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1849-1929

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The Rhodes Historical Review

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The Rhodes Historical Review

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Entrance to the Accademia, and then to America: The Life of Mary Solari, 1849-1929

Rosalind KennyBirch

Mary Solari, a prominent Memphis artist, immigrated from Italy to Memphis in the mid-19th century, a time when immigrants from all corners of the globe flocked to the United States as a land of opportunity. Working class Anglo-Americans felt economically and socially threatened by these immigrants and did not endeavor to hide their distaste. These “settled” Americans sometimes resorted to violence and lynchings to frighten Italian immigrants, whom they labeled as “wops” and “descendants of bandits and assassins.”¹ Females also faced oppression in American society, as they were excluded from male dominated working sectors such as manual labor, and from voting. Despite being an Italian woman, Solari found economic opportunity by establishing herself in the realm of art, a field which was relatively inclusive of females. Solari was able to simultaneously establish herself as both an independent, professional woman, and a charitable, nurturing female by working in the art sector and using the wealth she gained

¹ A. Kenneth Ciongoli, and Jay Parini, *Passage to Liberty and the Rebirth of America: The Story of Italian Immigration* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 22.

from working in this sector to donate to various causes in the Memphis community. She also used her prominence to recreate the depiction of Italians in a society which persecuted them, through both artwork and written commentary. Solari's life demonstrates how immigrants and women broke down socioeconomic barriers and began to assert themselves in a culture dominated by Anglo-American males. As a shipping center for the cotton industry, Memphis hosted white elites who embraced the hierarchal codes of slave-holding society. To them, social order rested on hierarchies of gender and race that subordinated women and non-Anglos. The city, fresh from secession, passionately defended its southern patriarchal identity in the late-19th and early-20th century.²

In 1850, Solari's family immigrated to Memphis from Calvari, Italy, a small town in the north.³ Italian families, like the Solaris, immigrated to America in order to obtain better economic opportunities, often with the specific intent of finding work as agricultural laborers.⁴ By the 1850s, Memphis was heralded as a wealthy city, and because of its primary dependency on the cotton industry and consequently, slave labor, it was dubbed the "Charleston of the West."⁵ Due to this dependency, Memphians worried about northern abolitionists' determination to eliminate the

² Wayne Dowdy, *A Brief History of Memphis* (Charleston: The History Press, 2011).

³ Robert Werle, *The Mary Solari Collection* (Memphis: Christian Brothers University, 2012), 38.

⁴ Ciongoli and Parini, *Passage to Liberty*, 20.

⁵ Dowdy, *A Brief History of Memphis*, 25.

institution of slavery, and in turn, the South's plantation economy.⁶ Mary's parents, Pietro Solari and Pasqualine Cunio, were limited to unskilled labor work, and took up farming. Their inability to read and write in English also made it difficult for them to integrate themselves in the community.⁷ In fact, one of the reasons they specifically moved to Memphis was because there was already a strong Italian network in the area, and they were able to make ties with established families that had previously immigrated to America.⁸ Once in the Memphis community, Mary began to take art classes, and her teacher, Mrs. Morgan, professed that she demonstrated a "decided inclination" towards art.⁹ She pursued this passion wholeheartedly by moving to Florence, Italy, with the intent of attending the famous Accademia. After training at this renowned institute, she attained positive recognition for her work, receiving awards in expositions such as the 1890 Beatrice Exposition, an event designed with the purpose of having Italian females submit their artwork.¹⁰

Upon returning to America, she received numerous offers to participate in expositions, and often won awards for her work at these fairs. She was invited to be on the board of judges in the 1894 Columbian World Exposition in Chicago, and to present her oil and watercolor paintings at the 1895

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Werle, *The Mary Solari Collection*, 38.

⁸ Anthony Canale, interview by author, Memphis, March 29, 2016.

⁹ Francis Evelyn William, "American Women: 1500 Biographies," Typescript, The Mary Solari Collection (1897).

¹⁰ Ibid.

Atlanta Exposition, 1897 Tennessee Centennial, and the 1904 Universal Exposition in St. Louis.¹¹ Later in life, Mary was noted by her Memphis public school teachers for “loving school,” and for her talent as a writer.¹² In a story she wrote titled “And That Little Girl was Me,” Solari described her childhood in Memphis as sanguine after the calamitous Civil War, “when the shadow of God’s broad hand above seemed to bring desolation to our Southland.”¹³ Clearly, she was optimistic about Memphis’s future after the war, and was relieved that the city she loved had rebuilt itself so quickly.

An anonymous journalist wrote an article on Solari in the *Southern Home Magazine*, a magazine that catered to females who operated in the domestic sphere. The anonymous journalist described her as “fearless” and “womanly,” as well as a “natural, unspoiled, busy woman, with a heart for all.”¹⁴ Indeed, the latter description details the expected role of an upper class woman during the mid-19th century: loving, motherly, pure, and generous. According to accounts of wealthy southern males, women were expected to be appealing creatures who not only had lovely personalities and pleasing manners, but also actively embedded themselves in the community by attending social events, such as large dinners, and made charitable

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Werle, *The Mary Solari Collection*, 38.

¹³ Mary Solari, “And That Little Girl Was Me,” Memphis, TN.

¹⁴ “Marie Magdalene Solari: A Remarkable Woman and Her Work,” *Southern Home Magazine* (1900): 82-83.

contributions to institutions such as hospitals.¹⁵ Jane Addams, a suffragette and settlement reformist, is one example of a “new woman” of late-1800s and early-1900s, described as a woman who “integrated Victorian virtues with an activist social role.”¹⁶ During this time period, new women stifled the critiques of people who judged them from venturing outside the home by making reference to domestic values in their work.¹⁷

The anonymous journalist, however, did not simply describe Solari as a southern dame, but also as a professional businesswoman. The journalist described Solari not as a stereotypical upper class woman, but a “fearless” woman willing to challenge social perceptions. The journalist goes on to mention that many people called her “the business woman,” a juxtaposition that shows that the journalist believed that Solari did not have to sacrifice feminine ideals in order to pursue her profession.¹⁸ Rather, the journalist commends her ability to balance the role of charitable female and businesswoman. Colonel J.M. Keating, a prominent journalist for the *New York Journal* and author of a respected written history on yellow fever in Memphis, also contributed to this article on Solari.¹⁹ He described her as a “woman of

¹⁵ Jane T. Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood: 1865-1895* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 51.

¹⁶ Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 269-307.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ “Marie Magdalene Solari: A Remarkable Woman and Her Work,” 83.

¹⁹ William S. Speer, *Sketches of Prominent Tennesseans* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 2003), 154-378.

Memphis, who surpassed Savonarola, in that she conquered the prejudices of Florence and commanded that the gates of the Academy of Art be opened and remain open to women forever.”²⁰ Keating touted her Italian heritage, rather than hiding it, calling her the “Italo-American,” as well as a “woman of Memphis.”²¹ Keating believed that being Italian was not incompatible with being a southern American. Rather, he recognized that Italian heritage could contribute to the culture of Memphis, if displayed in positive mediums, such as artwork. Indeed, Solari was a woman of contrasts: a female professional and an Italian American.

Although Mary Solari was able to turn her passion for art into a profession, the dreams of many second-wave Italian immigrants evaporated quickly as they were welcomed to America by a large and frustrated working class population that viewed immigrants as competitors for jobs – especially ones that required low levels of education. These jobs were often found in the fields. When Italians began to immigrate to the United States, working class American males who feared for their job security complained that “the wops are an inferior race – they get along with Negroes because they’re just like them.”²² Because of the association with the mafia empire in southern Italy, immigrants from this region in particular were classified by working class American males as “descendants of bandits and assassins” who were out to “steal” their

²⁰ “Marie Magdalene Solari: A Remarkable Woman and Her Work,” 83.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ciongoli and Parini, *Passage to Liberty*, 22.

jobs.²³ But verbal abuse was not the worst immigrants had to endure. In 1891, there was a mass lynching of eleven Italians in New Orleans, which was the “largest mass lynching in American history.”²⁴ In 1896, three more Italians were lynched in Hahnville, Louisiana, and in 1899, five other Italians met a similar fate in Tallulah, Louisiana.²⁵ Italian immigrants were the last major European immigrant group to arrive in the United States during its great period of immigration from the mid-1800s to the early-1900s. In 1922, Italians had an average of 17 years of residence in America, whereas the Germans had an average of 38 years, and the Irish of 51.²⁶ By the time that 4,476,739 Italian immigrants had entered America between 1822 and 1922, hostility towards foreigners had grown to unprecedented levels.²⁷ Indeed, prejudice had become practice.

Mary Solari’s surviving documents contain no apparent traces of the violent xenophobia that many other Italians faced. Indeed, Solari’s pursuits as a female immigrant in America differed from that of the majority of Italian immigrants in the mid- to late-1800’s, placing her outside of the alleged threat that immigrant agricultural laborers posed to working class male Americans. What allowed her to escape the prejudices that many other Italians faced, however, was her commitment to displaying the

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Larie Tedesco, “Anti-Italian Mood Led to 1891 Lynchings,” *Times Picayune Newspaper*.

²⁵ Ciongoli and Parini, *Passage to Liberty*, 22.

²⁶ Antonio Stella, *Some Aspects of Italian Immigration to the United States* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1924).

²⁷ Ibid.

virtues of her Italian heritage through artwork, a medium that could be publicly displayed in places such as exposition locations, so as to be accessible to all Americans.

While Solari did not face hostility from working class males in America, she did receive a shock when she went to Florence, Italy, in 1880, to enroll in the famous Accademia of Florence. The Accademia did not permit women to study within its walls, leaving Solari with a dilemma of where to take her talent. Amos Cassioli [1832-1891], a famous Italian painter, became her beloved mentor for several years. Cassioli likely agreed to become her teacher because he was involved with the Purismo movement, which endeavored to keep traditional Italian literature and artwork relevant for the younger generation.²⁸ Indeed, Solari's study under Cassioli greatly influenced her work, which was particularly apparent in her sketches.²⁹ But she remained determined to gain admittance to the Accademia. During this campaign, she became practiced at identifying the barriers to professional advancement that females faced, and in turn, learned how to use what limited power she had as a female in a patriarchal society to eliminate these barriers. Professors at the Accademia made disparaging remarks: one unnamed professor informed Solari that she "had missed her vocation [and] might better learn to cook a meal [or] knit stockings."³⁰ Solari refused to listen, and instead patiently challenged the decision over the course of approximately six years. She

²⁸ Cassioli, Amos (*Treccani Encyclopedia*).

²⁹ Werle, *The Mary Solari Collection*, 39.

