connected to conspiracy against the Allied powers. The alleged conspirators were mainly Germans, German-Americans, or radicals opposed to U.S. corporations profiting from war. One case in 1915 involved Franz Rintelen, a German naval officer living in the United States. Rintelen was charged alongside his American accomplices for plotting to tie up munitions by promoting strikes in factories.⁹ In another, a German sympathizer was imprisoned for eighteen

⁷ Wüstenbecker, "German-Americans During World War I."

⁸ *New York Times* (1915) in *Unsafe for Democracy*, 17.

⁹ Department of Justice, *Annual Report of the Attorney General of the United States*, by Thomas Watt Gregory, Washington D.C. 1917, 50.

months after detonating dynamite on a railroad bridge that linked Canada and Maine. Most other cases involved obstructing the creation or transportation of munitions for the Allied forces. These counts of conspiracy by German sympathizers heightened American nativist anxieties of their neighbors of German descent and set the foundation for later political rhetoric.¹⁰ Once the Germans sunk the British passenger liner *Lusitania*, where over 120 Americans were killed, American sentiments towards the Germans reached an all-time low. This event resonated strongly with U.S. citizens, as it was countless depicted in American Navy recruitment posters. In one of them, American sailors are illustrated saving scores of young women and children from *Lusitania* lifeboats.¹¹ These events ultimately marked the turning point for Americans from indifference to fear of the Kaiser and alleged German infiltrators.

In 1917, a number of German transgressions pushed the Wilson administration from neutrality to war. In January, Germany announced that it would practice unrestricted submarine warfare: Any American ship near the United Kingdom would be considered fair game for German submarines. Around the same time, the British intercepted a telegram from German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann to the German Minister of Mexico proposing an alliance between the two countries: “[Germany and Mexico

¹⁰ Thomas, *Unsafe for Democracy*, 19.

¹¹ W. A. Rogers, artist, “When You Fire Remember This – Enlist in the Navy,” United States, 1917. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2002722432/>.

will] make war together, make peace together,” and there would be “generous financial support and understanding on our [Germany’s] part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.”¹² Following the telegram and the declaration of unrestricted warfare, German U-Boats sunk multiple American cargo ships. War was imminent. On April 2, 1917, Wilson appeared before Congress to ask for a declaration of war against Germany.

A Call to Arms

Wilson’s war declaration address to Congress illustrated the United States war aims. But by doing so, Wilson also created a sharp dichotomy between steadfast patriotism and “disloyalty” that would remain prevalent even after armistice.¹³ Wilson argued that America’s position of neutrality became “impracticable.”¹⁴ From the start of his address, Wilson clearly asserted that the United States was not entering war for any material gains, but rather for the “vindication of right, of human right, of which we [the United

¹² Telegram from United States Ambassador Walter Page to President Woodrow Wilson Conveying a Translation of the Zimmermann Telegram; 2/24/1917; 862.20212 / 57 through 862.20212 / 311; Central Decimal Files, 1910 - 1963; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. [Online Version, <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/translation-zimmermann-telegram>, December 2, 2019]

¹³ For Wilson and Gregory, disloyalty was a blanket term used to define anyone who did not adamantly support the war effort. Pacifists were deemed as injurious to the American cause as German-American conspirators.

¹⁴ Wilson, “Wilson’s War Message to Congress.”

States] are only a single champion.”¹⁵ Wilson believed the German populace was victim to the Kaiser and his militaristic empire. Indeed, another one of Wilson’s war aims was to help “liberate” the Germans and ultimately secure their right “to choose their way of life and of obedience.” The speech was a tale of two halves. The first contained lofty, spirited language that juxtaposed America’s democracy against the Kaiser antiquated imperial government; Wilson saw America as a guarantor of rights and a democratic force to make the world “safe for democracy.” However, during the latter part, Wilson forewarned against acts of disloyalty by German-Americans: “If there should be disloyalty, it will be dealt with a firm hand of stern repression.” The irony of Wilson’s focus on democratic war aims becomes glaringly apparent when the government starts restricting civil liberties of its own citizens. In addition to the inherent irony, Wilson’s focus on democratic war aims should not be understated. By declaring democracy as the foremost war aim, Wilson implied that anyone not supporting the war effort was therefore un-democratic – or, more commonly, un-American and a potential saboteur. There was no middle ground.

Two days after Wilson appeared before a joint session of Congress to ask for a declaration of war against Germany, both houses of congress voted overwhelmingly in favor of war.¹⁶ However, it was unclear whether the populace

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The Senate voted 82 to 6; the House voted 373 to 50

supported the President and Congress.¹⁷ Some districts in the Midwest – with abundant German populations – held referendums that heavily favored non-intervention.¹⁸ Such areas with high concentrations of German-Americans fell victim to a disproportionate number of prosecutions under the later Espionage and Sedition Acts to larger and more densely populated coastal cities.

Although the war declaration passed sweepingly in both the House and Senate, the congressional vote over conscription – after only 97,000 men volunteered to enlist – was much closer and contested. In the House, the Selective Service Act of 1917 passed by a twenty-one-vote margin with fifty-two congressmen abstaining. These numbers expose a deep divide over America's role in the Great War. Some saw the U.S. as a supplier to the Allied powers for money, arms, and munitions, and greatly opposed sending an expeditionary force to Europe. Some who favored sending an expeditionary force questioned whether the Army should solely consist of volunteers. The passing of the Selective Service Act allowed the United States to raise an army through conscription; all males between the ages of 21 to 30 (later raised to 18 to 45) were required to register for the draft lottery. Wilson argued that the Selective Service Act was not “a conscription of the unwilling,” but rather, a “selection from

¹⁷ Thomas, 21.

¹⁸ Thomas, 21. For example, in Monroe, Wisconsin, a referendum found that its citizens voted against the war 954-95.

a nation which has volunteered its masses.”¹⁹ The success of the Selective Service Act is unclear. By the end of the war, over 2 million men volunteered, while 2.8 million men had been drafted. However, close to a third of a million men dodged the draft. Moreover, around 60% of draftees requested exemptions, which further suggests the unpopularity of the Selective Service Act and the eagerness of men to fight abroad.²⁰ From the beginning, America’s role in the Great War was unclear and remained a contentious issue for the duration of the war, which ultimately led to the government taking measures against those who opposed wartime statutes.

The overarching themes of Wilson’s speech to Congress in 1917 echoed his 1915 State of the Union Address when he described war in relation to democratic governments: “Great democracies are not belligerent. They do not seek or desire war... We regard war merely as a means of asserting the rights of a people against aggression.” Two years before the United States entered the Great War, Wilson believed that it was the “providential” duty of his country to play an “impartial role” as a guarantor of rights for the world. The address also took a firm stance against disloyalty. Wilson pleaded with Congress to enact federal measures that would “crush out” certain immigrants and other “creatures of passion, disloyalty, and anarchy” that have made the United

¹⁹ Wilson, “Message Regarding Military Draft” (speech, May 19, 1917), <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/may-19-1917-message-regarding-military-draft>

²⁰ Robert Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America*, (Champaign: The University of Illinois Press, 2001), 107.

States a “hotbed of European passion.”²¹ Wilson’s congressional addresses help shed light on the intent behind subsequent wartime statutes that restricted civil liberties. Simply, his desire for federal legislation that would punish disloyalty with a “firm hand of stern repression” was consistent with his aspirations for domestic policy years earlier.

Curbing Dissent: The APL, CPI, and Espionage and Sedition Acts

Two months after the United States declared war on Germany, Congress passed the Espionage Act of 1917. Briefly, the Espionage Act protected against any interference with the United States war effort. After the numerous counts of conspiracy and sabotage by German-Americans, it was not unreasonable for Congress to pass legislation that criminalized legitimate acts of sabotage. The passage of the Act fit within the broader themes of the Progressive Era. The innovations at the turn of the century led to an enhancement of the power of the federal government and marked the first age of a general-welfare state.²² The rise of industrialism brought along economic inequality and ubiquitous social troubles that plagued overcrowded urban cities. When

²¹ Wilson, “State of the Union,” (speech, Washington D.C., December 7, 1915), <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/woodrow-wilson/state-of-the-union-1915.php>

²² Michael Les Benedict, *The Blessings of Liberty: A Concise History of the Constitution of the United States*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016) 249.

citizens turned to the federal government for help, both Theodore Roosevelt and Wilson urged Congress to pass legislation that would control monopolies and improve working conditions. By the start of the Great War, the themes of the Progressive Era and broad national regulatory powers were commonplace in the United States.

During this time period, the United States also noticed a revolution in how wars were fought. Although the battles of the Great War were fought across the Atlantic, the general attitude placed great importance on the mobilization of societies on the home front. With the importance of industrialism in maintaining a warring nation, wars could be won or lost on the home front as easily as they could in the trenches. Writing in 1919, prominent legal scholar Zechariah Chaffee noted that the war statutes were emblematic of the attitudes of modern warfare:

Wars are no longer won by armies in the field, but by the morale of the whole people. The widespread Liberty Bond campaigns, and the ship-yards, munitions factories, government offices, training camps, in all parts of the country, are felt to make the entire United States theater of war, in which attacks upon our cause are as dangerous and unjustified as if made among the soldiers in the rear trenches.²³

The language in the Act itself is densely legalistic. Although brief in length, the Act scrupulously details

²³ Zechariah Chaffee, "Freedom of Speech in Wartime," *Harvard Law Review* 32, no.8 (1919): 937.

industries that were intimately tied to the national defense. For example, Section One, Subsection A, describes these industries of defense: everything from coaling stations and telegraph systems to vessels and military office buildings. Section Six allowed the President to expand the extent of what was deemed an industry “prejudicial to the national defense.”²⁴ For example, the YMCA and Red Cross were later added to the list of organizations off limits from public debate.

Section One directly targeted factory workers and other laborers connected to the war effort. Factory workers from parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, including laborers from Bohemia, Moravia, Croatia, and Slovenia, terrified politicians who believed that they would potentially rebel if they found out they were supplying weapons to kill their relatives.²⁵ Though broad, the entirety of Section One was seen as largely uncontroversial given the government’s task of mobilizing a nation for battle. As industry and modern warfare became more intimately connected, factory workers were instrumental in supplying the Allied forces with ammunition, weaponry, and other supplies. An absence of laws that punished an obstruction of these industries could risk the lives of soldiers abroad. Some newspapers even suggested that the foreign-born factory workers might instigate a clandestine insurgency, “Could a system of

²⁴ *Espionage Act of 1917*, Act of October 6, 1917, ch. 106, §10(i), 40 Stat. 422, codified at 18 U.S.C. §§ 793-98

²⁵ Thomas, 18.

sabotage, directed by aliens, be established under which imperfect and undependable products might be served to our fighting forces?"²⁶ In this case the workers would be sabotaging the quality of the product instead of outright refusing to work. Thus, Section One of the Act was prudent to quell the general fears of the populace after numerous counts of sabotage by opponents of the war.

Section Three of the Act, however, became controversial after the Federal Government applied this provision to silence pacifists, socialists, and others apprehensive to the war effort:

Whoever, when the United States is at war, shall willfully make or convey false reports or false statements with intent to interfere with the operation or success of the military or naval forces of the United States or to promote the success of its enemies and whoever when the United States is at war, shall willfully cause or attempt to cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny, refusal of duty, in the military or naval forces of the United States, or shall willfully obstruct the recruiting or enlistment service of the United States, to the injury of the service or of the United States, shall be punished by a fine of not more than \$10,000 or imprisonment for not more than twenty years, or both.

Section Three can be broken into three clauses: 1) willfully make or convey false reports or statements with intent to interfere with the armed forces; 2) willfully cause or attempt to cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny, refusal of duty in the armed forces; 3) willfully obstruct the recruiting

²⁶ Ibid.

or enlistment service of the United States, to the harm of the United States or draft effort. Because of the unpopularity of the draft, the third clause became the foremost tool of the federal government to target opponents of the war. For example, Eugene Debs, leader of the American Socialist Party, was arrested and convicted under the third clause after making a speech in Ohio that urged citizens to question the draft. The Espionage Act also set out harsh punishments for anti-war dissenters, including up to twenty years of imprisonment. England, in comparison, rarely imprisoned anti-war dissenters for more than a few months.²⁷

It is important to note that from a purely textualist reading of the Act, there is nothing overtly unconstitutional. Chaffee even considered the statutory language in the Espionage Act lawful: "... there is not a word in the 1917 Espionage Act to show that Congress... made any speech criminal except false statements and incitement to overt acts."²⁸ Highlighting how the word "willfully" was paired with "attempt," "obstruct," and "cause," Chaffee argued that the Act was intended to apply only to actions that warranted express causation.²⁹ In other words, the repressive measures that followed the passage of the Act were from misinterpretations by the federal government. Instead of starting with bad premises and then using good logic to produce a bad conclusion, the Department of Justice started

²⁷ Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America*, 107.