³⁰ William, *American Women: 1500 Biographies*, 1.

utilized nearby resources, such as Cassioli, in order to continue to practice her craft while she fought her case. By using historical arguments to explain that women had been an integral contributor to Italy's great period of cultural and artistic achievement in the Renaissance, Solari was able to convince the Accademia to admit her as a pupil. Solari explained to the Accademia that "when Italy was noted for her women students in the University of Bologna, and a few such noble and intelligent women as Vittoria Colonna, [who lived during the Renaissance] her men grew out and away from narrow grooves of thought and purpose and became leaders of the world."³¹ She learned how to use historical examples of powerful females in order to lend credence to her argument that women should be afforded the same opportunities as men. Solari's persistence not only allowed her to achieve her goal of enrolling in the Accademia, but also helped other females gain acceptance. Indeed, by 1897, approximately one third of the students enrolled at the Accademia were women.³²

Although Solari achieved her objective of gaining admittance to the Accademia, and opened its doors to future female applicants, the experience was a taxing one. In a letter she wrote to a friend from Memphis, Ms. Sims, she lamented the fact that the recipient did not write her more often. "I wait for them (the letters) so long," she says, "and often in vain; the disappointment takes away part of the

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

relish."³³ Indeed, Solari relied on communication with her friends and family in Memphis to cope with loneliness. Furthermore, she says that her brother's letters "are addressed plainly and simply Florence, Italy, and they are rarely out more than 15 days and it is very seldom that during my stay here I have been longer than this period without a letter from him."³⁴ Solari liked to remain in constant contact with her family and friends while she was in Italy, perhaps to keep her spirits up while she struggled to gain admission to the Accademia. But once she was able to enroll, she did not let these letters distract her from her studies. During her tenure as a student, Solari worked tirelessly to prove her artistic worth, receiving a prize for composition of the antique and modeling, a bronze medal for perspective and watercolor, an honorable mention for figure, and a silver prize for her overall work.³⁵ The silver prize she was awarded at the Accademia was the first ever awarded to a woman by the Florentine Accademia, demonstrating that she had successfully proven her worth as an artist.³⁶

She was not content with these accomplishments, however, and submitted watercolor paintings to the 1890 Beatrice Exposition, an exposition which was open to all females of Italy. She came out of this exposition with the highest distinction, but the crucial aspect of this exposition

³³ Mary M. Solari to Ms. Sims. August 20, 1880. Florence, Italy.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ William, *American Women: 1500 Biographies*, 1.

³⁶ Ibid.

was that over one thousand women entered their work.³⁷ Indeed, female artists were starting to gain more exposure in Italy. When Solari prepared to return to America, she had gained tools of leverage that could be used despite her identity as a female. She also knew how to effectively navigate male dominated institutions so that she could gain opportunity for herself. Her experience gaining entry to the Accademia demonstrated that if women were effectively able to challenge patriarchal norms, they could pursue professional advancement. Italy had proved to be a training ground in social negotiation as well as art.

By the time Solari returned to Memphis, she was well prepared to navigate a professional world dominated by males, and did not allow her identity as a female stop her from establishing herself as an artist and competing at the top levels of the American artistic sector. She did so by immediately becoming involved with the expositions that dominated American culture in the late-1800s and early-1900s. In 1894, she was the only person from the South asked to create a Board of Judges at the Columbian World Exposition in Chicago.³⁸ Because she was the only southerner to whom this honor was bestowed, the public was forced to admit that she was not just a talented *female* artist, but rather an accomplished artist in general – more accomplished than male artists in the South. According to an anonymous journalist from *Southern Home Magazine*, “her

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ “Marie Magdalene Solari: A Remarkable Woman and Her Work,” 82.

work in this body of celebrated artists was so thorough as to entitle her to be called the business woman."³⁹

After the bloody Civil War, the plantation culture of the South was transformed by the loss of slavery and male lives in the war. According to southern males before the Civil War, women were expected to be "meek," "submissive," "graceful," "able to suppress anger," and "true Christians."⁴⁰ After the war, southern males no longer had as much power to determine a women's place in southern society.⁴¹ A collection of diary entries and letters from the late-1800s revealed that although some women worried about not having a husband, others relished in the chance of not being subjected to the despotism of one man, and having more freedom.⁴² Through artwork, Solari set a precedent for females in the workforce, proving that women could become leaders in certain economic sectors, such as art. Her work was showcased at other expositions, and she received numerous honors at both the 1895 Atlanta Exposition and the 1897 Tennessee Centennial, which allowed her reputation to continue to grow on a national level.⁴³

As Solari's artistic reputation continued to rise, her reputation as an advocate for women's rights grew as well. One anonymous journalist who reported on Solari's

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 19.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 273.

⁴³ William, *American Women: 1500 Biographies*, 1.

involvement in the 1904 Universal Exposition in St. Louis states that “in connection with her life work she has done much to help the woman’s cause by opening the path that enabled them to place their work on the same basis as the masculine artist,” acknowledging that women could compete with males in the artistic world.⁴⁴ According to the anonymous journalist, Solari’s success exemplified how women could gain professional recognition for themselves in the art sector. Because of her participation in the 1904 Universal Exposition in St. Louis, Solari received a letter from David Francis, a prominent politician of Missouri who had previously served as mayor of St. Louis, thanking her for her “active interest” and “efficient cooperation” in the exposition.⁴⁵ Indeed, Francis, even as a somewhat conservative political figure, did not show any hostility towards her as a female or as an immigrant in this Exposition. By gaining attention as a recognizable, nationally renowned, southern female artist, Solari’s identity as an immigrant became less relevant. She was disassociated from the “typical” immigrant, who worked in the factory or as an agricultural laborer. In newspaper sources, Solari is identified as Italian, but not as an immigrant. One article emphasized that “her whole heart is with her adopted country,” suggesting that Solari was a “trustworthy” immigrant, and was not after the jobs that working class

⁴⁴ “Miss Mary M. Solari: Only Woman Honored in America on the Jury of Fine Arts at the St. Louis Exposition.”

⁴⁵ *Universal Exposition of 1904*. David Francis to Mary M. Solari. August 12, 1905. Saint Louis, MO.

Anglo-American males protected so defensively.⁴⁶ Her reputation as an artist, which was not seen as a threat, eclipsed her reputation as an immigrant. Indeed, even though immigrants were seen as a threat in working class American society, they were respected and accepted in the professional realm of art.

In her public letters, Solari made statements that the average Italian immigrant could not make without generating protest. For example, in her opinion piece published in the *Commercial Appeal* on the “Need for Practical Art in Southern Schools,” Solari states that “it is a fact Italians are the finest draughtsmen in the whole world; the peasant, the bootblack, or the shop boy is often as good a critic in art matters as in his more cultural superior,” and goes on to claim that “Italians are the most expert designers.”⁴⁷ A “wop” in the field would not have had the liberty to make this claim. Yet, there is no evidence that Solari’s opinion pieces were met with hostility. In fact, in an interview with the same prominent Memphis news source she had submitted to just three months prior, she made similarly bold statements, declaring that “among the American artists there are many whose works are mere attempts, for they do not suggest a thought.”⁴⁸ Indeed, she believed that Italian art was far more thoughtful, and

⁴⁶ “Miss Mary M. Solari: Only Woman Honored in America on the Jury of Fine Arts at the St. Louis Exposition.”

⁴⁷ Mary M. Solari, “Need for Practical Art in Southern Schools,” *Commercial Appeal* (Memphis), February 14, 1895.

⁴⁸ “Miss Solari on Artists: She Counsels Them to Be True to Their Profession,” *Commercial Appeal* (Memphis), May 13, 1895.

superior to, the works of American artists. Her opinionated messages were not viewed as threatening, because they did not criticize the work of male Anglo-American laborers. The art sector was not a sphere in which they feared for their job security. Yet, Solari equated “hand-work” to art. She explained that, “as books should life a reader out himself, and give a wholesome interest in others, so hand-work should elevate the workman above the common average of wage-earners, and make him morally and physically a more perfect man; so in the common schools, art should be cultivated, thus giving an impetus to those who possess talent.”⁴⁹ She suggested that those who worked with their hands, American and Italian alike, could raise their status by participating in art, as she had done. Solari’s identity as a female allowed her the opportunity to move up in the economic ranks, unnoticed by nativists, without facing malevolence from working class Anglo-Americans. But it was her national reputation and professional successes in the artistic sector that truly allowed her to escape the violent attacks that many Italian immigrants were victim to in the late-1800s and early-1900s.

Solari also engaged with the local community by regularly submitting opinion pieces to Memphis newsletters. Female writers were becoming more commonplace and less controversial in the mid-1800s, which allowed Solari to write her opinion pieces without fear of intense backlash in the late-1800s and early-1900s. Authors such as Louisa May

⁴⁹ Werle, *The Mary Solari Collection*, 43.

Alcott wrote popular novels about women, without portraying them as revolutionary figures or as possible competitors to men in the job market. According to Judith E. Harper, author of *Women During the Civil War: An Encyclopedia*, in 1862, when Mary Solari was a young girl, “women’s literacy rates began to soar.”⁵⁰ In fact, Harper reports that “women made up nearly half of all writers of popular literature in the country.”⁵¹ Solari grew up in an age in which female writers were popular and prominent. It is likely that they served as inspiration to young Mary, who loved school and even wrote her own short stories throughout her life, including “And That Little Girl Was Me.” According to Harper, women were also beginning to write in a more opinionated fashion, in order to “shape the way their nation viewed its mission.”⁵² Thus, Solari’s pieces and comments fit into a greater context of women’s subtle attempts to challenge the patriarchal hierarchies embedded in American society.

In addition to her writings, Solari’s work as an artist helped to improve the image of her native country in a society which was hostile to Italians. Many of her works depict scenes of Italy. *The House at the Harbor* (circa 1890) reproduces a classic Italian canal, complete with modest sailboats lining its walls.⁵³ Houses line the canal, painted

⁵⁰ Judith E. Harper, *Women During the Civil War: An Encyclopedia* (Routledge: New York, 2004), 247.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *The House at the Harbor*, c. 1890, The Mary Solari Collection, Christian Brothers University, Memphis.

with clay, tan, and ivory colors, characteristic of classic Italian homes. The residences illustrated in *Florence, Italy* (circa 1890), are stately and marked by red tile rooftops, a romantic image associated with Italy.⁵⁴ There are no people in either scene, ensuring that the focus of the painting is entirely on the aesthetics of Italy. One landscape painting depicts a bridge in Florence, the *Fonte Santa Trinita* (circa 1890), known in English as the Holy Trinity Bridge.⁵⁵ This particular bridge has statues of the seasons atop it- here the females Primavera (spring) and Summer are shown. These were important mythological figures in the time period in which ancient Rome was the most powerful empire in the world. Indeed, Solari's paintings of Italian scenery romanticize the beautiful and historically powerful country of Italy.

Italy was well known for its Renaissance artwork, and trained American artists had great respect for the nation's aesthetic tradition. Italian immigrants, however, were not associated with this legacy. Solari used the Italian Renaissance to her advantage, seizing the opportunity to use Renaissance artwork to enhance the reputation of Italian Americans. In her work, *The Artist* (circa 1890), Solari depicts a man dressed in traditional Italian fashion examining a canvas, with a woman right next to him pointing and giving

⁵⁴ *Florence, Italy*, c. 1890, The Mary Solari Collection, Christian Brothers University, Memphis.

⁵⁵ *Fonte Santa Trinita*, c. 1890, The Mary Solari Collection, Christian Brothers University, Memphis.

suggestions.⁵⁶ This subject matter hints at the rich tradition of Italian art, but also shows a woman in the role of expert. Thus, Solari portrays Renaissance Italy as a society in which women were involved in business, while simultaneously paying homage to the artistic roots of the country. In another watercolor piece, Solari paints a lively representation of the *Costume of the 13th Century* (circa 1890) in two different works (numbered one and two).⁵⁷ The costumes consist of flamboyant colors and bold patterns, but also capture fashionable details that amuse, including vivid feathers, billowing sleeves, and functional belts. Solari's work excites the eye, again by painting images of Italy at the height of the country's financial wealth and cultural dominance. One of the most popular subject matters of the Renaissance time period was the subject of the Madonna and Child. In her 1890 work, *Madonna and Child (after Torono)* Solari unmistakably represents Mary and Jesus as Italian.⁵⁸ The headdress on the Virgin is akin to those worn by Italian women in the Renaissance, and the dark hair, shape of the eyelids, and olive skin tone are characteristically Italian. Portraying Jesus and Mary as Italian would perhaps heighten southern Anglo-Christians' impression of Italians, by serving as a subtle reminder of the important role that the church played in Renaissance Italy. Solari's artwork

⁵⁶ *The Artist*, c. 1890, The Mary Solari Collection, Christian Brothers University, Memphis.

⁵⁷ *Costume of the 13th Century*, c. 1890, The Mary Solari Collection, Christian Brothers University, Memphis.

⁵⁸ *Madonna and Child (after Torono)*, c. 1890, The Mary Solari Collection. Christian Brothers University, Memphis.

successfully serves as a reminder of Italy's rich cultural heritage.

Solari's achievements as an artist caused her to become a wealthy woman who could donate to the Memphis community. In the late-1800s and early-1900s, literature encouraging women to donate to their country became popular. *Godey's Lady's Book* was a popular magazine that encouraged charitable sentiments. Sarah Hale, the editor in chief in 1846, remarked that "the time of action is now. We have to sow the fields—the harvest is sure. The greatest triumph of this progression is redeeming woman from her inferior position and placing her side by side with man, a help-mate for him in all his pursuits."⁵⁹ Although Hale encouraged women to work with men, she more so encouraged them to act as assistants, or "help-mates." Most of her suggestions for women to contribute to society were through acts of charity, thus gendering this activity. On the one hand, Solari encouraged charity in Memphis, writing an article titled "*If Christ Should Come to Memphis, and Visit the Hospital, What Would He See?*," which urged donations to the Memphis City Hospital.⁶⁰ On the other hand, wealthy from successful art sales, Solari herself was an active donor towards the end of her life. In 1927, Solari donated part of her collection to be kept in an exhibition gallery at Christian Brothers College, so as to be "readily accessible and

⁵⁹ Sarah Josepha Hale, *The Complete Godey's Lady's Book*, 1846.

⁶⁰ "Marie Magdalene Solari: A Remarkable Woman and Her Work," 83.

available to the public," and "free of charge."⁶¹ One year later, Solari gave a tract of land worth \$150,000 to Christian Brothers College (now University), which was described by one anonymous journalist as "one of the greatest educational benefactions in the history of Memphis."⁶² Solari also taught art classes that were open to men and women in the Memphis community. In a photograph from the early-1900s, Solari is captured in the act of teaching a local art class. She is painting along with the students, and sketches of men wearing traditional Italian hats are hung upon the wall for students to see.⁶³ These constant reminders of her Italian heritage could hang safely in her classroom, without fear of defacement. Students in the classroom saw Italians as aspirational figures, and not as the immigrant laborers who were competing with working class Anglo-American males for work in the field. Indeed, Solari was able to recreate the image of Italians in her classroom.

In addition to these acts of philanthropy and education, Solari operated as a social advocate for the city, writing letters about subject matters such as the education of young boys and the reforming of youthful criminals. These acts helped to better the Memphis community, and one anonymous journalist from the *Commercial Appeal* heralded her donations and commitment to furthering education as

⁶¹ *Extracts from Contract between Mary Solari and Christian Brothers College*, December 24, 1927, Memphis, TN.

⁶² "Miss Solari's Gift," c. 1927, *Commercial Appeal* (Memphis).

⁶³ Untitled Photograph, c. early-1900s, The Mary Solari Collection, Christian Brothers University, Memphis.

“influential” and “inspiring.”⁶⁴ Due to Solari’s dedication to Memphis, she was greatly respected as a champion of the city, allowing her to become completely accepted by the American community, and as a citizen of Memphis, rather than as an Italian immigrant. Indeed, Solari balanced the roles of successful, professional artist, and charitable, southern, upper class female seamlessly, attracting only positive attention from the Memphis community and the nation as a whole. Because she fulfilled the role of a charitable, southern upper class woman, Solari was able to publicly embrace her Italian heritage without fear of harm. In fact, her philanthropic acts were so supportive of the Memphis community that no one could question her loyalty to locale.

By using a tactful approach to become established in the economic sector of art, despite her identity as a female, Solari avoided the typical immigrant’s strategy of gaining economic opportunities through labor or factory work. After gaining recognition as an artist, Solari was not viewed as an immigrant, but rather as an American public figure influenced by Italian culture. By using what limited agency she had as a female in creative ways, Solari was able to become a prominent artist. Moreover, because her work did not fall within industrial and agricultural sectors, she did not compete for work with Anglo-American working class males, and instead gained prominence in the artistic realm of society. It was in the artistic sphere that she was able to shed

⁶⁴ “Miss Solari’s Gift.”

her reputation as an immigrant without sacrificing her heritage. In turn, through her artwork and her public statements, Solari used her esteemed position in society to enhance the reputation of Italian culture. By doing so, Solari demonstrated ways in which social minorities, such as immigrant groups and females, could creatively exercise their agency in order to gain influence without being met by malicious attacks.

Founders and Fascists in a Fuller Framework: Contextualizing the Spectrum of British Eugenic Opinion toward Nazi Practices in Light of the Field's Foundation and Problematic Colonial Encounters

Nathaniel Plemons

The historical study of Nazi eugenic practices and the ways in which they were viewed (and in some cases supported) by American eugenicists is well known and studied.⁶⁵ Less researched, however, are the views held by British eugenicists regarding the Nazi study and implementation of eugenic practices. This is a peculiar place to see a relative lack of research considering the field's British origins. Even less examined is the fact that British eugenicists, particularly the British Eugenics Society, were not uniform in their opposition to Nazi eugenics. Although the majority certainly rejected the blatantly racialized eugenics employed by Nazis as pseudoscience in favor of a class-based (though ultimately proven to be similarly pseudoscientific) framework, this stance is problematized when contrasted with British colonial eugenicists who employed racialized eugenic frameworks to justify African colonialism at the same time. Moreover, a minority within the Society was tentatively supportive of the Nazis' ability to both rapidly and successfully implement both various positive and negative eugenic practices and hoped that, by fostering relations through societies like the International Federation of Eugenic Organizations (the IFEO), they could learn to successfully implement eugenic practice in Britain as

⁶⁵ Examples include: Nancy L. Gallagher, *Breeding Better Vermonters: The Eugenics Project in the Green Mountain State* (UPNE, 1999); Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Christine Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

well. Finally, when he is mentioned at all, Captain George Pitt-Rivers stands as a glaring exception to both these majority and minority opinions. Pitt-Rivers openly and enthusiastically supported the vehemently anti-Bolshevik and anti-Semitic policies of the Nazis, from his exposure to them at the height of his academic prominence in the late 1920s as a published and respected anthropologist to his imprisonment as a member of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) and a Nazi sympathizer in 1940. Pitt-Rivers inhabits the most extreme end of the spectrum of British eugenic opinion at this time.⁶⁶

The British Eugenics Society was influential in its novel attempt to bring about societal change through applying what was then considered a legitimate science. Furthermore, these attempts to use science to address large-scale societal issues speak to the economic and socio-political concerns that British society was facing from the field's founding up and through the defacement of its public image through its connotation of Nazism. The failure of several previous histories to adequately discuss each facet of the Society, when they even bother to mention them in their totality, and properly contextualize them with the Society's origins and problematic colonial offshoots presents a blurred image of the Society that, by extension, distorts and misrepresents its historical study. By analyzing all three facets of British eugenic opinion regarding Nazi policies in light of eugenics' British origins, the socio-economic and

⁶⁶ Bradley Hart, *George Pitt-Rivers and the Nazis* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

political contexts that surrounded its development, and the hypocritical nature of British colonial eugenics practices one can envision a more authentic (if fragmentary) conception of the British Eugenics Society.

Observing the full spectrum of reactions displayed by the British Eugenics Society to Nazi racial hygiene elucidates a portion of history that seems neglected. Particularly, the histories of the Society's minority and the exceptional case of George Pitt-Rivers have (until Bradley Hart's *George Pitt-Rivers and the Nazis*) been primarily confined to the footnotes of various histories when they are mentioned at all. For example, Mackenzie's 1976 article "Eugenics in Britain" claims to be a general study of the history of the movement in Britain, but he devotes no discussion whatsoever to its minority and lacks any reference to the Society having the slightest interest in Nazi practices or their implementation. Pitt-Rivers, though mentioned, is written off as an eccentric lone wolf in half a sentence, keeping this overly rosy picture of the Society intact.⁶⁷ Barkan's *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* is hardly better. Although it contains an excellent discussion of Julian Huxley's role in guiding the Society away from Nazi Germany the minority remains absent and Pitt Rivers is again brushed off.⁶⁸ Even Nancy Stepan's *The Idea of Race in*

⁶⁷ Donald MacKenzie, "Eugenics in Britain," *Social Studies of Science* 6, no. 3/4 (1976): 499-532, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/284693>.

⁶⁸ Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960 fails to mention any dissent from majority opinion whatsoever.⁶⁹ The closest any historian has come to addressing all three facets of the British Eugenics Society would be Bradley Hart in his precursor to *George Pitt-Rivers and the Nazis*, an article titled “Watching the ‘Eugenic Experiment’ Unfold: The Mixed Views of British Eugenicists Toward Nazi Germany in the Early 1930s.” Though Hart does an admirable job of displaying the minority opinion, his main focus seems to have been bringing the story of Pitt-Rivers’ connection to the Nazis to light for the first time. The work’s main flaws exist in his treatment of the majority, which consists of a scant two and half page summary that paints it in the broadest and blandest of strokes.⁷⁰ More importantly, he fails to discuss the larger context necessary for the reader to understand the basis of the majority’s rejection of Nazi eugenics as an issue of rejecting what they perceived as racialized pseudoscience as well as its hypocrisy in rejecting a system of racialized eugenics while their fellows simultaneously employed it abroad.⁷¹ These and other accounts of the Society seem to gloss over the more aberrant facets of the Society’s character on a fairly consistent basis, despite the availability of sources that would serve to elucidate them, or else focus on them so intensely as to swing popular perception too far in the other direction,

⁶⁹ Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1982), 168.

⁷⁰ Hart, “Watching the Eugenics Experiment Unfold,” 53-55.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

thereby obscuring important aspects of the largest facet of the Society's character necessary for readers to contextualize the opinions of the minority.

Before directly engaging with British eugenicists during the Nazi era it is necessary to engage with the field's origins so as to contextualize the Society's thought processes when evaluating the legitimacy of Nazi eugenic practice. In 1865 Sir Francis Galton, inspired by his cousin Darwin's theory of evolution, published an essay entitled "Hereditary Talent and Character," where he proceeded to apply it to human beings.⁷² For Galton this was a matter of simple logic, for if all animals are subject to the theory of evolution, and humans are animals, it follows that the tenets of evolution must apply at least in part to humans. Galton proposed that it was in humanity's best interest as a species to direct the course of human evolution in a *positive* manner given our newfound awareness of the process. He emphasized the term positive in order to communicate his belief that it was *only* ethical to explore and implement his findings and theories regarding the application of evolutionary principles to humanity so long as no one was explicitly forbidden or somehow precluded from reproducing.⁷³ Specifically, the term "positive eugenics" meant the encouragement and incentivizing of "fit" populations (typically those gifted with athleticism, intellect, and/or high birth) to reproduce at a higher rate than the "unfit" in order to increase the overall

⁷² Francis Galton, "Hereditary Talent and Character," *Classics in the History of Psychology*, January 1, 1865, accessed October 1, 2016, <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Galton/talent.htm>.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

occurrence of these desirable traits on a societal level. Of course, its inverse existed in “negative eugenics,” which sought to discourage or in many cases preclude “unfit” populations (typically the mentally and physically disabled as well as the poor and “unmoral” figures) from reproducing at a rate greater than or equal to “fit” populations so as to reduce the occurrence of these undesirable traits in general.⁷⁴

Though first regarded with scientific suspicion and societal distaste, eugenics became legitimized in Britain through a number of scientific and socio-political factors in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. For example, the Weismann Germ theory suggested that traits passed on from one generation to the next were primarily a result of biology rather than environment, and advances in biometric methodology allowed for Galton and his contemporaries to more accurately model correlations between physical and mental ability with heredity. Additionally, the rediscovery of Mendelian theories of heredity allowed for hereditary questions to be reduced to simple numerical ratios primarily based on immediate parentage. Together, these justified claims of scientific legitimacy while allowing for the use of simplistic modeling and the omission of environmental factors as major influencers in the hereditary process.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* (London: Macmillan, 1883), 17, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.mugu.com/galton/books/human-faculty/text/galton-1883-human-faculty-v4.pdf> f 33-39; Stepan, *The Idea of Race*, 116-117.