²⁸ Chaffee, "Freedom of Speech in Wartime," 963.

²⁹ Chaffee, 964.

with sound premises from the Espionage Act, but then used bad logic to produce flawed results. In fact, many viewed the act as a moderate compromise. Gregory was unhappy that Congress worded the third clause to only criminalize actions that “willfully obstruct,” instead of criminalizing any “*attempt* to obstruct the recruiting and enlistment services.”³⁰ However, subsequent interpretation of Section Three turned a moderate law aimed at curbing espionage into an extreme statute that became the backbone of the government’s crusade against anti-war dissenters.

Title Twelve of the Espionage Act infamously allowed the Postmaster General to withdraw mail that violated provisions of the act or any mail “advocating or urging treason, insurrection or resistance to any law of the U.S.” This provision made it nearly impossible for anti-war dissenters to receive correspondence from other dissenters during the war. The Postmaster General, Albert Sidney Burleson, was one of the most overzealous members in Wilson’s administration.³¹ Even before the Act was passed, Burleson had begun to exclude journals and newspapers that “impugned the motives of the government and thus encourage insubordination.”³² Many of these contraband journals were from socialist publications. One prominent socialist, Norman Thomas, noted that Burleson could not distinguish socialism

³⁰ Department of Justice, *Annual Report of the Attorney General of the United States*, by Thomas Watt Gregory, Washington D.C. 1918, 18.

³¹ David Kennedy, *Over Here*, 75.

³² *Ibid.*, 76.

from rheumatism.³³ Burleson responded that he would not have to prohibit the circulation of socialist publications if they did not contain treasonable ideas; however, he also noted “the trouble is that most Socialist papers do contain such matter.”³⁴ With the help of Attorney General Gregory, who also believed in a broad application of the Act, Burleson’s censoring of writers critical of the government was rampant. Wilson had few objections to Burleson and Gregory’s fanatical silencing. Indeed, before the passage of the Espionage Act, Wilson pleaded with Congress to include a provision that would grant him power to directly censor the press. As Attorney General, Gregory became a prominent figure against anti-war dissenters and was later coined Wilson’s “chief spear-carrier.” Speaking in November 1917, Gregory proclaimed, “May God have mercy on them [opponents of the war], for they need expect none from an outraged people and an avenging government.”³⁵ For perceived opponents of the war, 1917 was just the tip of the iceberg; an amendment to the Espionage Act would eventually lay the legal backbone that would prosecute and imprison thousands for virtually any comment deemed injurious to the war effort.

Commonly known as the Sedition Act of 1918, the Act amended Section Three of the original Espionage Act to include a broader list of prohibited actions. Among other things, the Sedition Act most significantly made it a crime to

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Goldstein, 108.

“willfully utter, print, write or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government of the United States or the Constitution of the United States, or the military or naval forces of the United States, or the flag of the United States, or the uniform of the Army or Navy of the United States.”³⁶ Other important provisions included criminalizing any attempt to urge the “curtailment of production of anything necessary” to the war effort and “opposing the cause of the United States.”³⁷ Punishments for these acts resulted in a fine of no more than \$10,000 and/or no more than twenty years in prison. In comparison to the punishments levied to conspirators before the United States entered war – like the German who tried to blow up a Canadian bridge and was only sentenced to 18 months – these punishments were drastically harsher for seemingly non-violent crimes. Unlike the language in the original Espionage Act, the language in the Sedition Act seems overtly unconstitutional and violates the language in the First Amendment, which holds that “Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.” The Supreme Court would later adjudicate on the constitutionality of the Act, but until then, state and federal courts were instructed by the Attorney General to interpret the Act broadly.³⁸ In fact, Gregory infamously condemned a

³⁶ *Sedition Act of 1918*, United States, Statutes at Large, Washington, D.C., 1918, Vol. XL, pp 553 ff.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Gregory, *Annual Report of the Attorney General 1918*, 21.

judge that acquitted a man who called Wilson a “Wall Street tool.”³⁹

The amendment to the Espionage Act greatly enhanced the power of state and district courts to prosecute even the most ludicrous counts of injurious rhetoric. In *United States v. Nagler*, a Wisconsin District Court found Louis Nagler guilty under Section Three of the Espionage Act for calling the Red Cross and YMCA “a bunch of grafters.”⁴⁰ Since both the Red Cross and YMCA were protected as part of the “military or naval forces of the United States” under the Act, the judges believed that Nagler’s name-calling was an act of spreading false reports designed to interfere with the success of its operations. Another case sentenced a movie producer to ten years in prison for the production of a movie about the American Revolution. Although the film glorified American efforts, the government reasoned that it was too anti-Britain and might undermine support for the Allied cause. Federal district judges had sweeping authority to interpret the Espionage Act, and head of the newly formed War Emergency Division, John Lord O’Brian, applauded judges who “vigorously” prosecuted dissenters on their own volition without the prompting of the Department of Justice.⁴¹ During these tumultuous times, O’Brian noted that every U.S. judge became “an angel of life and death clothed with the power to walk up and down in his district, saying ‘This one I

³⁹ Kennedy, *Over Here*, 76.

⁴⁰ *United States v. Nagler*, 252 F. 217 (1918)

⁴¹ John Lord O’Brian in Chafee, “Freedom of Speech in Wartime,” 67.

will spare, and this one will I smite.”⁴² The Sedition Act gave the federal government the power it needed to legally prosecute opponents of war. Combined with lower state courts upholding these prosecutions, these two forces created a repressive force unseen since the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798.

In the Attorney General’s Annual Report, Gregory detailed how lower courts should interpret these wartime statutes, while also highlighting the success of the laws. Gregory framed the amending of the Espionage Act as a response to public approval.⁴³ Although the original Act was successful against “disloyal organized propaganda,” Gregory suggested the Act did little to punish the frequent individual disloyal utterances that agitated communities across the country.⁴⁴ In Gregory’s eyes, the government responded to popular demand by broadening the scope of the Espionage Act to include individual utterances. The Attorney General made it clear that Congress intended this statute to be a “weapon against propaganda,” and the Department of Justice would execute the law in this manner.⁴⁵ In the eyes of the Federal Government, there was no room for political dissent, even if the speaker had “good motivations” and for “justifiable ends.” If the government were to exclude dissent made with good intentions, then Gregory believed that it

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Gregory, *Annual Report of the Attorney General 1918*, 18.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

would virtually destroy the teeth of the newly amended Act.

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Ironically, the Department of Justice's commitment to prosecuting private expressions ultimately helped spread the alleged treasonable ideas. For any person arrested and tried for unpatriotic utterances, local and national newspapers covered their trials and quoted the alleged disloyal speech. In effect, the government *helped* disseminate and make public – what would have been otherwise private remarks – supposedly harmful statements for the whole nation to see. The sheer number of indictments, convictions, and imprisonments under the Espionage and Sedition laws indicate the sweeping extent of their usage. Over two thousand people were indicted under the laws, mainly for individual remarks rather than organized anti-war behavior. The widespread prosecuting continued, and it was not until the final days of war that the judges had to get confirmation from the Attorney General to prosecute an alleged offender.⁴⁷ Over half of those indicted were convicted, and more than one hundred people were sentenced to jail for ten years or more. However, there was not a single instance of a person being convicted for legitimate spy activities.⁴⁸ To summarize, the federal government and local courts turned the ostensibly “moderate” Espionage Act into a weapon of repression. The addition of the Sedition Act fueled the fire of the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Kennedy, 83.

⁴⁸ Goldstein, 113.

government's crusade and virtually punished any count of speech deemed disloyal or injurious to the war movement, which was prosecuted liberally.

In addition to enacting wartime statutes, the government established two different organizations aimed to manage public attitudes and silence dissent: The Committee on Public Information and the American Protective League. Although the organizations differed in terms of their methods, they both promoted the war effort while harassing their opponents. In an attempt to intensify patriotism within the public, Wilson created the CPI. Progressive reformer George Creel directed the organization, and Wilson instructed him to create a propaganda campaign that would increase public support for the war. The CPI famously had thousands of "four-minute men" give short, four-minute long speeches in theaters, fraternal lodges, labor unions, and other public areas across the United States, encouraging the public to support the war effort.⁴⁹ In comparison to the Espionage and Sedition Acts the CPI was not repressive in the sense of outright arresting dissenters. However, their campaign efforts combined patriotism and censorship, and – through widespread advertisements – urged the public to take agency in reporting and catching anti-war dissenters.

In addition to promoting the draft and Red Cross, the CPI also released advertisements in newspapers that warned Americans of German spies. In one issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* in August 1918, an advertisement titled "Spies

⁴⁹ Thomas, 22.

and Lies” encouraged citizens to be proactive against supposed German agents and spies in America: “Do not wait until you catch someone putting a bomb under a factory. Report the man who spreads pessimistic stories, divulges – or seeks – confidential military information, cries for peace or battles our efforts to win the war.”⁵⁰ The advertisement also equated a civilian’s encounter with the “domestic Hun” to a soldier’s experience on the Western Front: “You are in contact with the enemy *today*, just as truly as if you faced him across No Man’s Land. In your hands are two powerful weapons with which to meet him – discretion and vigilance. *Use Them.*” These advertisements increased the nativist hysteria and further sharpened the dichotomy between patriotism and everything else.

The impact of the CPI and its Four-Minute Men on the public were tremendous. Creel believed that his 75,000 amateur orators delivered over 7.5 million speeches to over 300 million people.⁵¹ It is difficult to square Creel’s gargantuan figure with the census that listed the total population of the United States at barely over 100 million people. However, one journalist noted, “it became difficult for half a dozen persons to come together without having a Four Minute Man descend upon them.”⁵² Thus, the magnitude of

⁵⁰ Thomas, 23.

⁵¹ Lisa Mastrangelo, “World War I, Public Intellectuals, and the Four Minute Men: Convergent Ideals of Public Speaking and Civic Participation,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 12, no.4 (2009): 610.

⁵² *Ibid.*

the CPI should not be understated. Although it is unclear whether the efforts of the CPI had a genuine effect on people, their efforts to encourage average citizens to report dissenters were a direct reflection of the federal government's domestic policies.

The most extreme example of government-endorsed vigilantism was the formation of the American Protective League (APL) in 1917. Over 250,000 volunteers from 600 cities helped the "overworked" Department of Justice. The APL identified disloyal citizens, German sympathizers, and thwarted the activities of socialist groups and other groups they deemed radical. Although the organization was technically private, it worked under the endorsement of the Department of Justice and the Bureau of Investigation (present-day FBI). The activities of the APL ranged from overt "slacker raids" to infiltrating socialist organizations and covert operations around local neighborhoods. "Slacker raids" were large-scale roundups of alleged draft dodgers. The most infamous slacker raid took place over a three-day period in New York City, where 75,000 alleged draft dodgers were arrested and questioned. In a letter to the President, Gregory justified the APL's participation in slacker raids and called the raids absolutely necessary, reasoning that without the APL, "Who would do the work?"⁵³ Statements like these indicate why many historians have coined the APL as "officially blessed vigilantism" by the federal government.⁵⁴

⁵³ "Slacker Raids," *New York Times*, September 13, 1918.

⁵⁴ Kennedy, 83.

The APL harassed and bullied opponents of war with the endorsement of the federal government, without the government having to take direct responsibility for the consequences of their extra-legal efforts. In the Attorney General's Annual Report, Gregory boasted, "It is safe to say that never in its history has this country been so thoroughly policed as at this present time," which was thanks to the "invaluable" effort of the APL.⁵⁵ While the CPI encouraged patriotism, the APL enforced it through raids, harassment, undercover operations, and bullying. The APL, in particular, was unprecedented in terms of scope – never before had the federal government collaborated with private individuals across the country to spy and harass alleged opponents.