In terms of socio-political justification and societal buy-in, Great Britain was beset by numerous social ills in the 1880s and 1890s. An intense economic depression kicked off by the Panic of 1873 led to a rise in strikes, unemployment, and radicalism due to a massive destabilization of the international currency market. This led to a consequent growth in poverty, disease, and alcoholism rates despite numerous attempts made by Parliament to alleviate these stresses through social legislation. A concurrent rise in lower class birthrates and decline of middle and upper class birthrates led Britons to fear that they would be overrun by a class that they believed was physically, mentally, and morally “unfit” to adequately rule. The Second Boer War catalyzed these fears. The near rout of the British at the hands of South African colonists and, particularly, “natives” frightened Britons with the idea that the compounding social ills and subsequent rise of the “unfit” that they were experiencing at home would lead to the loss of their empire abroad through societal enervation and consequent military impotence. With the failure of Parliamentary legislation to bring about effective change, many began looking to science, particularly eugenics, to provide a cure for their societal ills that would ensure the longevity and viability of the British Empire at home and abroad.⁷⁶

By 1907 enough interest had been generated to justify founding the Eugenics Education Society, which published its first Annual Report a year later as a foray out of academia

⁷⁶ Ibid., 117-121.

and into the public realm.⁷⁷ Written by its first president, Montague Crackanthorpe, the report consists of a fairly cogent outline of the Society's history, beliefs, and ideas relating to eugenics and the ways in which the Society believed the field's findings could be successfully practiced and implemented. After an introduction consisting of a brief summation of the field's founders and its recent history Crackanthorpe sets the tone for the piece with his discussion in his second section, "Heredity." Before discussing any eugenic practices or beliefs he begins the section with a disclaimer that is meant to ward off the oft-cited concern that eugenics is too blunt an instrument to be applied given the variance of individual circumstances. He writes,

What makes the science of Eugenics possible is not that "like begets like," as the popular saying is, but that there are laws of heredity. Like does not always beget like... Eugenics deals with *averages* rather than with individual cases. *In the average* the law of heredity acts with practical certainty, and all Eugenic questions are questions of average.⁷⁸

Crackanthorpe argued that, given that eugenics was only concerned with change at a societal level through "raising" the average quality of citizens, those who leveled criticisms at its application to each individual case were committing a

⁷⁷ Montague Crackanthorpe, *The Eugenics Education Society First Annual Report* (London, 1909), accessed September 10, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b16230735>.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 5. Emphasis Crackanthorpe's.

composition fallacy, falsely attributing the flaws of individual cases to the endeavor as a whole.

In 1909 the Glasgow Eugenics Society, a branch of the Eugenic Education Society, published a widely-distributed pamphlet that distilled the aims of the Society in a manner accessible to the general readership. At its end a set of five bullet points conveyed the Society's aims regarding public outreach. Briefly put, the Society aimed to promote the spread of eugenic knowledge so as to cull the "negative attributes" of the "unfit" from the general population while simultaneously promoting the reproduction of those seen as "fit" or exceptional in an attempt to raise the overall quality of the population as a whole.⁷⁹

Given the societal aims of the group's agenda, public outreach was of primary concern throughout its existence. Perhaps the most interesting example of this was from the 1920s, when the existence of cinemas became an accessible form of popular entertainment. This allowed for films whose plots utilized eugenic practices to solve contemporary issues to be made accessible to the general public in an easily digestible format.⁸⁰ Ads and editorials taken out in newspapers played a role as well. Some examples include the recounting of a well-attended lecture on the importance of birth control delivered to the women of Kettering, a

⁷⁹*Glasgow Eugenics Society Pamphlet*, (Glasgow, 1909), accessed September 10, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b16238035>.

⁸⁰ R.M. Hewell, Letter to Mrs. A.C. Gotto, May 27, 1919, accessed September 10, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b16237638>; "Crippled," Film concept, 1921, accessed September 11, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b16237638>.

meeting of doctors and academics concerning the “sterilization problem” of the unfit in Brighton, and an argument against the right of the “mentally defective” to marry in Glasgow.⁸¹

Through these methods of public outreach the British Eugenics Society accrued members of both the general public and people of academic distinction. However, despite growing interest, the Society seemed to lack the legislative impetus to realize changes in policy. The greatest frustration was their inability to get laws passed concerning the sterilization of the mentally disabled. For example, during the early 1930s, C.P. Blacker, the Society’s General Secretary, approached Parliament with an act that would begin to implement sterilization measures in this population. Labour and Catholic interests, however, quashed it.⁸² When the Nazi Party came into power in 1933 and passed the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring (which allowed the compulsory sterilization of any citizen who suffered from a list of alleged genetic disorders) only months later, it served as a point of both frustration and intrigue to the Society. Members could not help but wonder how a party that had only been in power for a few months had

⁸¹ “Healthier Children Wanted: Dr. Marie Scopes at Kettering on Birth Control,” *Northhamptonshire Advertiser*, February 24, 1931, accessed September 12, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b16241915>; “Doctors and Teachers Confer: Protecting Society from the Unfit,” *Brighton Argus*, October 10, 1935, accessed September 12, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b16241873>; “Mental Defectives and Marriage,” *Aberdeen Press Journal*, May 5, 1935, accessed September 12, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b16241873>.

⁸² Daniel J. Kevels, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 167-169.

managed to implement sweeping eugenic policies in so short a period while their dedicated society of academics and enthusiasts had virtually nothing to show for decades of work.

The Society attempted to find out through their connections in the IFEO, a loose-knit organization founded in 1921 in an attempt to unite eugenicists from Europe and America in the pursuit of eugenic knowledge and implementation.⁸³ Though Pitt-Rivers acted as the Society's representative in 1929, he had a falling out with the Society's leadership in 1932, leading to his resignation.⁸⁴ In his stead Cora Brooking Sanders Hodson, the Society's secretary during the 1920s, took the position and became the link between Nazi eugenicists, the IFEO, and the Society during the 1930s.⁸⁵

It is in Hodson we find a clear example of the Society's minority opinion concerning Nazi Eugenics – that of cautious optimism. Deeply influenced by her time spent in and around the IFEO, Hodson wrote *Human Sterilization Today: A Survey of the Present Position* in 1934. It served as both an analysis of the sterilization techniques employed by physicians, primarily in the US and Germany, as well as an

⁸³ Harry H. Laughlin, *A Decade of Progress in Eugenics; Scientific Papers of the Third International Congress of Eugenics Held at American Museum of Natural History, New York, August 21-23, 1932, August 23, 1932*, accessed September 19, 2016, https://archive.org/stream/decadeofprogress00inte/decadeofprogress00inte_djvu.txt.

⁸⁴ George Pitt-Rivers, Memorandum to the Council titled "Policy and Other Matters," April 6, 1932, accessed September 29, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b16233797>.

⁸⁵ C.P. Blacker and Ursula Grant Duff, "Obituary: Mrs. C.B.S. Hodson," *The Eugenics Review* 45, no. 2(Jul.1953), accessed October 3, 2016, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2973446>.

attempt to persuade British readers to lobby Parliament for the passage of similar laws.⁸⁶ In it, Hodson argues that Germany's seemingly newfound and vigorous interest in eugenics as well as its willingness to implement legislation should be emulated.⁸⁷ She goes so far as to say that Germany's "characteristic thoroughness" was a flaw, one that slowed the process through which the "mentally defective" could be effectively sterilized.⁸⁸ Over time Hodson's enthusiasm concerning the sterilization of the "mentally defective" grew to the point of zealotry and, by 1936, several members of the Society became concerned that her reports were becoming more filled with propaganda than with verifiable facts. Of particular concern was a circular letter that she had published in the April 1936 issue of the *Eugenics Review*. In it, she made the unsubstantiated claim that "Great Britain has four times as much feeble-mindedness as the Northern part of Europe and kindred nations of Central Europe" to drum up support to pass a sterilization bill.⁸⁹ C.P. Blacker was prompted to publicly rebuke her claims in a letter to the Editor that followed hers in the same issue, stating, "There is no evidence for the statement quoted in Mrs. Hodson's circular

⁸⁶ Cora Brookings Hodson, *Human Sterilization To-day: A Survey of the Present Position* (London: Watts & Co. 1934), accessed November 25, 2016, <http://archives.wellcomelibrary.org>.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 45-49.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸⁹ Cora Brookings Hodson, "Circular to all Fellows of the British Eugenics Society," April 1936, accessed September 9, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b16232513>; Cora Brookings Hodson, "Letter to the Editor of the *Eugenics Review*," 86-87, April 1936, accessed September 9, 2016, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2985549>.

letter... [and] I should like to express the hope that it will not be viewed as representing the views of this Society."⁹⁰ His private condemnation, which went unpublished, was even more strongly worded and could be seen to serve as a denunciation of all members of the tentatively supportive minority. In it, Blacker states

I unhesitatingly say that the most dangerous enemies of eugenics are not to be found among the ranks of socialists... but among those of its over-enthusiastic and intemperate advocates. It is a fact that the Society has acquired in certain quarters the reputation consisting of cranks, faddists, and alarmists. This reputation will take some time to die and in the meantime we must be careful not to prolong its life by irresponsible generalizations. Though I am among the first to acknowledge the immense services which, in the past, Mrs. Hodson has performed for the society, I am persuaded that in making statements such as the one contained in her circular letter [accusing Britain of having a far greater number of mental defectives than Germany because of the 1933 sterilization law], she is doing a serious injury to the cause of [British] eugenics.⁹¹

⁹⁰ C.P. Blacker, "Published letter to the Editor of the *Eugenics Review*," April 1936, 87-88, accessed September 9, 2016, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2985558>.

⁹¹ C.P. Blacker, "Private letter to the Editor of the *Eugenics Review*," July 17, 1936, accessed September 9, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b16232513>.

The words of these minority members, particularly those who grew more extreme (e.g. Hodson), began to damage the already-frail cause of British eugenics through their association with Nazism. Though the field was still largely considered to be one of legitimate scientific inquiry at this time, the racialized policies of Nazism had already begun to tarnish its international image. Blacker, alongside other Council members, was left with the task of cleaning up the damage wrought by these statements in an effort to preserve what they had for so long fought to achieve.

While Hodson was the loudest voice of this minority she was, of course, not the only one. Major Leonard Darwin, F.C.S. Schiller, and Karl Pearson all serve as members of this minority as well, though they never grew to the level of zealotry exhibited by Hodson.⁹² While Hodson took the most interest in Nazi sterilization legislation and Darwin, Schiller, and Pearson in the ability of the Nazi's to powerfully and effectively implement eugenic legislation, none of them took stock in the racial theories and anti-Semitism that underpinned Nazi practice.

This qualification cannot be applied to the aforementioned extremist George Pitt-Rivers. To understand the reasons behind his fall from academic grace to his infatuation with fascism, however, one must consider his

⁹² Leonard Darwin, "Letter to C.P. Blacker," January 24, 1938, accessed September 16, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b18226929>; Bradley Hart, "Watching the 'Eugenic Experiment' Unfold: The Mixed Views of British Eugenicians Toward Nazi Germany in the Early 1930s," *Journal of the History of Biology* 45, no. 1(Spring 2012); Stepan, *The Idea of Race*, 116-117; Karl Pearson, "Transcription of a speech delivered at his retirement dinner," 1934, quoted in Hart, "Watching the 'Eugenic Experiment' Unfold," 50-51.

early life and career. Grandson of famed archaeologist and ethnologist General Augustus Pitt-Rivers, George Henry Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers was born in London on May 22, 1890. Hart argues that it was his grandfather's legacy as an academic colossus that cast its shadow over the entirety of his career, shaping his interests. A well-educated noble, Pitt-Rivers followed almost exactly in his grandfather's footsteps, attending Eton before joining the military as a member of the Royal Dragoons in 1910. His experiences there, particularly his role as a Captain in curtailing a 1913 socialist strike that turned into a riot in Johannesburg, solidified his already negative view of socialism into a sense of staunch anti-Bolshevism that would be validated by the violence of the Russian revolution and his belief in a Jewish conspiracy as the motivating force of World War One. Pitt-River's military career, however, was cut short in 1914 when his leg was shattered.⁹³

Pitt-Rivers turned to academia during his convalescence and began reading the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Oscar Levy. Inspired by their ideas and a desire to emulate his grandfather, he pursued psychology and anthropology at Worcester College in 1918, where he was first exposed to the ideas of eugenics.⁹⁴ However, his more immediate concerns were with Bolshevist and Jewish conspiracies, which he enumerated in the publication of his

⁹³ Hart, *George Pitt-Rivers and the Nazis*, 32-45.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

1920 book *The World Significance of the Russian Revolution*.⁹⁵ In 1921 he moved to the Bismarck Archipelago to pursue anthropology. While there he made several studies of the locals, culminating in his 1927 book *The Clash of Culture and the Contact of Races*. Written for both the academic and general readerships, the book explored the reasons for the rapidly declining numbers of native peoples following contact with Europeans that, in some cases, led to the extinction. Pitt-Rivers concluded that these groups suffered from European attempts at “civilization,” claiming they should be left alone to “develop separately.” Hart argues that this seemingly benevolent idealism was based in a racialized form of eugenic thought that held native groups as biologically, and therefore irrevocably, inferior in their ability to comprehend and adapt to European social norms.

This work garnered the attention of many British colonial administrators and eugenicists. The former typically praised the work as science confirming the truth of what they had experienced, while the latter claimed that his racialization of eugenics was an unscientific and dangerous misinterpretation of eugenic theory.⁹⁶ It was from this position of academic notoriety that Pitt-Rivers properly entered the Society in 1929 and gained his appointment as its representative to the IFEO later that year on July 24.⁹⁷ At his

⁹⁵ George Pitt-Rivers, *The World Significance of the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1920), accessed September 30, 2016, <https://archive.org/details/TheWorldSignificanceOfTheRussianRevolution>.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 88-90.

⁹⁷ “Letter from the Society Secretary to George Pitt-Rivers,” July 27, 1929, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b16233797>.

first IFEO meeting he successfully lobbied for the location for the next year's conference to be hosted at his estate in Hinton St. Mary. As the host, Pitt-Rivers was able to determine a significant portion of the Conferences programming, prioritizing subjects related to racialized eugenic thought. Speakers such as Alfred Ploetz (the progenitor of the Nazi racial hygiene movement) and Ernst Rüdin (a proponent of the creation of the field of racial psychiatry) led the event and helped to introduce Pitt-Rivers to members of the National Socialist party.⁹⁸

Emboldened by his success and subsequent high standing in the international eugenics community, Pitt-Rivers wrote *Weeds in the Garden of Marriage* in 1931, his only work purely focused on eugenics, as a response to what he perceived as spinelessness in the British Eugenics Society. Supremely racist and anti-Semitic, the book claimed that "fit" western whites needed to employ eugenic practices before "unfit" stock and racial mixing irreparably damaged their international supremacy. Jews were attacked on the basis that their conspiracy for world domination was based on a hypocritical subscription to racial purity, with Pitt-Rivers claiming that Jews "were the most race-conscious people in the world," purposefully choosing to intermarry to maintain Semitic purity while simultaneously conspiring to keep others from assuming collective racial identity by

⁹⁸ Hart, *George Pitt-Rivers and the Nazis*, 111-112.

feigning offense at the use of such classifications in socio-political contexts.⁹⁹

The Society's leadership saw the book as little more than a pseudoscientific diatribe that would damage the reputation of eugenics as a whole. The general reaction to the work was negative, with the leadership refusing to offer endorsement or even put it on a list of books published by the society's members for fear of further antagonizing Parliament.¹⁰⁰ Infuriated by this slight, Pitt-Rivers penned a memorandum in which he directly called out the leadership's "timorous" approach to public relations as a squandering of Galton's work, interpreting their unwillingness to push the medical community and political elite into action as milquetoast defeatism.¹⁰¹ Blacker, Darwin, and other Council members were unimpressed, stating Pitt-River's desired course of action would only serve to further alienate and entrench the Society's political opponents.¹⁰²

Marginalized by the Society, Pitt-Rivers resigned and radicalized. In 1934 he made his first trip to Nazi Germany as a speaker in a conference devoted to the discussion of race, eugenics, Nazism, and development of the British Union of Fascists. There, he claimed that "his interest [in the conference] was that of a scientist, not that of an ideologue,"

⁹⁹ George Pitt-Rivers, *Weeds in the Garden of Marriage* (London: Noel Douglas, 1935), accessed September 18, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b18030257>.

¹⁰⁰ C.P. Blacker, "Letter to George Pitt-Rivers," March 22, 1932, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b16233797>.

¹⁰¹ Pitt-Rivers, "Memorandum to the Council," 2-7.

¹⁰² Hart, *George Pitt-Rivers and the Nazis*, 120-123.

though his membership to the BUF purchased only months prior indicated otherwise. He also maintained regular correspondence with Lothar Loeffler and Eugen Fischer, Nazi racial hygienists.¹⁰³ Perhaps the most blatant example of Pitt-River's Nazi sympathizing was his letter to the Führer a year after Pitt-Rivers attended the 1937 Nuremberg rally in which he praised the measures taken by the Nazi Party to "protect" the German people from the Jews and "poor stock."¹⁰⁴

By 1940, instead of being turned away by the war, he doubled down. In a letter to BUF leader Oswald Mosley he revealed that he believed the British Eugenics Society to be a puppet of the primarily Jewish PEP (Political and Economic Planning committee) and pled for Mosley's organization to keep tabs on his former associates.¹⁰⁵ Clearly, by the late 1930s the anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism that had occupied Pitt-Rivers for several decades had gone beyond the not uncommon sentiments expressed in his books and lectures and came to the forefront of his priorities. When his estate in Hinton-St. Mary was commandeered by the British military, Pitt-Rivers reacted poorly. According to a source quoted by Hart, he "talked to the officers in a violently pro-German manner and impressed upon them his admiration for Hitler, his ideology, his work, and the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 138-140

¹⁰⁴ George Pitt-Rivers, "Letter to Adolf Hitler," June 22, 1938, quoted in Hart, *George Pitt-Rivers and the Nazis*, 161.

¹⁰⁵ George Pitt-Rivers, "Letter to Oswald Mosley," January 24, 1940, quoted in Hart, "Watching the Eugenic Experiment Unfold," 50.

German people” and referred to his friend William Joyce (the infamous Lord Haw-Haw) numerous times.¹⁰⁶ Unsurprisingly, this worrisome behavior, combined with the knowledge that Pitt-Rivers had begun regularly attending meetings hosted by Oswald Mosley, was reported to MI5. A little over a month later Pitt-Rivers was arrested and detained for two years as a known Nazi sympathizer and danger to the state.¹⁰⁷

Of course, as fascinating a study as the minority opinion exemplified by Hodson as well as the unique story of George Pitt-Rivers make, they constitute the minority of the British Eugenics Society as it pertains to its view of the Nazis. The majority of the Society’s members became, if not immediately, then very quickly opposed to Nazi racial science, which they perceived as a perversion of “legitimate” eugenics. They reasoned that the basis for what constitutes “legitimate” eugenic practice varies in different contexts. For the British, the previously discussed political and socio-economic circumstances in the late-19th and early-20th centuries led them to focus on the overall “improvement” of the working class through reform and negative eugenics while simultaneously incentivizing the middle and upper classes to reproduce at a higher rate so as to ensure the sun never set on the Empire. With the exception of London, the majority of Great Britain was not particularly concerned with issues of race mixing since they were not subject to the

¹⁰⁶ Hart, *George Pitt-Rivers and the Nazis*, 181-182.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 183-186.

same type of immigration as the United States or continental Europe. As such, the British Eugenics movement was primarily concerned with issues of class rather than race.¹⁰⁸

Moreover, mainland British eugenicists' conceptions of race were fragmented and scientifically frustrated. The Society's anthropologically trained members, charged with investigating racial matters and relaying their findings to the other members, ran into numerous issues throughout their studies. Anthropologists travelled around the globe in an attempt to measure humanity as categorized by race. However, their primary tools, craniometry and intelligence tests, gave incoherent and confused results. Craniometrical measurements, which were theorized to strongly correlate with racial categories and psychic traits, failed when the measurements of one race faded imperceptibly into the measurements of another time and again.¹⁰⁹ Consequently, by the 1930s these and other findings reduced the role of race in the mainland majority's consideration of eugenics from a factor of primary concern to an enigma that, while seemingly observable, was neither reliably measurable nor indicative of physical health or mental competency.

The prospect of accepting a class-based approach as the only foundation of British eugenic practice, however, is problematized when one scrutinizes British eugenicists that utilized race as a foundational concept when research was moved into the colonies. The colonial eugenics project in

¹⁰⁸ Stepan, *The Idea of Race*, 125-126.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 130-134, 161.