The Endorsement of the Supreme Court

The question of the constitutionality of the war statutes finally reached the Supreme Court in 1919, well after thousands were indicted. Although the Supreme Court listened to these cases after World War I, they remain instrumental in assessing whether the repressive measures by the federal government were deemed constitutional by America's highest court. *Schneck v. United States* (1919) was the first case to address the Espionage Act. Additionally, it was also one of the first times the Supreme Court ever adjudicated over an issue with the First Amendment. Socialists Charles Schenck and Elizabeth Baer were charged with distributing leaflets that equated the Conscription Act to

⁵⁵ Gregory, *Annual Report of the Attorney General 1918*, 15.

slavery, arguing that the draft violated the Thirteenth Amendment. The leaflet called for peaceful measures of opposition through a petition to repeal the act. Nonetheless, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes upheld the conviction and reasoned that because the leaflet was created in the first place, the document *must* have had an intended effect, which was to persuade people to obstruct the draft.⁵⁶ Speaking on the Constitutionality of the Act, Holmes argued that the Court placed a greater deference to Congress during wartime, even at the expense of civil liberties:

When a nation is at war many things that might be said in time of peace are such a hindrance to its effort that their utterance will not be endured so long as men fight and that no Court could regard them as protected by any constitutional right.

Holmes created the famous “Clear and Present Danger” test and believed that the First Amendment did not protect speech that could bring about the substantive evils that Congress “has the right to prevent.”⁵⁷

However, Holmes’s suggestion that Congress’ powers increased during times of crisis at the expense of civil liberties contradicted statements of the Department of Justice. Both Gregory and O’Brian frequently articulated how the freedom of expression was to be protected without regard to the war: “[the] department throughout the war has proceeded upon the general principle that the constitutional right of free

⁵⁶ *Schenck v. United States*, 249 U.S. 47 (1919)

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

speech, free assembly, and petition exist in war time as in peace time, and that the right of discussion of governmental policy and the right of political agitation are most fundamental rights in a democracy.”⁵⁸ In other words, to the Department of Justice, there was no such thing as a wartime Constitution. Although Holmes believed the clear and present danger test was a more stringent protection of speech than the traditional Bad Tendency Test, Holmes’s opinion in *Schenk* seemed to endorse the Bad Tendency rule.⁵⁹ For lower courts, the ruling essentially said that the government could pass legislation to ban acts of expression that *tended* to incite illegal activity or damage society. The Supreme Court’s landmark decision in *Schenck* ultimately solidified the legality of the Espionage Act, broadened the regulatory powers of Congress during wartime, and became the sole precedent in adjudicating further cases over the wartime statutes.

In *Debs v. United States* (1919), the Supreme Court upheld the conviction under the Espionage Act of prominent socialist Eugene Debs. Debs was arrested shortly after speaking before a large crowd in Canton, Ohio, where he delivered an anti-war speech. Although the speech generally talked about the state of socialism in connection to the war, Debs lauded those who publicly questioned America’s war aims, like Rose Pastor Stokes. Pastor Stokes was imprisoned after being convicted under the Espionage Act for anti-war

⁵⁸ John Lord O’Brian in Chafee, “Freedom of Speech in Wartime,” 67.

⁵⁹ The Bad Tendency Test punished actions that *tended* to encourage or incite criminal activity; there was no need for a direct causal link.

views. Debs declared her a martyr and said that he was just as guilty as her for expressing his beliefs. The Court specifically took issue when Debs urged listeners to join the Socialist party. Debs said, "You need at this time especially to know that you are fit for something better than slavery and cannon fodder." The Court connected this statement to Debs's previous utterances – which were deemed injurious to the war effort – and finding Debs's statements analogous to the leaflets distributed in *Schenk*, upheld his conviction and punishment of ten years in prison.

In *Abrams v. United States* (1919), the Supreme Court ruled that the added Sedition laws to the Espionage Act were constitutional and did not violate the Freedom of Speech. The defendants in *Abrams* were Russian immigrants who opposed a US military operation against Germany on Russian soil after the Bolshevik Revolution. The defendants released two pamphlets expressing their discontent – one denounced the government for sending troops to Russia, the other called for a strike against weapons that would be used to "murder" Russians. Citing *Schenk* as precedent, the Court ruled that the convictions satisfied the "clear and present danger" test and posed a danger to the war effort. Even though the defendants were only calling for a strike against ammunition and weapons used against Soviet Russia, the Court believed that any strike would hurt the American war effort against Germany. The Court resorted to a Bad Tendency interpretation of the "clear and present danger" test. Even though there was no chance of a general strike, the Court

reasoned that this tendency was enough to uphold their conviction. The ruling in *Abrams* essentially hammered the nails into the coffin for every person convicted under the Sedition Act. The upholding of convictions of anti-war dissenters was evidence that the Supreme Court had little interest in protecting citizens' rights of expression.

Although Justice Holmes wrote the majority opinion in both *Schenk* and *Debs* and created the "clear and present danger" test, he dissented in *Abrams*. Holmes argued that the leaflets posed no clear and present danger. In hoping to heighten judicial scrutiny for the test he constructed, he reasoned that the government could not interfere with First Amendment liberties unless it was "speech that produces or is intended to produce clear and imminent danger that it will bring about forthwith ... substantive evils." In other words, there has to be a direct link between the act of expression and an immediate crime. Bad Tendency and indirect causation were not strong enough to restrict First Amendment rights.

Holmes's revelation came after being criticized by some of the nation's leading legal scholars for his opinion in *Schenk*. Notably, Chaffee published an article in the *Harvard Law Review* titled "Free Speech in Wartime." The article seemed to be written directly at Holmes. Chaffee highlighted the freedom of expression, especially in times of war and controversy, by arguing, "Truth can be sifted out from falsehood only if the government is vigorously and constantly cross-examined, so that the fundamental issues of the struggle may be clearly defined, and the war may not be diverted to

improper ends, or conducted with an undue sacrifice of life and liberty, or prolonged after its just purposes are accomplished.”⁶⁰ The article seemed to have tremendous influence on Holmes’s jurisprudence, as the overarching theme in Holmes’s dissent reiterated Chaffee’s foremost points. In addition to reading the article, Holmes also met with Chaffee and other influential legal minds like Federal District Judge Learned Hand throughout the summer of 1919 before the *Abrams* decision. Hand was one of the few defenders of the freedom of expression during the Great War era. In, *Masses Publishing Co. v. Patten*, one of the earliest lower court cases dealing with the Espionage Act, Hand issued a restraining order against the Postmaster General from censoring a radical journal. Hand made a distinction between acts of expression that were seen as unpopular, compared to acts that directly incited criminal activity. Although the Supreme Court never fully adopted Holmes’s second mode of interpreting the “clear and present danger test,” his dissent marks a clear shift from total deference to congressional powers and an attempt to heighten judicial scrutiny when such measures restricted the freedom of expression.

Conclusion

Writing at the conclusion of the war, O’Brian wrote: “No other nation [United States] came through the struggle with so little disorder and with so little interference with the

⁶⁰ Chaffee, 958

civil liberty of the individual.”⁶¹ O’Brian’s words were indicative of the federal government’s ignorance of their repressive measures. Laws that protect the freedom of expression are supposed to shield minority viewpoints from majorities. If there was one unitary viewpoint shared by every citizen, there would be no need to protect the freedom of speech – nothing would ever be viewed as contentious and warrant protection. It is at the upmost imperativeness to protect the freedom of expression during wartime to allow competing ideas and interests circulate. As Chaffee eloquently argued in 1919, this is necessary so the populace does not fall victim to an exploitative government.⁶² But the United States government during World War I believed that any varying ideology would destroy the war effort. The cost of war is high in ways beyond currency. No just government can call itself a democracy while restricting the freedom of expression when the lives of millions of men are at stake.

At the same time, it is enormously difficult endeavor to mobilize an army if the public is in stark opposition to the war itself. But in this instance, the government far exceeded its powers by provoking hysteria and silencing anyone who was not a fervent supporter of the war. The Espionage Act still stands today, but it is used sparingly and against only the most egregious offenses. To summarize, the measures taken by the federal government to repress anti-war dissent

⁶¹ John Lord O’Brian, *Civil Liberty in War Time*, 62 Rep of the NY Bar Assn (Jan 17, 1919): 3.

⁶² Chaffee, 958.

coupled with the Department of Justice's broad interpretation of those laws virtually made it impossible for opponents of the war to express themselves without being indicted. As the Attorney General made clear, there was no room for opposition to the war with "good motives." The Department of Justice consistently reasoned that any expressions of anti-war rhetoric could potentially be read in a training camp where it might cause insubordination. It also made it difficult for opponents of the war to address large audiences. Some judges would convict speakers of attempting to obstruct the war effort, because, within the audience, there were males between the age of eighteen and forty-five.⁶³ The government extended its effort to prosecute opponents of war for their private beliefs, and endorsed the vigilantism of the APL and CPI to help carry out these authoritarian efforts. When the Supreme Court adjudicated over the constitutionality of the seemingly unconstitutional Sedition Act, the Court reasoned that it was within Congress' wartime powers to prevent such evils. Thus, the federal government made it a crime to utter anything that could be construed as disloyal speech or an obstruction to the war effort; statements of opinion were treated as statements of fact and severely punished. This exposes an inherent irony in the measures taken by the federal government for the sake of national security. What was supposed to be a fight for democratic values and rights ultimately ended in an obliteration of civil liberties for Americans.

⁶³ Chaffee, 965.

The Faustian Soul and the American West: The Turner Thesis in the Context of Spengler's Philosophy of History

Matthew Broussard

In 1893, against the backdrop of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, American historian Frederick Jackson Turner presented his essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." The essay, which offered the Western frontier as the reason for cultural differences between Europeans and Americans, was immediately embraced by historians. By the time of Turner's death in 1932, sixty percent of the country's leading history departments offered a course on the American West taught with Turner's Frontier Thesis.¹ Twenty-five years later, German historian Oswald Spengler published the first volume of his magnum opus, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*). Spengler's morphological philosophy of history, which viewed Cultures as organisms that grow and decay as time marches onward, propelled his name into

¹ Alan G. Bogue. "Frederick Jackson Turner Reconsidered," *The History Teacher* 27, no. 2 (1994): 195.

the forefront of the German intellectual sphere.² Both works, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” and *The Decline of the West*, proposed a Copernican overturning of history in their own contexts. Yet the most striking aspect of these works is that despite their different times and contexts, they both work in concert as a Romantic narrative due to their shared epistemological assumptions. The Romantic thread that binds these works is most evident when the Turner Thesis, which is limited to the history of the United States, is placed within the larger scope of Spengler’s all-encompassing philosophy of world history. Specifically, Turner’s essay can be understood as Spenglerian by viewing the thesis’ theory of American history as the burgeoning of the Faustian, or Western, soul in a new mother-landscape, the wilds of the North American continent. They are bound by a shared Romantic underpinning and guided by a Herderian narrative concerning a group ethos, which is highlighted in the Turner Thesis when Turner’s America is placed into Spengler’s philosophy of world history. This is significant because the Romantic means by which Turner explains American history became the leading interpretation of United States history by American historians in the decades after 1893, revealing

² Each time the words Culture or Civilization are used in a Spenglerian context, they will be capitalized. Spengler uses the two terms to denote the first and second halves of a Culture’s lifespan; Culture is the becoming, Civilization is the thing actualized. The word Spengler uses for history’s Cultures is *Hochkulturen*, which directly translates to “high cultures.” This simply refers to the prominent cultures of history that made their marks on the time and space they inhabited, leaving behind their own art, language(s), and other marks of a guiding *ursymbol*, or prime symbol (see page 3).

Romanticism's influence on Americans' perceptions of themselves in the late-nineteenth century.

Before placing the Turner Thesis in the context of the *Decline*, it is first necessary to outline each writer's philosophy. The structure of Spengler's philosophy of history claims its ancestry in the work of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, one of the most important figures in German Romanticism.³ Goethe, known primarily for his work in literature, also conducted research in morphology, the theory of form, and used phenomenology – the study of the structures of experience and consciousness – in his approach to natural history. Spengler's use of a Goethean method is the primary source of the work's Romantic influence decades after the Romantic period ended. Both Faustian and American Cultures were treated as individual organisms by Spengler and Turner respectively, a hallmark of Romanticism. The Romantics of the early nineteenth century emphasized, among other things, individualism in art and literature. Romanticism emerged in opposition to Enlightenment and Rationalism, which both focused on nature as something to be studied and understood empirically rather than appreciated for and understood through its beauty.⁴ Goethe's work as a scientist proved that the Romantic movement was

³ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, trans. by Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), originally published in 1918, xiv.

⁴ Edwin Berry Burgum, "Romanticism," *The Kenyon Review* 3, no. 4 (1941): 480.

not limited to art and poetry, but that Romanticism could produce works that were epistemologically sophisticated.⁵

Spengler applied Goethe's concept of "primordial forms of living bodies and their transformations" to world history in order to explain how new peoples are born, live, act, and eventually die out.⁶ For the purpose of Spengler's philosophy of history, these living forms are not individual plants or people, but entire Cultures that exist over the span of centuries. Spengler's Goethean treatment of entire civilizations as a single organism that grows and adapts over time is a product of Romantic thought. That same thread of Romantic thought can be found in Turner's own philosophy, which treats the collective soul as one entity whose psyche was affected by the frontier, the formative mother-landscape that transformed the Faustian soul into the American soul.

Spengler's philosophy of history is not a linear theory of civilizational progression, but a cyclical one.⁷ A Culture is born "in the moment when a great soul awakens out of the proto-spirituality" and "detaches itself" from base humanity. Once born, a Culture "remains bound" to its native land and grows within it. From birth, a Culture's soul struggles to actualize itself. This actualization is a Culture's Idea, which is composed of a Culture's "languages, dogmas, arts, states, sciences" and everything else stored in its inherent potential,

⁵ Joan Steigerwald, "Goethe's Morphology: Urphänomene and Aesthetic Appraisal." *Journal of the History of Biology* 35, no. 2 (2002): 292.

⁶ Steigerwald, "Goethe's Morphology: Urphänomene and Aesthetic Appraisal," 295.

⁷ Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, 222.

which is present at its birth. Once a Culture's soul has been actualized, it suddenly hardens, "its blood congeals," and it becomes Civilization. Whereas a Culture is focused on inward development, a Civilization turns outward and seeks expansion, its soul-potential already having been fulfilled. Finally, at the end of its millennium, a Civilization struggles in vain for life, but inevitably dies.⁸

The distinguishing and innate characteristic of each Culture is that Culture's "prime symbol." Spengler identified the prime symbol as the "common world-feeling" shared by members of the same Culture that connects individuals as part of that larger organism. This feeling is derived from "a deep identity" that unites individuals during the "awakening of the soul."⁹ Despite the significance of the prime symbol to its Culture, it is not a conspicuous force; a prime symbol is expressed unconsciously by those it touches. In a Culture, the prime symbol "is operative through the form-sense of every man, every community, age and epoch and dictates the style of every life expression." Everything a Culture produces—government, religion, myths, ethics, music, poetry, science, mathematics, language—is derived from its prime symbol.¹⁰

Central to the development of a Culture is its mother-landscape. According to Spengler, there is a deep, metaphysical connection between a Culture's soul and the land in which it develops. The mother-landscape serves not

⁸ Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, 106-8.

⁹ Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, 174.

¹⁰ Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, 175.

only as the location of the soul's initial realization of being, but it is also a formative and reflective entity in relation to the soul. It has a "spirit" that "unites with the soul that has sprung from it."¹¹ For example, the Egyptian Culture was defined by its prime symbol of the path, rendering an Egyptian's existence as one that linearly marches onward in "one unchanging direction," a theme that permeates every aspect of the Culture. Their pyramids are composed of a "rhythmically ordered sequence of spaces," beginning with a gate that leads to progressively narrower chambers until it ends in the chamber of the dead.¹² The linear procession through a pyramid's chambers acts as a stream, flowing in one direction towards an inevitable end. The Egyptian architectural stream is likewise reflected in the Nile, the life force of Egypt. The Nile, whose waters move in one constant direction, is "a sacred way" that becomes "one with the prime-symbol" of its child's soul.¹³ Though Spengler is unclear about the exact nature of the "mysterious" relationship between a Culture's independent soul and the land of its origin and residence, the name "mother-landscape" implies that the land takes on a more formative than a reflective role. The land shapes what is already inherent in the soul's initial potential as it actualizes over the course of the first half of its epoch. Spengler's language is simultaneously scientific and poetic, drawing from Goethe's studies in

¹¹ Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, 203.

¹² Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, 189.

¹³ Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, 203.

morphology, which Goethe described as “the theory of form, formation, and transformation of organic bodies.”¹⁴ The form of Spengler’s philosophy of world history, which involves a social-Darwinian evolution of Cultures as organisms, is based on Goethe’s scientific work while his conception of Cultural aesthetics themselves rely on Goethe’s literary work.

Indeed, Spengler’s term for Western European Culture, “Faustian,” is likely derived from Faust, the titular protagonist of Goethe’s magnum opus, *Faust*, which was based on a German legend. As an adjective, “Faustian” (as in a “Faustian bargain”) describes a situation in which integrity is sacrificed for power or success. While Spengler’s use of the word is clearly homage to one of his intellectual forefathers, he likely realized the natural application of the adjective to his conception of the Western soul, which constantly strives for that which it will never achieve: perpetuity. According to Spengler, the paradoxical pursuit of the infinite is the West’s defining characteristic. The Faustian soul strives for “pure and limitless space” in all areas.¹⁵ Though the obvious example of this is Western expansion from Europe into Africa, Asia, and the Americas, the prime symbol of the infinite is buried in Faustian mathematics dating back to the Renaissance. Cardanus’s discovery of binomial coefficients as early as 1550 paved the way for Newton’s binomial theorem in 1666, which expanded imaginary figures scarcely

¹⁴ Steigerwald, “Goethe’s Morphology: Urphänomene and Aesthetic Appraisal,” 295.

¹⁵ Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, 183.

conceived of in earlier Cultures into an infinite sequence.¹⁶ Whereas the Classical Culture’s soul did not compel the Greeks and Romans to look beyond measurable magnitude, the Faustian Culture was and is keenly aware of distance and time, always aspiring to surpass the known limits of possibility.¹⁷

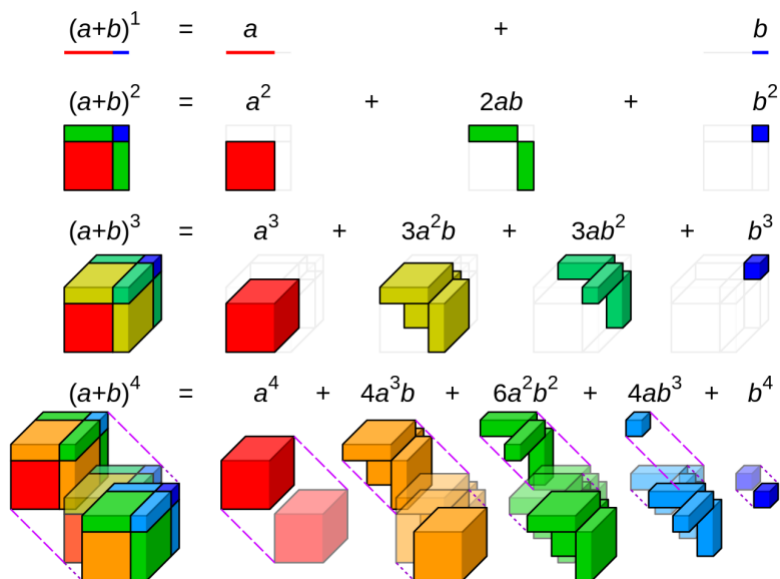


Figure 1. This geometric visualization of the binomial theorem shows that the formula extends into the infinite. As a product of Faustian Culture, it exemplifies the “tendency towards the infinite” Spengler described in the realm of mathematics. Created by Cmgle, *Visualization of binomial expansion up to the 4th power*, April 18, 2015, Wikimedia Commons.

¹⁶ Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, 75.

¹⁷ The “Classical Culture” refers to the Greeks and Romans. The Classical Culture is the greatest example of Spengler’s distinction between Culture, an inwardly focused period of cultural growth and actualization of the soul, and Civilization, the outwardly focused period of imperialistic expansion and conquest. The Greeks were a Culture and the Romans a Civilization.

The Faustian Culture's mother-landscape is Western Europe. According to Spengler, Western Culture "blossomed forth" in the tenth century in "the Northern plain between the Elbe and the Tagus."¹⁸ The spirit of the infinite is endemic to the land of Western Europe, found in the "broad plains of Franconia and Burgundy and Saxony."¹⁹ The bond between the emerging Faustian soul and the land of Western Europe developed when Western men gave up their roving nomadism for agriculture in the plains of Europe. Whereas nature is "hostile" to the nomad, to the settled man the "earth becomes Mother Earth." As he tills the soil, "a profound affinity is set up" and the "man himself becomes plant—namely, as a peasant," spiritually connected to the land he works.²⁰ That bond gave birth to the Faustian soul in the social form of feudalism. According to Spengler, the West's Culture phase lasted until the late seventeenth century, with the advent of the Enlightenment and the belief in the power of reason. At that point, the Faustian soul congealed into Civilization, having fully fleshed out its potential for actualization. Western man then became an "intellectual nomad," possessing his Culture within his mind, immovable and unchanging despite the mother-landscape in which he resided.²¹ Yet well before that point of Civilization, a

¹⁸ Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, 183.

¹⁹ Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, 203.

²⁰ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Perspectives of World History*, trans. by Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), originally published in 1922, 89-90.

²¹ Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Perspectives of World History*, 90.

contingent of the Faustian soul broke off and planted seeds in a new mother-landscape across the Atlantic.

When placed within a Spenglerian framework, Frederick Jackson Turner's essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," explains the development of the Faustian soul in America. Western Culture was brought over to the New World and, at first, remained the same. With time, the "wilderness master[ed] the colonist" and shaped the European spirit into something new.²² The American frontier was the westward-moving line that stood between civilization and the wilderness. In spite of inevitable danger, the newly planted Faustian soul was determined to press westward until the frontier ceased to exist. Though the American wilderness was dense and fraught with the unknown—unlike the plains of Europe—the Faustian spirit, ever tending towards the infinite, pushed onward. In challenging the frontier, the mother-landscape of North America forged the American spirit out of the Faustian mold.

Turner describes the westward movement as a constant struggle of man against nature, as each party affects the other. According to Turner, someone who is "European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought" is not suited for the North American landscape, the frontier. The European's clash with the wilderness necessarily forces him to adapt to his environment or die. Though nature is "at first too strong" for the Faustian to bear, he eventually overcomes

²² Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 4.

it and, as a result, is fundamentally transformed, becoming American.²³

Placed in the Spenglerian context, the Frontier Thesis shows the effect a mother-landscape can have on a soul yet to be actualized when it is displaced from its own homeland. Because the mother-landscape is so tied to the development of a Culture, the transplanted portion of the Faustian soul could not have continued to evolve as its main body would across the Atlantic. Rather, the frontier, the mother-landscape, of North America took control, preserving the Faustian soul to the point that it did not become like the continent's natives, but shaping it as it tackled its new environment and, in time, adopting it as its own.

Yet the Spenglerian and "mysterious" relationship between a Culture-organism and the land in which it resides does not work one way; the people affect the land just as the land affects the Culture's development. According to Turner, as the former Europeans on the American continent migrated west, pushing the frontier further past its starting point on the Atlantic, the Faustian-turned-American "little by little [transformed] the wilderness," mastering and settling the land as he went. The exact change the new settlers made to the land as the frontier moved west is significant, as an unchanged Faustian soul would transform the wilderness of the New World into a replica of Western Europe. Turner

²³ Frederick Jackson Turner. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1921), accessed on Gutenberg.org, 4.

remarks that “the outcome” of this landscape transformation “is not the old Europe,” but something entirely different. Even after land is settled and inhabited by the Faustian soul, “the region still partakes of the frontier characteristics.” Each step to the west marks “a steady movement away from the influence of Europe” as the Western soul affects the land it has made home, simultaneously accepting the frontier’s influence on its own development.²⁴ Turner’s explanation regarding the interaction between Western men and the North American wilderness is strikingly similar to Spengler’s explanation of history’s *Hochkulturen*. In both of their works, nature both shapes and is shaped by a monolithic yet malleable collective.

Both Spengler and Turner treated their subject Cultures as independent, living collectives that interacted with their natural surroundings as part of an organic process of growth. While Spengler directly refers to his Cultures—necessarily a collective—as individual entities, saying they should be treated as organisms with lifespans and lifelong evolution, Turner does so indirectly. Turner, in line with Spengler’s relationship between the people and the land, identified the land’s natural “arteries” as the key determinant of how Americans built their civilization. Nature, interwoven with the Faustian soul that had settled in and developed it, became “a complex nervous system” as those arteries formed the base for commercial trade routes, highways, and other

²⁴ Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” 4.