Kenya during the 1930s serves as a powerful example of British colonial eugenicists utilizing their science as a means through which to define British colonizers as inherently superior to colonized peoples and subsequently to promote the continuance of racial separation and inequality. Moreover, it demonstrated the power eugenics held in the minds of British colonialists as a source of imperial legitimization. Given their rather unique position as members of a white settler colony in equatorial Africa, these eugenicists believed that they had “specialist knowledge [regarding] issues of race and intelligence” based on their ability to observe Africans over a long period of time.¹¹⁰ Far from being perceived as eccentric or simply as scientists studying other ways of life, many allowed for the “the importance of the Kenyan eugenicists’ ideas [to become] magnified ... because they chimed so powerfully with overwhelming [colonial] preoccupations and anxieties about the African population and its advancement,” concerns that ring true when one considers the experiences of Britain in the late-19th and early-20th centuries – particularly their near loss of South Africa in the Second Boer War, which highlighted fears of the Empire’s possible dissolution.¹¹¹

The primary area of research that Kenyan eugenicists engaged in was that of the presence of inherent amentia, or mental deficiency, in the African population.¹¹² This area of

¹¹⁰ Chloe Campbell, *Race and Empire: Eugenics in Colonial Kenya* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 3.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 7.

research, partially legitimized by the implementation of similar tests back at home, was chosen because it reinforced the idea of Millsian paternalism with the authority of science, enabling white Kenyan settlers to legitimize their view of the African population “as a childlike yeomanry who required the authoritative leadership of Europeans.”¹¹³ A statement made by the aforementioned Pearson served to underscore the legitimacy of their work. It read,

There is no natural equality of human races, any more than there is any natural equality of human beings; they are the product of their past evolution molded by selection and heredity. As far as we can understand it evolution is largely an irreversible process.¹¹⁴

Considering the primacy of the ideas contained above, the “results” colonial eugenicists gleaned from their observations were far from surprising. The problem of amentia was seen by Kenyan eugenicists as hereditary and immutable which could be attributed to the “dysgenic” effects of African conditions. Cultural standards there were described as being so low that the mentally deficient were able to flourish and reproduce abundantly, normalizing sub-par levels of intelligence.¹¹⁵ Either genuinely or willfully ignorant of the aforementioned results from craniological

¹¹³ Ibid., 5.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 21.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 28.

measurements and intelligence tests, Kenyan eugenicists made these tools the underpinning of their research.¹¹⁶ From these and other observations they concluded “the very best environment has no power in itself to raise a bad or unfit race of people, as for example, gypsies or negroes.”¹¹⁷

Despite the hypocrisy that is made obvious by this discrepancy of approach, the fact remains that the majority of British eugenicists, at least those who were focused on Britain, held race to be of little importance to the practice of their science when considering eugenic policies by the 1930s, due in no small part to the inconclusive results yielded by the research that their colonial counterparts did not, for whatever reason, take into account. Conversely, Nazi racial hygienists centered eugenic practices on issues of race, going so far as to pass racial legislation like the Reich Citizenship and Nuremburg Race Laws, based on a gross misrepresentation of biometric and Mendelian theories of heredity.¹¹⁸ For British eugenicists, the use of race as the foundation of a eugenic framework damaged the overall legitimacy of eugenic science by prioritizing a category that had yet to be rigorously proven to have any meaningful impact on an individual’s intellectual, moral, or physical state. By extension, the majority of British eugenicists believed that, by prioritizing a pseudoscientific category,

¹¹⁶ H.L. Gordon, "Amentia in the East African," *The Eugenics Review* 25, no. 4 (Jan. 1934): 223-35, accessed December 1, 2016, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2985291>.

¹¹⁷ Campbell, *Race and Empire*, 26.

¹¹⁸ Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 184.

Nazi racial hygienists undermined the goal of their counterparts. Instead of striving for the improvement of society as a whole through the active participation in and direction of the course of human evolution, Nazi racial hygienists sought to segregate society into divisive and hereditarily irrelevant categories.

One of the most outspoken critics was Julian Huxley, a celebrated biologist, member of the Royal Society, and the British Eugenics Society's Vice President in the 1930s. A letter to Blacker written in 1933 claimed that Nazi racial hygiene under Eugen Fischer was "mere pseudoscience" and cautioned him to take measures to ensure that the public perception of the British Eugenics movement would not be "tarred with the same brush."¹¹⁹ Blacker shared his sentiments, responding "the more I look at Fischer's thesis, the less I am impressed by it and the more I am led to the conclusion that he practiced upon the intelligentsia... a most interesting hoax."¹²⁰ Huxley's fear of eugenics developing a fascist connotation was far from unfounded, as the Society was forced to defend itself from Nazi associations as early as the mid-1930s.¹²¹

A year later, with the help of A. C. Haddon, Huxley published *We Europeans: A Survey of 'Racial Problems.'* The book, written for the general readership, was a politically

¹¹⁹ Julian Huxley, "Letter to C.P. Blacker," May 29, 1933, accessed September 29, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b1623280>.

¹²⁰ C.P. Blacker, "Letter to Julian Huxley," September 11, 1933, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b1623280>.

¹²¹ "Help for Mental Unfit: Professor on Voluntary Sterilization," *News Chronicle*, November 24, 1934, accessed December 1, 2015, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b1623280>.

charged attack on Nazi racial hygiene and the racialization of eugenics in general. Its opening paragraph set the tone, stating, "One of the greatest enemies of science is pseudoscience... We all know the Devil can quote Scripture for his own purpose: to-day we are finding that he can even invent a false Scripture from which to quote."¹²² This book, alongside other pamphlets and publications, was circulated in an attempt to discredit Nazi racial hygiene while distancing British eugenic practices from it.¹²³

Later that year Blacker wrote a letter to Huxley rejecting the idea of holding a lecture discussing German eugenics. In it, he includes a paragraph that could be said to have powerfully summarized the Society majority's thoughts on Nazi racial hygiene. It read,

The publication of the Nazi Sterilization Act has done the cause of sterilization in this country much harm. The construction given the word eugenics by Germans is not in accordance with ours and is regarded by many people, including myself, as ridiculous (I refer to the stress on the Nordic cult and the anti-Semitism); The recent news from Germany about their having secretly built an Air Force larger than that at the disposal of the whole British Empire, about their building submarines, about the pagan

¹²² Julian Huxley, Alfred C. Haddon, and A. M. Carr-Saunders, *We Europeans; a Survey of 'Racial' Problems* (New York: Harper, 1936), 7, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b18031006>.

¹²³ Stepan, *The Idea of Race*, 167.

religion which is finding favor, etc., etc., have made many people (again including myself) feel that the country is suffering from a sort of collective psychosis.¹²⁴

In the same letter, Blacker criticizes Schiller for the comments he made in a lecture concerning German eugenics, writing, “[he] made some remarks which some people thought were very stupid about ‘Supermen’ or ‘Ant Men’... [the former] was to be a kind of glorified Fascist or Nazi; [the latter] a modified communist.”¹²⁵ Blacker’s general criticism of Nazi racial hygiene as deleterious to the British cause and his denunciation of Schiller’s statements are both indicative of his larger concerns – preserving a positive public image and the ability to curry favor with various parties to effect eugenic legislation.¹²⁶ Huxley, of course, shared the sentiment.¹²⁷

Simply put, Blacker and the majority of the Society took issue with Nazi eugenic policy not in the implementation of sterilization but in the mythologized racial ideology that had come to guide Nazi practices. The British Eugenics Society devoted itself to what it saw as a wholly scientific practice of eugenics. In their view the ideas of Aryan superiority, anti-Semitism, and the overall

¹²⁴ C. P. Blacker, “Letter to Julian Huxley,” May 3, 1935, accessed September 6, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b1623280>.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ “Memorandum on Telephone Conversation with Professor Julian Huxley,” May 7, 1935, accessed November 29, 2016, <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b1623280>.

subordination of scientific empiricism to emotional rhetoric created a strain of anti-scientific, racist eugenics that ran directly counter the practices and theories they supported. The extent of the barbarism resultant from Nazi ideology revealed after the war exemplified everything that the Society had, in its vast majority, stood against.¹²⁸

With so few histories giving even perfunctory attention to each facet of British eugenic responses to Nazi practices, it is not unlikely that readers may mistakenly believe that the British Eugenics Society stood as one against the pseudoscientific practices of Nazi race hygienists. By contextualizing the discussion with a brief foray into the political and socio-economic context surrounding the origins and evolution eugenics and the British Eugenics Society alongside the full spectrum of British eugenic response to Nazi practices, one can gain a more complete understanding of the variety of opinions held by the Society's members

¹²⁸ Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*, (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

Cedo la parola al piccone: Fascist Violence on the Urban Landscape

Dominik Booth

On a brisk October morning in 1934, Mussolini stood atop a roof in the Rione di Campo Marzio surrounded by ministers, bureaucrats, journalists, and workmen proclaiming the newest phase of Fascist urban action in Rome: the demolition of 27,000 square meters – 120 buildings and homes – of some of the oldest, most densely populated neighborhoods in Rome for the creation of a new piazza around the Mausoleum of Augustus.¹²⁹ His speech was punctuated by regular interruptions, with the name of each street or building due to be demolished receiving its own outburst of enthusiastic applause. Much to the continued delight of his audience, Mussolini finished his exhortation by grabbing a pickaxe off the man standing next to him, proclaiming “*Ed ora, cedo la parola al piccone!*” – And now, let the pickaxe do the talking! – and proceeding to rip

¹²⁹ Benito Mussolini, “Per L’Isolamento Dell’Augusteo,” in *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Duilio Susmel, vol. 26 (Florence: La Fenice, 1934), 368.

up the terracotta tile of the building upon which he was standing.¹³⁰

Mussolini's declaration that morning was an excellent summary of the general Fascist mood towards urban planning: a heavy-handed, destructive approach that favored action over inaction, and the demolition of the urban elements of earlier eras. Mussolini, a native of northern Italy, had long reviled the image of a decadent and diseased Rome and made it his primary objective to purify and restore the city (both physically and symbolically) to the status of ancient Rome. Like all massive urban projects, the development plan of Rome – the *piano regolatore* – was carefully orchestrated and selectively executed, and like all massive urban projects, it was as much an expression of the prevailing ideology of the state as it was a pragmatic solution to social needs. The *piano regolatore* focused heavily on two categories – the problems of necessity, and the problems of grandeur, and sought to resolve them through the creation of three major types of physical spaces: the *piazze*, public squares; the *via*, public avenues; and the *case popolari*, public housing.¹³¹ Among these, the *piazze*, or *piazza*, gained predominance as the major vehicle of urban

¹³⁰ Mussolini, "Per L'Isolamento Dell' Augusto," 368; Arnaldo Ricotti, *Inizio Delle Demolizioni per l'isolamento Del Mausoleo Di Augusto*, *Giornale Luce* (Piazza Augusto Imperatore, 1934). All primary source quotations in this paper have been translated to English by me, unless otherwise marked and, excepting *The New York Times*, appear in the original sources in Italian.

¹³¹ Benito Mussolini, "Per la cittadinanza di Roma," in *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Duilio Susmel, vol. 20 (Florence: La Fenice, 1924), 235; Borden W. Painter, *Mussolini's Rome: Rebuilding the Eternal City* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 3–4.

reform and political expression, though all were mechanisms through which the Fascist state communicated its ideals.

By nature, urban works projects are extensions of political discourse. The complexity and expense of such actions require a level of coordination that can largely only be accomplished by state actors. In the context of the piazza – a public, open space defined on all sides by buildings – the political expression of public construction becomes more apparent. The structure of a piazza is such that it allows for the interchange of ideas, symbols, identities, and information through both private discourse such as individual interactions, and public discourse like speeches and the public display of iconography. Given its nature as a public space and the extensive history of the piazza in Italy as a forum for ideational exchange, the piazza cannot be understood in any terms other than political, and the creation of new piazza can likewise be seen primarily as political. As the scholar Eamonn Canniffe wrote, “The forming of [the] public space is itself a product of an ideological process, most overt in authoritarian regimes.”¹³²

In the context of Fascism, the process of the design and construction of the piazza is also a vehicle for the expression of Fascist principles, primarily the major tenets of Fascist action and Fascist violence. Fascism is predicated on the doctrine of pragmatic action and the idea that violent action is a positive, purifying force. In his “Foundations and

¹³² Eamonn Canniffe, *The Politics of the Piazza: The History and Meaning of the Italian Square* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 2.

doctrine of fascism" published in 1932, Mussolini wrote that "[fascism] was born of the need of action, and was action."¹³³ A year later, an article in *The New York Times* would write of him, "Work is Mussolini's gospel. His creed, which is action, demands immediate and tangible results."¹³⁴ The Fascist predilection for action over thought or intellectualism, a predilection closely tied to traditional concepts of masculinity, is a direct output of the experience of the First World War. For the men who formed the early Fascist movement, and who were largely veterans of that war, the impulse for action was derived from their experience of violence and death. This experience led to an understanding of war that held it not to be evil, but rather a good and purifying force through which the true, moral self can be known. In his "Foundations," Mussolini defended the antipacifism of fascism: "War alone keys up all human energies to their maximum tension and impresses the seal of nobility upon those peoples who have the courage to face up to it. All other tests are pale substitutes that never place a man face to face with himself in the moment of decision between life or death."¹³⁵ The tendency towards action, and the purity of violence, developed as a result of the "life or death" experience of war, in which men were

¹³³ Benito Mussolini, "Foundations and Doctrine of Fascism (1932)," in *A Primer of Italian Fascism*, ed. Olivia E. Sears and Maria Galli Stampino, trans. Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 51.