“lines of civilization.”²⁵ Out of that development, according to Turner, the West “evolved” and the settlers did so along with it.²⁶ Like Spengler with his mother-landscapes, Turner discussed the North American wilderness as something alive. Similarly, the Turnerian “colonist” is representative of all the settlers in the New World. The colonist, standing in place of the thousands who traversed the frontier, felt the “steady growth of independence on American lines” as that evolution took place, eventually growing into the contemporary American character.²⁷

Indeed, Turner recognized the Faustian prime symbol because of the soul’s interaction with the frontier. In examining the early American struggle with the frontier, Turner identified certain American traits that originated in the frontier. These include “coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness,” a “masterful grasp of material things,” “dominant individualism,” and a definite “buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom.” Turner viewed these as the frontier’s traits or “traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier.” These traits culminate in the “expansive character of American life.”²⁸ That expansive character always tends towards progress, whether that progress is physical, scientific, or social. Turner even predicted that, in spite of the lack of free land, the American tendency to expand would

²⁵ Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” 14-5.

²⁶ Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” 6.

²⁷ Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” 4.

²⁸ Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” 37.

likely not disappear, but would find a “wider field” for its own expansion. Before the frontier vanished, however, Turner’s contention was that the existence of free land spurred the early settlers into action. Their motivation for settling that land is what connects Turner’s philosophy to Spengler’s much wider philosophy of history. Spengler explained the Faustian soul’s desire to extend infinitely and Turner explained how that desire was acted upon in early American history.

Turner’s explanation for the origins of the American spirit replaced a more scientific and Eurocentric approach to understanding American history. Prior to 1893, Americans primarily subscribed to Germanic germ theory, a race-based “scientific” explanation for Americans’ uniqueness in the world.²⁹ The theory is based on the assumption that, long ago, the Germanic race appeared and evolved in the ancient Teutonic forests, endowed with a great capacity for politics and government. Their germs were, directly and by way of England, carried to the New World where they were allowed to germinate in the North American forests. In so doing, the Anglo-Saxons and the Germanic people’s descendants, being exposed to a forest like their Teutonic ancestors, birthed the free political institutions that formed the foundation of American government.³⁰ Though the Germanic germ theory still relies on the frontier as a formative force on the European

²⁹ Gilman M. Ostrander, "Turner and the Germ Theory," *Agricultural History* 32, no. 4 (1958): 258.

³⁰ Ostrander, "Turner and the Germ Theory," 259.

settlers in North America, it lacks the spiritual aspect of Spengler's philosophy and Turner's thesis. Instead of a relationship between the Westerners and the mother-landscape that affects and alters both parties, the Germanic germ theory assumes the necessity of the Germanic racial component.

Indeed, just three years before Turner presented his thesis on the American frontier, historian Hubert Howe Bancroft published his own work on the frontier's role in American history, articulating what much of America perceived to be their own national origin story. To Bancroft, the Anglo-Saxon racial stock of America's first settlers was crucial in forming the American mind. Bancroft argued that the "tide of intelligence," beginning with Germanic peoples in Teuton lands, moved west, covering the whole of Europe by the Middle Ages. Yet according to Bancroft, the scientific and social stagnation in medieval Europe was owed to, in addition to legal and ecclesiastical restraints, the lack of free land on the continent. In the New World, where there was nothing but free land, that same racial stock, possessing the characteristics of adaptability and self-reliance, was able to reach its full potential. Freedom from the restraints of medieval government furthermore allowed Americanization of the colonists by way of "free thought and untrammelled activity" in North America.³¹ To Bancroft, the American national character is simply that of the early Teuton,

³¹ Ostrander, "Turner and the Germ Theory," 258-9. The quotes cited come from Bancroft's *Essays and Miscellany*, as quoted and contextualized by Ostrander.

unrestrained by church, state, or inadequate living space on the North American continent. Bancroft's American directly descends from the greatest of ancient European racial stock, the Aryan race, from which he inherited his traits. By contrast, non-Aryan races could not handle the frontier as well as Anglo-Saxons, who have an inherent racial advantage. Bancroft's essay was the latest scholarship on the Germanic germ theory prior to Turner's 1893 thesis and represented much of what Americans, at least academics, believed about the American spirit that had fomented in the colonial era.

As a Romantic philosophy, Turner's thesis on the frontier and the emergence of the American spirit was quite different from Bancroft's on the basis of race consciousness alone. Whereas Bancroft's work on the subject was "jubilantly" race-conscious, as his entire argument was predicated on Anglo-Saxon racial characteristics as part of the Germanic germ theory, Turner's thesis flatly denied the latter theory. Turner believed that "too exclusive attention has been paid by institutional students to the Germanic origins" and not enough to the uniquely American origins.³² According to Turner, if the creation of the American was limited to the evolution of Germanic germs, the outcome would have been a second Europe in the New World.³³ Eventually, the same conditions that created Europe would arise: the Germanic germs would travel west, taming and settling the land, until they ran out of living space. Furthermore, they would

³² Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 3.

³³ Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 4.

establish the same government with its increased centralization of power in the church and state. Turner looked to contemporary America to disprove Bancroft's argument. Because America is fundamentally different from Europe, there must have been some differing variable in America's early development to distinguish it from the formation of Europe. Turner replaced Bancroft's race-determinism with self-determinism, emphasizing the role of the individual rather than that of the racial group. To Bancroft, it was the natural ability of the Anglo-Saxon race that mastered the frontier. To Turner, it was the settlers' sheer willingness to tackle and conquer the frontier that created the American spirit.

Spengler's definition of the Faustian soul gives insight into why Turner's early Americans pushed past the frontier. Having contrasted Turner and Bancroft, it is worth noting that Spengler did not classify the Faustian Culture or any *Hochkultur* as a racial group. Spengler found no credence in the belief that skeletons and bone structure are able to distinguish the races from one another, nor did he believe that superficial differences were sufficient to separate the races. Rather, "it is the living body that carries nine-tenths of the expression" of the race by way of culture, customs, and languages, not physiognomic differences.³⁴ To Spengler, much of that living expression can be found in a Culture's prime symbol. The driving force behind those who challenged the frontier was not racial destiny, but the

³⁴ Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Perspectives of World History*, 124-5.

tendency toward the infinite ingrained in the Western soul. That driving force is an important distinction between the Romanticism of Turner and Spengler and Bancroft's genetics-based Germanic germ theory. The early American, according to Bancroft, conquered the frontier because he was naturally able to do so. To Turner, the colonist overcame the frontier's challenges because he struggled to defeat nature. Through that struggle, his character was changed. In Spenglerian terms, the Faustian soul landed on the shores of a new mother-landscape and wrestled with its new surroundings until it emerged as something new. The Westerner, driven by the Faustian prime symbol of perpetuity, attacked the challenge of the frontier and was fundamentally transformed as a result.

Turner appeared to have had a similar view to Spengler on the subject of race. Turner did not identify any particular race, such as the Germanic people or the Anglo-Saxons, as having been the ancestor of the contemporary American. He overtly rejected the Germanic germ theory and was clearly dismissive of the genetic argument for European racial superiority. Turner did not go as far as Spengler on the question of race—as the latter even named racial terms like Aryan and Semite “silly catchwords”—but he did directly address the role of race in early America in his *Frontier Thesis*.³⁵ Turner noted that the Atlantic coast was “preponderantly English” when the push westward began, but that there was a demographic shift as the Europeans

³⁵ Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Perspectives of World History*, 318.

traveled further west. The “Scotch-Irish and the Palatine Germans” were among the first racial groups to join the effort to settle the West. These two groups, according to Turner, “furnished the dominant element in the stock of the colonial frontier.” Consistent with his opposition to the Germanic germ theory, Turner claimed that the specific racial stock or combination of races that moved west did not matter because the frontier “promoted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people” rendering race practically useless, at least among European groups. Turner supported his argument using the fact that the United States is an English-speaking country even though many of these non-English settlers exclusively spoke German or Dutch. The cohesive American nationality formed out of the North American wilderness disregarded race due to the mysterious workings of the frontier.³⁶

The shift from Bancroft’s racially-inflected line of thinking regarding the origins of the American spirit to the Turnerian individual struggle with the frontier marked a significant turning point in the way Americans perceived themselves. Though the Germanic germ theory is Eurocentric and spurious at best, its genetic argument is a more scientific approach to history—though pseudoscientific—than Turner’s Romantic approach. Though more thorough in research, Turner’s thesis is more mystical in nature, relying on a sort of frontier mythos as the foundation of American character. That mythical aspect, imbuing the frontier and its

³⁶ Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” 22-3.

explorers with a transformative and practically heroic quality, qualifies Turner's work as belonging to the same Herderian tradition as Spengler's own philosophy of history.

Evidently, the Romantic origins of America were more appealing than its scientific-racial origins in the nation's academic discourse. High profile figures with contrasting views to Turner's, such as Theodore Roosevelt, embraced Turner's Romantic version of early American history.³⁷ Before Roosevelt's rise to fame as a military leader and politician, he had begun a multivolume historical work called *The Winning of the West*. In it, he contended that the formation of the American character occurred not with early settlers struggling to survive while learning a foreign land, but "on the cutting edge of expansion" in the early battles with Native Americans in the New World. Whereas Spengler and Turner saw a people's Culture develop in times of peace, Roosevelt believed that war shapes character. Like Bancroft, Roosevelt observed a racial component. The frontier was the site of a racial war, where European-descended individuals struggled not with the land, but with the "hostile races and cultures" who resisted European incursion with violence. To Roosevelt, the Europeans had no choice but to fight back, eventually seizing victory from the natives and, in so doing, displayed their "mastery through violence" over them.³⁸ Despite the glaring differences between Turner and Roosevelt, Roosevelt

³⁷ Richard Slotkin, "Nostalgia and Progress: Theodore Roosevelt's Myth of the Frontier," *American Quarterly* 33, no. 5 (1981): 608.

³⁸ Slotkin, "Nostalgia and Progress: Theodore Roosevelt's Myth of the Frontier," 613.

shared Turner's belief in the frontier as the source of American character. Roosevelt considered Turner's work to have been a completion rather than a contradiction of his own writings on the subject even though Roosevelt focused on the violent aspects of the frontier. Regardless, Roosevelt's ready acceptance of the Frontier Thesis highlights the appeal that Turner's work had in America's intellectual and even political spheres.

Turner's influence extended beyond fellow historians of the American West. As mentioned earlier, the Turnerian history of the United States was taught in the majority of history departments in American universities well into the twentieth century. In his lifetime, Turner was an academic celebrity; he was highly sought by universities for guest lectures and commencement speeches. During his life, he commanded great respect among academics and the public alike. After he published his magnum opus in 1893, he continued to promote his Frontier Thesis both in academia and in the public sphere in the form of multiple essays and editorials. As a result, his thesis "became one of the great interpretations of American development, institutions and character." He became the president of the American Historical Association in 1910, having climbed to the top of his field. Even after death, Turner's reputation and work thrived in the United States. In the 1940s, the Council of the American Historical Association named Turner one of the two "most eminent deceased historians of the United

States.”³⁹ Indeed, nearly a century had passed before Turner’s influence finally faded from the American classroom.⁴⁰

Turner’s Romantic approach to American history likely had such widespread appeal because it came about during a time of rising nationalism. With Europe still at the forefront of world progress, Americans sought to define themselves as something unique and independent from Europe. America, to the rest of the world, was a fledgling, backwater nation with no real heritage aside from English colonization.⁴¹ Turner sought an autochthonous explanation for American identity, claiming that it was not genetics, nor race, nor England that created the American spirit, but was instead Americans’ ability to persevere in the face of adversity. Embracing Turner’s message, Americans would seek to prove their equality to the empires of Europe in Cuba and in the Philippines, paving their own destinies in new frontiers as the fulfillment of a Turnerian prophecy. Turner’s thesis signifies American self-consciousness as the rapidly changing nation paused to ask itself who it is and where it came from. That question was most hotly debated less than a decade later in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War.⁴² Turner’s answer to that question was self-deterministic, a significant departure from the previously dominant Eurocentric view of American history. The young nation

³⁹ Bogue, “Frederick Jackson Turner Reconsidered,” 195-6.