¹³⁴ Valentine Thomson, "Mussolini Builds a Rome of the Caesars," March 19, 1933, sec. VI, 6, Rhodes College Microfilm Collection.

¹³⁵ Mussolini, "Foundations and Doctrine of Fascism (1932)," 53.

required to decide between courage and cowardice, action or inaction.

It is no surprise that the Fascists would implement an urban program of such scale that it would fundamentally change the landscape and demographics of the city. The Fascist urban project was itself a form of violent cultural action, in which the old city was ripped down and new piazza were built in an entirely unique style to take their place. This action left scars on the urban landscape, with entire regions of monuments that stood discordant in relation to the Baroque and medieval structures surrounding them. These contrasts exist as testaments to the Fascist application of the “antipacifistic attitude” to the urban sphere.¹³⁶ Italian culture is largely defined by its proud historical narrative that traces the development of the arts and intellectual life through its physical manifestations. More than any other European nation, Italy is known for the excellence of its material cultural outputs. Fascist urban planning was a form of violence that would seek to destroy many of those material creations that formed Italian cultural identity and put the nation into a “life or death” situation, in which it had to decide between the cowardice of status quo or the courage of “dynamism,” modernization, and the elimination of a feeble past.¹³⁷ This is exactly the kind of violence Fascism reveres, the “beauty of violence and will, when they are devoted to the group’s success in a Darwinian

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Dreams of Empire Kindle Rome,” August 25, 1935, sec. VII, 15, Rhodes College Microfilm Collection.

struggle."¹³⁸ This struggle was for the survival of the Italian people, a struggle against the influence and history of an Italian state that the Fascists held to be "incapable of choosing between national strength and national weakness, and which [would] eventually die of its own indecision" and take the Italian people with it.¹³⁹

The systematic destruction and elimination of undesirable, less grandiose periods of Roman history were intended to purify Rome, the heart of the Italian state, of past decadence and restore both the image and virtue of the Roman Empire. In 1933, in a profile on Mussolini's new Rome, *The New York Times* wrote, "He is returning to the old sources of Roman strength and domination. He wishes to resuscitate the material vestiges of ancient Rome because they are beautiful and invaluable, but also, and mainly, because in doing so he hopes to revive the old virtues of the rugged men who under iron discipline once fashioned Roman power."¹⁴⁰ To do this, the Fascists' "monumental language came increasingly to depend upon the conceptual suppression of the time elapsed between the end of the Roman empire and the advent of fascism."¹⁴¹ This process of building a narrative through the destruction of the historical record is a form of historical revisionism and selective memory. Fascism revised the urban space of Rome in order

¹³⁸ Robert O. Paxton, "The Five Stages of Fascism," *The Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 1 (Mar. 1998): 7.

¹³⁹ Benito Mussolini, "Passato E Avvenire," in *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Duilio Susmel, vol. 18 (Venice: La Fenice, 1922), 160.

¹⁴⁰ Thomson, "Mussolini Builds a Rome of the Caesars," 6.

¹⁴¹ Canniffe, *The Politics of the Piazza*, 8.

to “transform the city of Rome into a physical setting to show that the Fascist state was the lineal descendant of the ancient Roman Empire.”¹⁴²

The urban landscape is represented by a layering of history, in which different physical elements representative of different eras and ideologies reside adjacent to each other, though not necessarily in harmony. The identity of urban areas is formed largely by this layering of history and the “manifestation of political conflict and change,” creating a sense of the trajectory of the city and the values of its residents, both past and present.¹⁴³ In this regard, regimes have the ability to enhance or eliminate certain elements of their history and thus the values that era represented, by either restoring and maintaining the constructions of that era, or by destroying and replacing those constructions. Selective memory, in which certain elements of history are exploited for political ends while still other elements are minimized, and in which narratives that “are highly selective, if not fictional” are constructed to define group identity, is fundamental to understanding the Fascist urban project.¹⁴⁴

While this process of selective re-imagination of collective space did not originate with the Fascists – Rome alone was largely shaped by the gradual destruction and

¹⁴² Katherine Turro and Richard A. Etlin, *Modernism in Italian Architecture, 1890-1940* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991); “Aesthetics Under Mussolini: Public Art & Architecture, 1922-1940” (History Honors Papers, Connecticut College, 2012), 67.

¹⁴³ Canniffe, *The Politics of the Piazza*, 2.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

rebuilding projects overseen by popes and emperors – the Fascist period certainly represents a previously unseen level of fervor. The Fascist approach to urban planning and renewal became known as *sventramenti* – literally “disemboweling” – due to the intensity and violence of its execution. Whereas the majority of development in Roman



history consisted of at most regionalized collections of building projects, such as the many fora created by Roman Emperors, the Fascist plan called for a near complete redevelopment of Rome in a matter of a

few decades. Processes that played out on localized scales over the course of years were now enhanced to cover the entire city, and while the *piano regolatore* remained unfulfilled, in the relatively short period of time that it was being implemented – less than twenty years – Rome saw a sudden increase in new projects that succeeded in radically redefining the urban space.

The scope of Fascist urban planning as a broadly destructive force can be clearly seen in the *isolamento*, or isolation, of the Forum of Trajan. Over the centuries after it fell into disuse, apartment buildings and other living spaces were constructed inside, on top of, and around the Forum.

These buildings, by the time of Mussolini, had fallen into disrepair (Figure 1).¹⁴⁵ They were, as *The New York Times* described, “squalidly quaint, [and] picturesquely unhealthy.”¹⁴⁶ The

Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1. Market of Trajan before the isolation project, showing the buildup of slums, 1929.

buildings that had grown around the ancient site were razed to the ground (Figures 2 and 3), creating a broad open space revealing the Forum and visually connecting it with the modern Altare della Patria (Figure 4).¹⁴⁷ This action connected the two elements of Rome – the modern Fascist state and the ancient Empire – spatially, but also resulted in the forcible displacement of thousands of citizens, yet another form of violence perpetrated against the urban landscape.

These displacements were rationalized by Mussolini as projects to improve the public hygiene of Rome. Again, *The New York Times* wrote,

“There are two problems in one,” Mussolini said in explanation of the tremendous difficulties encountered in creating the Rome of today; “one is dictated by necessity, the other by the greatness of Rome.” The Rome of antiquity and of medieval times had to be freed from the excrescences of houses and shops which had grown over them during the centuries. [...] “In directing the population toward the

¹⁴⁵ *Fori Imperiali, Scatti Inediti Dagli Anni '20*, Photograph, 1935 1929, Museo di Roma-Archivio.

¹⁴⁶ Thomson, “Mussolini Builds a Rome of the Caesars,” 7.

¹⁴⁷ *Fori Imperiali, Scatti Inediti Dagli Anni '20*.

hills and the sea we are clearing away all the unwholesome hovels, purging Rome, letting in air, light and sun," says Mussolini. Health for the nation! This is one of the Fascist credos.¹⁴⁸

The state responded to this development by creating *case popolari* – public housing – on the outskirts of Rome. New marshlands were drained for the establishment of *borgate*, the cheapest form of *case popolari* that was intended to house those urban poor displaced by the construction projects. The first *borgata* was Acilia, created in 1924 to house those displaced by the leveling of the Capitoline Hill for the construction of the Altare della Patria, and the destruction of the *spina* in the Rione di Borgo.

The *borgate* became a part of the regime's effort to clear out the population of Rome and ruralize, encouraging urban dwellers to move to the outskirts and promising amenities in return. Mussolini promised that "the new conditions would give space, air, gardens, fresh drinking water, and other benefits that a 'fraternal and paternal fascism [offered] to the humble,' creating



Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 2. Demolition begins for the construction of the Piazza Foro Traiano, 1930.

¹⁴⁸ Thomson, "Mussolini Builds a Rome of the Caesars," 6–7.

an environment in which children could flower.”¹⁴⁹ In reality, the conditions of the *borgate* were nowhere near that, with shoddy construction and frequently lacking running water and electricity. Carla Capponi, a major figure in the Roman resistance, gave this account:

I slept at Gordiani, which was the worst *borgata* of them all. It was made up of shanties, with four families in each – wide open, I mean, and in the entrance you could see beds lying on the ground, perhaps on boards, or nothing, on packed earth or concrete, and there they would lay mattresses and the children all heaped on top.¹⁵⁰



Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 3. Demolition on the Market of Trajan closes, opening a visual path between the Roman monument and the modern Altare della Patria. 1931.

In the case of the largest of the *borgate*, Primavalle, the majority of “transplanted Romans” came from the demolition of the area surrounding the Mausoleum of Augustus, and were “from the working class and leaned to the left in their politics.”¹⁵¹ The

¹⁴⁹ Painter, *Mussolini's Rome*, 94.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 63.

¹⁵¹ Painter, *Mussolini's Rome*, 95.

forced migration of these populations of people, freeing space within the city for the continued aggrandizement of both ancient Rome and modern Fascism, had the added bonus of putting these individuals who posed the greatest domestic threat to Fascist power (and therefore by extension, Italian identity) in one singular location, where they could be monitored with ease.



Figure SEQ Figure \^ ARABIC 4. The Piazza in its final stage, looking across the Via dei Fori Imperiali towards the Altar, 1935.

The Fascists, and Mussolini in particular, made no secret of the narrative they were trying to build in their public projects and public displacements. In 1921, when Mussolini was still just a minister in the conservative coalition

government, he published an article in his newspaper entitled "Past and Future," in which he detailed the profound significance of Rome.

To celebrate the birth of Rome is to celebrate our own form of civilization, to exalt our own story and our own race, to rely firmly on our past in order to better propel our future. Rome and Italy are in fact inseparable. ... Rome is our first point of departure and our first point of reference, it is our symbol or, if

you desire, it is our myth. We dream of a Roman Italy, one that is wise and strong, disciplined and imperial. Much of the immortal spirit of Rome can be found in Fascism: Roman are our fasces, Roman are our fighters, Roman is our pride and our courage. *Civis Romanus Sum.*¹⁵²

That the new Fascist state would be a Roman one was never in question, and that the Rome in question would be that of the empire was also certain. For Mussolini, the Fascist state had to live up to the glory of Rome's past. "Rome must not and cannot be a modern city in the banal sense of the word," he said in 1924, "it must be a city worthy of its own past glory, and that glory must be renewed and transmitted as the legacy of the Fascist state to future generations."¹⁵³ To achieve this, Mussolini engaged in a plan of action that isolated and aggrandized the Roman spirit, using the memory of Rome as the source of legitimacy for the new Romanized state and using the physical remains as the scenery for public Fascist displays. But it must be made clear that this was to be a city of two parts, in which the modern landscape was to be surrounded by, related to, but visually separate of the ancient. This was evident not only in the ruralization plans of the *borgate*, but also in the design of the *piano regolatore*, the urban plan for the redevelopment of the entirety of Rome. There was, in essence, a city within a city,

¹⁵² Mussolini, "Passato E Avvenire," 160–161.