⁴⁰ Bogue, “Frederick Jackson Turner Reconsidered,” 214.

⁴¹ Bogue, “Frederick Jackson Turner Reconsidered,” 196.

⁴² Megan Elias, “The Palate of Power: Americans, Food and the Philippines after the Spanish-American War,” *Material Culture* 46, no. 1 (2014): 45.

needed only to decide what that uniquely American destiny would be.

By placing Turner's Frontier Thesis in the context of Spengler's philosophy of history, outlined in *The Decline of the West*, it is possible to form a complete narrative of the development of the American character in early American history. While Turner's thesis explains America as a nation founded on the individual's struggle with the frontier, a multigenerational act that forged the American spirit, Spengler's work explains the motivation behind that act: the Faustian tendency toward the infinite, which includes breaking new boundaries and achieving higher goals. The *Decline* elaborates on the larger historical trend of Cultures' evolution in a mother-landscape, fully articulating what Turner observed in a strictly American context. Yet Spengler did not delve into what would take place if a particular soul, born in its mother-landscape, were to be transplanted in another mother-landscape. Turner's philosophy of early American history both answers that question and is contextualized by Spengler when "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" is fitted into the much larger *The Decline of the West*. The Faustian contingent that broke from Europe and settled in the New World retained much of its former spirit but was refashioned into a new soul by the frontier. When the Spenglerian framework—which emphasizes the individual character of an organic collective to show the biological process of evolution in history's Cultures—is applied to Turner's Frontier Thesis, the

Romanticism of the late nineteenth century essay becomes immediately apparent. This would not be important if not for the immense influence Turner had on his time and beyond. Turner changed the way Americans perceived themselves using a Romantic narrative, challenging the racist-based understanding of American history through the Germanic germ theory. In this way, two seemingly unrelated historians shed light on Americans' Romantic perceptions of themselves. That perception, a remnant of a bygone era, persisted and influenced American politics and aspirations well into the modern age. From Roosevelt's fiery imperialist rhetoric to Kennedy's Rice Stadium Moon Speech, the Turnerian specter can be felt across American history.

I Sunk Your Battleship: The End of Capital Ship Primacy and the Rise of the Submarine

Gary Whittaker

The balance of naval power in Europe in 1914 largely resembled the balance of power in 1814. Despite a century of technological advancement, the British Empire could still claim the title of Europe's naval power, while those on the continent vied for a distant second. In an attempt to shift power away from Great Britain the German Empire began a massive naval rearmament program under Admiral Tirpitz in 1898. This plan expanded the German Navy by building a series of battleships meant to challenge the British position in the North Sea. These large ships were the metric by which nations measured their naval power in the Twenty century. As technology progressed these ships became larger, faster, and better armed and armored, but their basic role did not

change.¹ A navy's strength was directly tied to that of its capital ships. However, during the First World War the importance of these ships dropped significantly following the indecisive Battle of Jutland in 1916. With Germany's declaration of conducting a campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare, the North Atlantic became a hunting ground for merchant ships carrying supplies to the Allies. The international trade that sustained the British Empire became subject to indiscriminate attack. Germany opened up another front on the ocean. The war at sea was now separated into two theatres, above the waves and below. While the Royal Navy ruled the waves, Germany could strike from below, undetected and seemingly invulnerable. Germany shifted the centuries-old paradigm of capital ship primacy with its submarine flotilla, and in doing so redefined the role of naval warfare in future conflicts. This shift in naval doctrine did not go unnoticed. As merchant ships lost to submarines increased and the United States entered the war, the allies had to develop new ways to respond to this fundamental shift in naval doctrine. The First World War marked the end of capital ship primacy and saw the rise of a new method of naval warfare based on strangling an opponent's logistical supply to the point of forcing a capitulation or face starvation.

At the start of the Twentieth century the Royal Navy (R.N.) was the largest navy in terms of number, size of vessels,

¹ Though the exact name (e.g. Ships of the Line, Battleships, and after the launch of H.M.S. *Dreadnought*, Dreadnaughts.) varies with context, these ships all occupied the same place as the pinnacle of a nation's naval strength.

and overall manpower. Nearly 200,000 men served in the Royal Navy in one form or another in 1906.² The R.N. operated a fleet of fifty-two battleships totaling an impressive tonnage of 720,000 tons.³ This figure does not include the numerous merchant ships and their crews that conducted trade across the globe under the British Flag. A total of eleven million tons of merchant shipping sailed under the red ensign of the British Merchant Marine with over a quarter million men serving on these ships. The British Empire maintained an extensive network of naval bases and coaling stations across the globe. These facilities ensured the Royal Navy's ability to operate around the world and thus extend the reach of the British Empire. Its navy allowed Great Britain to project power across the globe.

However, Britain was not alone on the seas. The United States and Germany were both rapidly expanding the size of their navies, as well as building increasingly modern ships. The United States Navy (U.S.N.) had less than a quarter of the Royal Navy's manpower with 35,000 personnel.⁴ The United States Merchant Marine operated a fleet of over five million tons, less than half of the R.N.⁵ Additionally, the United States Navy was pursuing an ambitious battleship

² Fred T. Jane, *Jane's Fighting Ships 1906/7*. (New York: Acro Pub. Co., 1970), 41.

³ Jane, *Fighting Ships 1906/7*., 43-55. Total tonnage is a useful measure of a nation's naval capability as it represents both naval funding as well as logistical and industrial support of the Navy. However, it says nothing of the quality of construction nor the effectiveness of the fleet.

⁴ Jane, *Fighting Ships 1906/7*., 96.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

building program to increase its modest battleship fleet of twenty-five ships and 300,000 tons with more modern and larger ships, with the largest being 16,000 tons.⁶ The German Empire's Kaiserliche Marine with two million tons of merchant shipping and 33,000 sailors in the navy appeared strong on paper.⁷ However, the Kaiserliche Marine's fleet of battleships numbered only twenty-four with none heavier than 14,000 tons. Even the comparatively new U.S.N. operated a larger fleet of more advanced ships. Germany's naval strength paled in comparison to the other naval powers in the North Atlantic.⁸

The launching of the H.M.S. *Dreadnought* in 1906 called into question the importance of these battleship fleets. This ship was a revolution in the design. In contrast to previous designs, the *Dreadnought* relied on a uniform battery of large diameter guns, with a secondary battery of smaller, quick firing guns.⁹ In addition to its armament the *Dreadnaught* was also exceptionally fast for its day. With a maximum operating speed of twenty-one knots, it was on par with some of the

⁶ Ibid., 97-106.

⁷ Ibid., 225.

⁸ While France also maintained a strong navy, of 53,000 sailors, it maintained a very small fleet of battleships. Instead a sizable percentage of France's naval strength consisted of cruisers, destroyers, torpedo boats and light craft fit for colonial dispatch duty. Though in 1906 the French navy was in the midst of building ten new battleships, half of these would grow obsolete while still being built following the near universal adoption of dreadnaught style ships.

⁹ Jane, *Fighting Ships 1906/7.*, 42-43. Prior to *Dreadnought* battleships were fitted with a range of different sized guns with the intention of being able to engage any surface target. In practice having upwards of six different gun calibers made the complex art of long range naval gunnery incredibly difficult.

world's fastest cruisers in terms of speed and maneuverability.¹⁰ The ship was also a testament to British naval design and construction. Its keel was laid down on October 2, 1905 and King Edward VII christened the ship on February 10, 1906, only 132 days later, making it one of the quickest constructions of a sizable ship and a testament to British naval engineering.¹¹

The construction of *Dreadnaught* sparked an arms race. The United States and Germany began building increasingly larger capital ships in an effort to not be eclipsed by competing world powers. At the time of *Dreadnaught's* launch the United States was already building the U.S.S. *South Carolina*, America's first dreadnought battleship.¹² Like *Dreadnaught*, the *South Carolina's* armament consisted of a primary battery of large diameter guns and a secondary battery of small diameter guns.¹³ Unlike *Dreadnaught*, the guns were arranged in four turrets with two guns per turret with the central pair of turrets placed higher on the ships superstructure allowing them to fire over the other two turrets.¹⁴ The United States Navy was striving to achieve parity with European navies and with the launch of the U.S.S. *South Carolina* had surpassed, for a short time, the navies of Europe. Germany likewise joined dreadnaught race. Already

¹⁰ ~24 miles per hour. See Jane, *Fighting Ships 1906/7.*, 42

¹¹ Johnston, Ian & Buxton, Ian, *The Battleship Builders - Constructing and Arming British Capital Ships* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2013), 134.

¹² Jane, *Fighting Ships 1906/7*, 97.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid.

in 1906 plans were drawn up to build a new class of ships to compete with American and British designs. Developed under the names *Ersatz-Sachsen* and *Ersatz-Bayern* these ships were meant to directly challenge the H.M.S. *Dreadnought*.¹⁵ This arms race, while certainly not directly responsible, helped increase the rising tensions among the European powers just before the First World War.

By 1914 the Royal Navy possessed thirty dreadnaught style battleships, with the largest displacing 25,000 tons.¹⁶ Additionally, eight ships of the new battlecruiser style had been built.¹⁷ These ships represented an attempt to combine the firepower of dreadnaughts with the speed cruisers at the expense of armor protection.¹⁸ The British Merchant Marine comprised half the total global tonnage.¹⁹ Germany had sixteen dreadnoughts, with a further three being built, the largest being 28,000 tons displacement.²⁰ Six battlecruisers had also been built in this time.²¹ Twelve American dreadnaughts had been laid down and completed in this time.²² These ships represented a tremendous advance in industrial capability and engineering ingenuity.

¹⁵ Jane, *Fighting Ships 1906/7*, 243.

¹⁶ Jane, *Fighting Ships 1914*, 32-41.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 42-45.

¹⁸ ~28 miles per hour.

¹⁹ Admiral Jellicoe, *The Crisis of the Naval War*, (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1920), 1.

²⁰ Jane, *Fighting Ships 1914*, 116-121.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 121-124.

²² *Ibid.*, 164-171

Despite these impressive feats of construction, the actual usefulness and importance of these ships must be called into question. While the capabilities of this new design of ship improved over their immediate predecessors little else had changed in naval warfare tactics. Despite these capital ships attaining increasingly higher speeds and mounting uniform batteries of increasingly large size, their role and basic use in a naval battle changed very little. A nation's fleet of battleships were built and maintained to counter an opposing nation's navy. In practical terms nothing had changed from the earliest days of wooden ships mounting cannons four hundred years prior. Ships may have begun relying upon steam rather than the wind, fired larger guns from farther away, and built in increasingly larger tonnage; but their use in naval strategy remained the same. These ships reinforced rather than revolutionized naval strategy. Thus, while the dreadnought arms race just prior to the First World War did contribute to the growing tensions in Europe, it did not change naval strategy.

As tensions in Europe reached a breaking point in the summer of 1914 the fleets of Germany and the British Empire were ordered to begin preparations for war. On August 1 the German High Seas Fleet gathered in the North Sea port of Wilhelmshaven on Germany's northwest coast. At the same time 450 miles away, The Royal Navy's Grand Fleet completed preparations as a precautionary measure and remained on alert in its home port of Scapa Flow in the

Orkney islands off the Scottish coast.²³ These two fleets represented the greatest concentration of naval power ever assembled to that point in history. As tensions mounted across continental Europe it became increasingly likely that the British Empire would be dragged into another European war. On August 4th at 11:00 A.M. the British Admiralty sent a message to all ships of the Royal Navy: "Commence hostilities with Germany."²⁴

The Royal Navy wasted no time in implementing its pre-war plans of containment against Germany. The day after hostilities were declared the Royal Navy began the first of many sea patrols designed to blockade Germany.²⁵ The Grand Fleet, comprised of the British Empire's most advanced ships, patrolled between the Scottish Coast and Scandinavia in an attempt to stop all merchant traffic bound for Germany.²⁶ In the English Channel, the Channel Fleet, made up of older ships and obsolete pre-dreadnoughts, prevented merchant ships bound for Germany from traversing the English Channel.²⁷ The aim of these blockades were two-fold. The first was to prevent the flow of supplies and war material to Germany in the hopes of limiting the German's military capabilities on land and potentially starving the country in submission. The second was to confine the German High Seas

²³ John Costello and Terry Hughes, *Jutland 1916*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), 62.

²⁴ Costello and Hughes, *Jutland*, 63.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Fleet to the North Sea and thus limit the ability of Germany's navy to interfere with maritime commerce and British control of the North Atlantic. This passive strategy was to be pursued until a direct conflict with Germany's navy became necessary or advisable. Then the Royal Navy would engage the German Navy with the aim of eliminating it with Britain's superior numbers.²⁸

Despite knowledge of Britain's plans for a distant blockade and passionate arguments from Grand Admiral Tripitz, Kaiser Wilhelm sided with the Army General Staff and favored a quick land campaign to achieve victory in Europe. The German Supreme Army Command intended to use the intact High Seas Fleet as a bargaining chip in post-war peace negotiations.²⁹ Risking the High Seas fleet seemed pointless in the fall of 1914 as Germany advanced rapidly on Paris. The High Seas Fleet remained in port as a threat to the British in being. This strategy, termed "Fleet in Being" holds that by keeping a fleet in port it will remain a constant risk to the enemy which will have to devote forces to counter any potential actions by the fleet, rather than engaging an enemy directly and risk losing a substantial part of the fleet. Germany's naval strategy stood at odds with its army strategy. The passive response to the Royal Navy enabled the British to control the North Sea and allowed the British Expeditionary Force to land in France unscathed. This

²⁸ C.C. Gill, *Naval Power in the War*, (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1919), 17.

²⁹ Costello and Hughes, *Jutland*, 65.

inactivity enraged Admiral Tripitz who pointed out the flaws of allowing the British to control Germany's trade. He recognized that if the war extended beyond a few months then Germany would be forced into a war of attrition without access to the materials and supply needed to maintain an army.³⁰ Massive spending on dreadnought battleships seemed wasted. Germany refused to risk its fleet in open battle and the British deployed their ships for mundane blockading duties. Just as the armies of Europe became bogged down in the fields of Flanders and France, so too did the navies of Europe idle in port or steamed across the North Sea without sighting an opposing ship for weeks on end.

The few early naval actions of the war were minor, but decisive German victories. Despite being essentially cut off from Berlin, German Colonial squadrons began harassing British colonies and the trade being conducted between them and Britain.³¹ Utilizing a squadron of cruisers German Admiral von Spee raided British commerce in the Pacific and evaded action with the Royal Navy until his triumphant victory over Admiral Cradock just off the South American coast in late 1914.³² This was the first defeat of the Royal Navy in over a hundred years. Even more humiliating, the British battleship H.M.S. *Audacious*, one of the R.N.'s largest, was sunk by a German mine off the coast of Ireland in full view of the passenger ship R.M.S. *Olympic*. Given the nature of the

³⁰ Costello and Hughes, *Jutland*, 65.

³¹ Gill, *Naval Power*, 19.

³² Costello and Hughes, *Jutland*, 70.

sinking it could not be covered up by the Admiralty and photographs of British sailors fleeing the sinking ship made their way into papers within days of the incident. On 3 November 1914, the German fleet again humiliated the Royal Navy. Four German battlecruisers shelled the city of Yarmouth without the Royal Navy ever engaging the Germans.³³ Again in December of that year the Germans repeated the insult by shelling Scarborough, also without interference from the Royal Navy.³⁴

The once spotless reputation of the Royal Navy and the unshakeable faith in the dreadnaught began to show cracks, in some cases literally. The first months of the Grand Sea Fleet's patrol showed deficiencies in the building of Britain's fleet of dreadnaughts and their susceptibility to attack from German submarines and mines.³⁵ It was becoming increasingly clear that underwater threats could not be countered by the type of warfare that the Royal Navy embraced after a century of naval dominance. German submarines could prey upon the Grand Fleet in three key ways should the German High Seas fleet raise steam and seek to challenge the British in the North Sea. The first, as the British Navy massed at Scapa Flow when ships would be moving as individuals from their home ports to join the fleet. The second, when the Grand Fleet would put to sea as a group it could be easily harassed due to its large size and slow

³³ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁴ *Ibid.*,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

speed. Finally, after any large fleet action ships would return to Britain damaged, disorganized and most likely without escort, thus susceptible to submarine attack.³⁶ Despite the Royal Navy humiliation early in the war, it failed to develop a solid response to Germany's naval threat. The dreadnoughts plied the seas uselessly as Germany's battlefleet sat safely in port. If the trend of submarine and mine attacks was halted, then the Grand Fleet may have found itself defeated without ever engaging in battle.

Despite the blows inflicted to British prestige, the German Navy found itself in an equally frustrating position. The Royal Navy's choice of a distant blockade came as a surprise to the German Navy. While a blockade was expected, the German Admiralty believed that the Royal Navy would conduct a close blockade, sitting just off the German coast, as it had done against France during the Napoleonic Wars.³⁷ In that case the German Navy could choose when and where to engage the Royal Navy with surface ships, lay mines and ambush the British with submarines, engage when its local forces were superior to the British and whittle down the Royal Navy's superior numbers. Further, the Germans expected any general European war to be a matter of months, not years, and figured that while some form of blockade was inevitable in the case of war, the war would be short enough that the effects

³⁶ Costello and Hughes, *Jutland*, 74.

³⁷ Lance Davis and Stanley Engerman, *Naval Blockades in Peace and War: An Economic History Since 1750*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 163.

of the blockade would not be felt.³⁸ As the war dragged on to 1915 the scope of the British blockade extended from absolute contraband consisting of arms, ammunition, clothing, and military equipment, to conditional contraband of oil, nitrates, and coal, and finally to food.³⁹ With the Western Front stagnating and the flow of supplies needed for war constricted, Germany's position in the war became increasingly precarious. The German Navy faced a decision: Either try and break the British blockade by directly confronting the Grand Sea Fleet and risk destruction, or change the strategy of German's submarine fleet from harassing the Royal Navy to sinking British Mercantile ships without warning. As the Kaiser remained reluctant to risk his High Seas Fleet, he eventually acquiesced to Admiral Tripitz's demands for direct and aggressive action against the British and authorized the first campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare in February of 1915.⁴⁰ The waters surrounding the British Isles were declared a war zone and German submarines targeted any ship operating in those waters, whether flying the flag of a neutral or hostile nation.⁴¹

The initial phase of this campaign was a success. British Merchant losses rose from a meager 36,000 tons in January to 92,000 tons in May before peaking at 149,000 tons in August of 1915.⁴² Germany achieved this impressive rise in

³⁸ Davis and Engermen, *Naval Blockades*, 163.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Davis and Engermen, *Naval Blockades*, 165.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*,

⁴² *Ibid.*, 169.

merchant losses with very few submarines. In 1915, Germany had a fleet of less than forty submarines. Fewer than thirty were able to be used for commerce raiding due to the size and range needed to patrol the stormy North Atlantic. Of those submarines only six, on average, were put out to sea at a time.⁴³ A submarine blockade of the British Empire seemed workable. Although for a full-scale campaign to be successful, more submarines would be required, and total merchant tonnage sunk would have to increase substantially.

Despite the success of the initial phase of submarine warfare, one glaring issue came to light. For the campaign to be successful the submarines needed to strike undetected and without warning. However, rules for commerce raiding forbade this. International law on the enforcement of blockades and attacks on neutral vessels required that the blockading ship would have to inspect the cargo of the merchant ship and ensure the safety of the crew and any passengers before sinking the merchantman.⁴⁴ While these rules were practical for surface ships conducting a blockade, they eliminated the effectiveness of submarines. A submarine is not designed to directly engage an enemy. Its torpedo armament is only effective in a surprise attack against an unsuspecting enemy that maintains a constant speed and course. Also, due to the nature of the submarine's hull, while structurally sound, it was unarmored and easily breached. Any breach, of course, would doom the submarine by forcing

⁴³ Ibid.,

⁴⁴ Davis and Engerman, *Naval Blockades*, 171.

it to remain on the surface or start an uncontrollable dive to the bottom. Submarines were incredibly vulnerable while surfaced, and even a merchant ship armed with light defensive armament could sink a surfaced submarine with ease.

If the submarine campaign was to be effective it would have to violate international conventions of blockades. Additionally, the choice to sink any shipping, including neutral merchants, would draw the ire of neutral nations on which Germany relied for supplies. Nevertheless, German submarines sank nearly two million tons of Allied and neutral shipping. Only after international outrage with the sinking of the British passenger ship *Lusitania* did Germany end its campaign in September of 1915⁴⁵

If Germany was to win the war, it had to break the British blockade. With the submarine campaign suspended and the Battle of Verdun entering its sixteenth week with little signs of success, the German High Seas Fleet made final preparations to depart Wilhelmshaven and engage the Grand Fleet in the summer of 1916.⁴⁶ The preparations however did not remain secret and Admiralty code breakers in Britain soon discovered Germany's plans to mobilize the High Seas Fleet.⁴⁷ In response, the Grand Fleet quickly left its home port in Scotland and proceeded to the North Sea. Admiral Jellicoe's prediction that German submarines would attempt to

⁴⁵ Ibid.,173.

⁴⁶ Costello and Hughes, *Jutland*, 108.

⁴⁷ Costello and Hughes, *Jutland*, 109.

ambush the Grand Fleet if it left harbor turned out to be correct. Days prior to the departure of the High Seas Fleet, German submarines were ordered to patrol off the coast of Scotland to intercept the Royal Navy. However, nature was on the side of British. The Royal Navy left their protected anchorages under a moonless night, preventing the submarine patrols from detecting and engaging the fleet as it went to sea.⁴⁸ Soon both fleets were at sea ready to engage the full might of their counterpart's navy.

Shortly after 2:00 P.M. On 31 May 1916 the British and German scouting forces made contact after both had sighted the smoke from a Danish steamer, believing it to be an enemy vessel. As the forces approached a running gun duel broke out between the light ships of the scouting force, the largest and only naval battle between dreadnaughts followed soon after.⁴⁹ By 3:50 P.M. the fast battlecruisers of both fleets had met in an engagement. Soon after the first casualties of the Battle of Jutland occurred. The *H.M.S. Lion's* central turret received a hit and narrowly escaped the ensuing fire reaching its magazine.⁵⁰ This was soon followed by the detonation of the magazines on *H.M.S. Indefatigable* and *H.M.S. Queen Mary*, disintegrating the ships in a matter of seconds.⁵¹ Eager to pursue the enemy that had inflicted so much damage, British Admiral Beatty followed the German battlecruisers straight to the fleet of German dreadnoughts. Realizing his mistake,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 110.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 127.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 138.

⁵¹ Ibid., 140-142

he turned north to return to his nation's own fleet of dreadnoughts. By 6:00 P.M. both dreadnought fleets sighted each other and engaged in a massive display of naval gunnery. The two fleets battered each other with gunfire until night fell at 9:00 P.M. when both fleets began to withdraw, not wishing to risk the confusions of a night engagement.⁵² In the span of three hours the largest engagements of dreadnoughts began and ended. In total, the British lost fourteen ships, including three battlecruisers, totaling 111,000 tons. Germany lost eleven ships, with one battleship and one battlecruiser lost, totaling 62,000.⁵³ Though it appeared that the German Navy had emerged victorious from this battle, it had failed in its ultimate objective of destroying the Grand Fleet. Britain had lost too many ships to claim an outright victory. Yet the British could still maintain the blockade of Germany. Despite the massive scale of the Battle of Jutland and the use of the most advanced ships in the world, nothing had changed. The continued reliance on capital ships had led to nothing but a waste of thousands of lives for no gain.

In the aftermath of Jutland the uselessness of dreadnoughts and the High Seas Fleet became apparent. The fleet was ordered back to Wilhelmshaven where it remained for the rest of the war. In January of 1917 the Kaiser once again authorized a campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare, and thus abandoned the Kaiser's pre-war focus on gaining

⁵² Costello and Hughes, *Jutland*, 200.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 224.

naval dominance with capital ships and shifted to relying on the newer and only partially tested submarine.⁵⁴

In Britain, Admiral Jellicoe, commander of the British Grand Fleet at Jutland, was instructed to leave his coveted post as a Fleet Admiral at sea and take the less glamorous position of First Sea Lord, the head of the Royal Navy, on land.⁵⁵ Jellicoe insisted that this was not a demotion, nor a demonstration of the government's lack of faith in his ability to command, but a recognition of the changing landscape of naval warfare, that large fleets of capital ships were declining in usefulness and alternate approaches needed to be examined and tested.⁵⁶ Jellicoe recognized the limitations of traditional fleets of battleships and believed that Germany would not set the High Seas Fleet out for some time, instead favoring another attempt at submarine warfare.⁵⁷

At once Jellicoe used his new position to shape how the Royal Navy would fight going forward. He created a new position on the War Staff, that of the Anti-Submarine Warfare Division in December of 1916 just before the reintroduction of unrestricted submarine warfare.⁵⁸ Jellicoe came to the realization that Germany's attempt at a passive fleet-in-being strategy was now working, though not for the reasons Germany had intended. With the High Seas Fleet still intact it remained a threat that required the Grand Fleet to remain at

⁵⁴ Davis and Engermen, *Naval Blockades*, 176.

⁵⁵ Jellicoe, *The Crisis of the Naval War*, 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

full strength, including its detachment of destroyers.⁵⁹ The destroyer's small size made it a rather inglorious ship, but perfect for combating submarines. The design of a destroyer included a shallow enough draft that any torpedo would pass well below the keel and with small quick firing guns to quickly sink approaching light craft.⁶⁰ These same characteristics made them perfect counters to the submarine. As the main armament of a submarine was the torpedo, it would be useless against the shallow drafted destroyer; thus leaving the submarine the option to either fight a gun duel against a more heavily armed opponent or try and run from a faster ship.⁶¹ Neither of these options provided a decent chance of survival for a submarine. The Grand Fleet required almost half of the Royal Navy's destroyer force to be able to protect and screen the fleet effectively. This meant that these destroyers would sit idle in port waiting for another fleet engagement instead of actively hunting for submarines at sea.⁶² For the time being the Royal Navy could either protect its capital ships or attempt to counter the German submarine threat, not both. This allowed the Germans to always be able to strike where Britain was weakest. It became apparent that

⁵⁹ A destroyer, abbreviated DD, is a light ship designed to counter lighter torpedo craft and act as a screen for larger ships. Due to its small size, small quick firing guns, and maneuverability it became the favorite craft to counter submarines. Though other smaller craft, converted trawlers, minesweepers, etc. were often placed in anti-submarine duties with varied effectiveness.

⁶⁰ Ibid.,

⁶¹ Ibid., 93.

⁶² Admiral William Sims, *Victory at Sea*, (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1920), 37.

the total number of ships that were able to counter submarines would need to be increased to satisfy both the Grand Fleet's requirements and the Merchant Marine's need for protection from the submarine threat.

While new ships were being built or converted to counter the submarines, other defensive measures were being introduced to alleviate the increasing loss of merchant ships. One method was to give merchant ships general routes to follow as they navigated British waters. The idea was to spread vulnerable merchant shipping across as wide an area as possible in order to reduce the likelihood of a given ship's discovery by a patrolling submarine.⁶³ This ended up having the opposite effect as it decreased a given ship's likelihood of being attacked, but increased the likelihood of a submarine finding any ship. Once this became apparent the need to organize shipping into convoys became a priority. The convoy system had its drawbacks, namely slowing down the rate at which supplies crossed the Atlantic both by making ships wait for a convoy to form and by forcing ships to only go as fast as the slowest ship in the convoy.⁶⁴ However, due to the security it provided, the total amount of supplies crossing the Atlantic increased.⁶⁵

The largest problem of employing convoys was the sheer number of escorting ships needed to guard the

⁶³ Jellicoe, *Crisis of the Naval War*, 41.

⁶⁴ Herman Whitaker, *Hunting the German Shark*, (New York: Century Co., 1918), 156-157.

⁶⁵ Whitaker, *Hunting the German Shark*, 157.

merchant ships.⁶⁶ There were simply not enough ships to protect all of the trade supporting the Allied war effort. This “ship shortage” was a consequence of the pre-war focus on capital ships and limiting the construction of smaller ships. While Jellicoe ordered the expansion of the destroyer force, the simple fact of the matter was that Germany could produce eight submarines a month while the British could only produce at most four destroyers per month.⁶⁷ The problem was further compounded by the fact that few other craft could fill the role of destroyers. While converted trawlers could provide some protection to merchant convoys, they were far too slow and too small to conduct offensive patrols to discover submarines.⁶⁸ It would take a sudden increase in the number of destroyers to counter Germany’s submarine threat. For the time being the Anti-Submarine Division developed several ways to maximize the impact of the Royal Navy’s current resources. Of these developments were the introduction of K-guns (a form of mortar that would lob a charge off a ship that would then explode several feet underwater), an increase in the amount of depth charges carried by ships, the development and deployment of hydrophones to detect submarines, the increased use of decoy or “Q-Ships”, and the increase of defensively armed merchant ships.⁶⁹ These countermeasures stemmed the tide of losses from submarines by taking the Royal Navy off of the

⁶⁶ Jellicoe, *Crisis of the Naval War*, 46.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁶⁸ Jellicoe, *Crisis of the Naval War*, 47.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

defensive and allowing the offensive destruction of Germany's submarines.⁷⁰

Despite these additional measures the most effective answer to the submarine problem was the deployment of additional destroyers. Jellicoe's call for destroyers was answered on 4 May 1917 when the first squadron of American destroyers arrived in Queenstown, Ireland. A few weeks prior, before America was officially at war, Admiral Sims of the United States Navy visited Britain in order to discern the exact extent of the war at sea. Initially, he believed, like many American and British civilians, that the war at sea was going rather poorly for Germany.⁷¹ However, once Admiral Sims met with the British Admiralty, the dire reality of the situation became apparent. Though the British government did not lie in the figures it gave the media, it did hide exactly how many tons of shipping were being lost each month to Germany and in turn how many submarines were being sunk.⁷² Jellicoe revealed to Sims that the British were only weeks away from being starved out of the war and with even the most restrictive rationing of food Britain would reach the limit of its endurance in November of 1917.⁷³ This was of course if the current trend of losing several hundred thousand tons of merchant shipping each month continued uninterrupted. The spring of 1917 saw the worst losses of merchant ships due to submarines of the entire war. More than half a million tons of

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁷¹ Sims, *Victory at Sea*, 5.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 5-7.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 7-11.

shipping were sunk in April 1917 alone.⁷⁴ Jellicoe confided to Sims that he fully expected the situation to worsen with summer since it provided the German submarines with more daylight and better weather to hunt merchant ships.⁷⁵ American destroyers became the only hope of beating back the submarine menace.

Sims and Jellicoe recognized the ingenuity of the German submarine campaign. Such a strategy was unthinkable just three years prior when war broke out in 1914, yet the greatest naval power on earth was now in danger of being not only defeated on the sea, but by their overreliance on antiquated methods of controlling the seas. However, the tides turned as an increasing number of American destroyers and merchant ships were able to supplement the Royal Navy's operations. Britain realized the futility of their pre-war naval strategy far too late to make an effective change, yet were still able to implement their new strategy with the aid of their new American ally.

These American ships were quickly put into great use against the German navy. Within a month of the arrival of the first destroyers, enough escort ships were available to fully adopt the practice of convoying merchants to and from Britain.⁷⁶ The convoy system was perhaps the single most significant step in mitigating the losses from submarines. The Royal Navy inadvertently proved this after the Battle of

⁷⁴ Davis and Engerman, *Naval Blockades*, 169.

⁷⁵ Sims, *Victory at Sea*, 10.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

Jutland, when it chose to maintain the full force of the Grand Fleet's destroyers to escort the fleet. The Grand Fleet after Jutland continued to patrol the North Sea without loss of a dreadnought to a submarine.⁷⁷ Just a few miles south of the Grand Fleet's home port, merchant ships sank in scores due to submarine attack.⁷⁸ The reason for the immunity of the Grand Fleet from submarine attack lay with its destroyer force. Small ships able to escort larger and more vulnerable ships and hunt down submarines were the key to countering Germany's naval tactics. With novel developments such as depth charges and sonar detection, the destroyer changed from a solely defensive escort to an effective tool able to protect ships vulnerable to submarine attack and a keen hunter of submarines. All Britain needed was enough destroyers to protect home waters.

Though the United States could provide the much-needed destroyers, it could not provide the tactics and expertise that the British had honed over the war. Few of the American sailors had wartime experience or experience sailing in the temperamental waters of the North Atlantic.⁷⁹ The heavy swells of the seas disoriented even experienced sailors, and novice sonar operators misidentified mundane debris constantly as submarines or a torpedo coming to end the destroyer.⁸⁰ This foray into British waters under combat conditions provided an indispensable tool to train sailors for

⁷⁷ Ibid., 89.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁹ Sims, *Victory at Sea*, 119.

⁸⁰ Ibid.,

the future of naval warfare.⁸¹ British expertise in the North Atlantic and their novel developments in anti-submarine warfare guided the inexperienced and untested U.S. Navy. Not only would the submarine menace change the world's conceptualization of how naval strategy would play out and its effects on a war in general, but it also gave rise to new naval powers.

The role and importance of certain types of ships changed drastically. The once ignominious destroyer and escort ship became the savior of the Royal Navy and the British Empire. Novel tactics and equipment were developed and tested in order to compete in a new phase of naval combat. Britain still controlled the seas in the antiquated pre-submarine notion. However, this control was quite literally surface level as the fleet that the Royal Navy maintained was designed to counter other traditional surface threats. Submarines however now separated control of the seas into control of the surface and control of the depths.⁸² While the dreadnoughts could control the surface, the submarine could prowl the depths until the most opportune time to strike the surface. Thus, submarines made control of the surface meaningless. Though the British were quickly making changes to counter this deficiency it was the Americans that occupied the strongest position in this new phase of naval conflict. Sims outlined this fundamental change naval strategy and examined how it would impact future wars as

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 21.

well as how the balance of naval power would soon have to be reconsidered. The geography and infrastructure of the world's naval powers now mattered more than ever with the introduction of submarine warfare and the growing importance of international trade in the prosecution of a war. Britain was uniquely susceptible to the threat of submarine warfare. All of the trade entering the country could come from a limited number of directions and would be funneled into the Irish Sea, Orkney Islands, or English Channel. This would allow submarines to lay in wait in a select few areas. Additionally, the small size of the British Isles and limited rail network made achieving self-sufficiency in the modern age a serious problem. The United States suffered none of these problems. The American coast allowed for innumerable directions for which to approach ports from the Atlantic. If an enemy wished to destroy trade entering the United States, it would have to cover nearly every port from Maine to the Rio Grande.⁸³ The same problem would occur with the West Coast. The country's extensive rail network meant that goods entering at any port were easily distributed across the country.⁸⁴ This meant that trade could be easily shifted as needed. Even more simply, the sheer distance between the United States and any other sizable naval power would complicate naval operations off the American coast immensely. The geography of the United States made it virtually impossible to succumb to the problems that Great

⁸³ Sims, *Victory at Sea*, 23.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*,

Britain faced during the submarine peril. This inherent strength provided the foundation for the United States Navy becoming the leading naval power only a few short years later.

The true revolution of naval strategy during the First World War was the abandonment of outdated beliefs on what naval power meant. For centuries the size and number of a navy's biggest ships became a direct measure of that nation's naval power. As new technologies were developed, and nations relied more heavily on international trade for both commerce and sustenance, the actual usefulness of these ships came into question. The Battle of Jutland showed just how useless the dreadnought arms race had been. The full might of both the Grand Fleet and High Seas Fleet had met in battle, yet neither side could claim victory. Less than a year later Britain found itself facing the very real prospect of both defeat on the high seas and either starvation or surrender. The campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare showed that naval power was no longer the control of the seas, but control of the economic activity on the seas. The failure of the Royal Navy to adapt to a rapidly changing strategic situation almost caused the British Empire its greatest defeat, as the over reliance on Britain's status as the world's leading naval power and focus on building ships that aligned to outdated naval strategies hampered the Royal Navy's ability to respond to changing threats. Resting on the laurels of Admiral Nelson and the prestige of big ships, Britain had almost been defeated. Thankfully ingenuity and the United States came to

Britain's aid in its most trying time. The British development of novel anti-submarine tactics, such as the convoy system, were vital developments for a new theory of naval warfare. Yet the British had made these advancements far too late into the war to be able to effectively implement the necessary changes and produce enough of the requisite escort ships. Fortunately, the United States Navy possessed enough manpower and light ships to make up for Britain's material shortcomings. British innovation and American material support secured the seas for Allied ships to carry men and supplies to the Western Front and insured Germany's defeat. Without the combined Merchant Marine and destroyer force of the United States and Great Britain, and the ability to protect those ships, the First World War would have been lost.