¹⁵³ Mussolini, "Per la cittadinanza di Roma," 235.

in which “modern business mingled with ancient memories” and the state sought the “excavation of the ancient city as well as the construction of the new one.”¹⁵⁴ This new city would be Fascist in every way, and Roman in every way – “vast, ordered, powerful as in the time of Augustus.”¹⁵⁵

Nowhere was this connection made more explicit than in the creation of the Piazza Augusto Imperatore – the piazza created surrounding the Mausoleum of Augustus. Mussolini’s personal preoccupation with Augustus is evident. It is difficult to find any mention of other emperors in his public speeches and writings, and it is easy to see why. While all Roman ruins had some “generic worth ... in the process of *valorizzazione*,” scholar Spiro Kostof argued that “the Mausoleum of Augustus carried special meaning because of its association with the founder of the empire.”¹⁵⁶ No other figure in the history of the Roman Empire, or in any manifestation of Italian political consciousness since, rivaled that of Augustus. As such, if the Fascist redevelopment of Rome were to evoke the vision and morality of the ancient city, a primary focus needed to be placed on the monuments of Augustus himself. The Forum of Augustus had already been excavated by the time the plan to isolate the Mausoleum came to fruition, having in fact been uncovered in one of the earliest Fascist excavations

¹⁵⁴ Thomson, “Mussolini Builds a Rome of the Caesars.”

¹⁵⁵ Benito Mussolini, “La nuova Roma,” in *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Duilio Susmel and Edoardo Susmel, vol. 22 (Florence: La Fenice, 1925), 48.

¹⁵⁶ Spiro Kostof, “The Emperor and the Duce: The Planning of Piazzale Augusto Imperatore in Rome,” in *Art and Architecture in the Service of Politics*, ed. Henry A. Millon and Linda Nochlin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), 279.

during the construction of the Via dell'Impero in 1924. The two remaining monuments to Augustus – the Ara Pacis Augustae and the Mausoleum of Augustus – were to be isolated and restored in the creation of a new piazza.

The Augustan project far exceeded the scale of prior redevelopment projects, perhaps save that of the Via dell'Impero itself. The *piano regolatore* of 1931 “was a triumph of Fascist space-lust and the policy of *sventramenti*, or wholesale urban clearance. The demolition around the mausoleum was to be more extensive than in any previous project.”¹⁵⁷ Prior to the demolition, the area surrounding the Mausoleum was a densely-packed array of Baroque-era housing, arranged around the Mausoleum which had itself become a concert hall. The only public space “in the solid construction between the mausoleum and the Corso [Umberto I]” was in the form of the tiny Piazza degli Otto Cantoni, a near perfect square nestled between the church of San Carlo al Corso and the Vicolo Soderini.¹⁵⁸ The project destroyed this piazza, eliminating a public space defined by one of Rome’s more notable churches, and carving out in its place a massive open space defined by the mausoleum in its center, and new Fascist facades on the periphery.

Bounded in the north by the Via della Frezza and the Vicolo de Fiume, to the east by the Corso Umberto I (now the Via del Corso), to the south by the Via Tomacelli, and the west by the Tiber, the area of new demolition covered tens of

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 285.

¹⁵⁸ Kostof, “The Emperor and the Duce,” 271; “Map of the Area around the Mausoleum of Augustus” (Rome, 1963), sourced in Kostof, Spiro.

thousands of meters of buildings.¹⁵⁹ The region to be demolished included a number of historic and notable buildings, including Baroque housing and a block of houses designed by the prestigious Busiri Vici family, a family of architects with a pedigree of Roman buildings dating back to the 15th century.¹⁶⁰ The scale of destruction was extraordinarily vast, leaving behind a hole in the dense urban fabric. The effect was as dramatic as the method. The ancient Roman monument was subsumed into a larger Fascist one, and became a part of the iconography of the Fascist space. In addition, the destruction in effect cut open a space right in the center of the Corso Umberto I, and aligned the Foro Romano, Altare della Patria, Montecitori Palace (the seat of Parliament), and the Mausoleum of Augustus on the same axis. On either side of the Corso Umberto I, the Via di Ripetta (originating at the site of a former major port – the Porto di Ripetta) and Via del Babuino (originating at the Piazza di Spagna) slowly converged, giving the new Piazza its triangular shape. The three roads met at a single point, uniting the landmarks in one location: the Piazza del Popolo – the Piazza of the People.¹⁶¹ While previously a visitor travelling up the Corso Umberto I from the Foro Romano would likely never see the Mausoleum, now as they passed

¹⁵⁹ Marcello Piacentini, "Piano regolatore 1931. Variante al piano particolareggiato d'esecuzione della zona compresa fra la via Ferdinando di Savoia - il lungotevere in Augusta - via Tomacelli e corso Umberto I°," 1931.

¹⁶⁰ *Baroque House at the Corner of Via Del Corso and Via Dei Pontefici*, Photograph, March 1935 sourced in Kostof, Spiro; *The Busiri Vici Block of the Late Twenties, under Demolition; Lungotevere in Augusta*, Photograph, 1938, sourced in Kostof, Spiro.

¹⁶¹ Marcello Piacentini, "Piano Regolatore di 1931," 1931.

the Piazza Augusto Imperatore the street would be lined with facades replete with Fascist iconography and designed in the Rationalist style. As they continued along the street and reached the Via de Pontefici, the buildings would give way, offering a view of the Mausoleum from the street. In this manner, the now-Fascistized Mausoleum became part of the larger monumental story of Rome, experienced by both Italians and visitors alike daily.

The buildings that came to occupy the periphery of the space are equally important to understanding the aims of urban development in Fascist Rome. As has been established, urban construction projects in the Fascist era are manifestations of Fascist ideology – action and violence – a stark contrast to the messages of peace that dominated political discourse and propaganda in Augustan Rome. Especially in the context of the piazza, a public space designed to be a forum for ideational exchange, urban construction projects also provide a vehicle for the Fascist state to shape the identity of the urban space through establishing new iconography to shape the contemporary narrative. The state sought to establish new iconography and a new architectural language by prescribing a specific style to be used throughout all of the projects outlined in the *piano regolatore*.

This architectural style was known as rationalism, and was a stylistic blend of the type of modernist architecture that was in vogue globally at the time and the classical Roman style of the Empire. Buildings tended to be

defined by clean, clear lines, smooth marble faces, and colonnades set flush with the façade. Architectural details were kept minimalist, with small simple friezes and on rare occasions such as the Piazza Augusto Imperatore, mosaic. This form of architecture owed much to the prevailing international style of the early twentieth century, which took advantage of new materials to create imposing minimalist structures. However, Fascist architecture took that style and Romanized it, relying heavily on the characteristics that defined ancient Roman architecture, like extensive use of colonnades, domes, and arches, as well as reliance on more architectural embellishments than were typical of most modernist buildings.

The design of these buildings is intended to evoke a sense of historical unity, as a modernization of the same architectural principles that defined Rome's cityscape two thousand years prior. Fascist architecture sought to "put a Fascist face on the capital of capitals," drawing a clear linear progression from classical to modern.¹⁶² The façade of the Istituto nazionale fascista della previdenza sociale (The National Fascist Social Security Institution, or INFPS) displays this stylistic continuity exceedingly well. The balcony is made up of a series of alternating triglyphs, evoking the frieze of classical Doric temples, contributing to the overall impression of a Greco-Roman temple's *pronaos*. The colonnade fronting a temple now is represented by the

¹⁶² "Fascisti Would Surpass Even Michelangelo in Designing a Rome to Dwarf New York," *The New York Times*, February 15, 1926, sec. I, Rhodes College Microfilm Collection.

piers running from the balcony to the roof, the decorative frieze and pediment of a temple been expanded into a full mosaic covering the front wall, and the small door that would have lead into the temple cellar is now transformed into the central window of the building. The building blurs the line between classical temple architecture and modernist styling, pulling obviously Greco-Roman elements into a secular state building that is visually related to the past, but genuinely unique in style.

The mosaic decorating the front of the Institute is dominated many of classically Roman symbols and figures.

(Figure 5).¹⁶³ The mosaic is a triptych, with the central panel depicting a personification of the Tiber standing in his own waters holding Romulus and Remus as infants, with the famous she-wolf standing at his feet. Above him, the sun rises out of the waters flanked by horses, while on the side panels heroic figures are engaged in various labors considered virtuous by the



Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 5. Front face of the Istituto Nazionale Fascista della Previdenza Sociale, one of the many buildings designed to encircle the Piazza Augusto Imperatore, n.d.

¹⁶³ Façade of the *Istituto nazionale fascista del* Rome, sourced in Kostof, Spiro.

state, such as drawing water, reaping, and planting trees. Above the central window an inscription in Latin reads, "HIS AB EXIGVIS PROfecta INITIIS ROMA" – a paraphrase from Livy's preface to *Ab urbe condita* [The History of Rome] that means "Rome, having started from small and humble beginnings."¹⁶⁴ The symbols in the mosaic are that of the founding of Rome and the working for the good of the state. They are Fascist ideals, and their display in a public forum and in such a permanent manner establishes them as part of the identity of the city, the historical record and the common experience of Rome. This public iconographic display is in keeping with the role of the piazza, as "iconography might easily be exposed in a public space, and thereby find an audience for its specific messages."¹⁶⁵ As such, the state "sought to produce architectural embodiments of the prevailing ideology through an often explicit iconographic programme" and has done so here with extraordinary skill, uniting the Fascist ideal with the Roman image.¹⁶⁶

This unity extends throughout the piazza. Mussolini mandated the construction of a museum adjacent to the Mausoleum for the public display of the newly restored Ara Pacis. Upon the side of this museum he had a transcription of the *Res Gestae* of Augustus carved into limestone panels and mounted in a fashion similar to how the *Res Gestae* had

¹⁶⁴ Susan L. Fugate Brangers, "The Mausoleum of Augustus: Expanding Meaning from Its Inception to Present Day" (Dissertation, University of Louisville, 2007), 120.

¹⁶⁵ Eamonn Canniffe, *The Politics of the Piazza*, 2.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

been displayed on the Mausoleum in its original form. The Piazza features more than one Res Gestae, however. Underneath the mosaic of the INFPS building is an inscription, framed by winged victories carrying fasces, detailing the scope and significance of the successes of Mussolini. The Latin text, now partially defaced with the latter half of Mussolini's name and the Fascist date excised, reads thus:

This is the place where the soul of Augustus flies through the breezes, after the mausoleum of the emperor was extracted from the darkness of the ages and the scattered pieces of the altar of peace were restored, Mussolini the leader ordered the old narrow places to be destroyed and the location to be adorned with streets, buildings, and shrines fitting for the ways of humanity in the year 1940, in the eighteenth year of the Fascist Era.¹⁶⁷

The two inscriptions are closely tied in style and content in the way in which they detail the public projects the two leaders sponsored in Rome. Both laud themselves as restorers of virtue and grandeur and as great public servants who vastly improved the power of Rome.

The sculptural friezes adorning the new façades of the Piazza are themselves direct homages to the Ara Pacis Augustae and the Roman virtues of Fascism. Both the relief

¹⁶⁷ Charles Rhyne, "Piazza Augusta Imperatore," trans. Walter Englert.

and the frieze adorning the INFPS building make heavy use of the imagery of mothers and children, of natural abundance and labor. These images evoke the Tellus relief of the Ara Pacis, and represent the Fascist valorization of the family and prosperity. Beside these friezes are two panels surrounding columns of windows that depict Roman and Fascist arms. The western panel “is composed of classical military motifs disposed around the windows: helmets, shields, bows and arrows, musical instruments, and so forth.”¹⁶⁸ The eastern panel features muskets, gas masks, Italian uniforms, and cannon. These panels mirror each other, but also reflect the original significance of the Ara Pacis as a military monument. Kostof writes that “to Fascist interpreters, the Ara Pacis was a monument eloquent of military strength, the symbol of Roman dominion over all the decrepit civilizations of the world. The martial aspect of the Augustan age was increasingly insisted upon after 1935 when Fascist policy became openly aggressive.”¹⁶⁹

Mussolini’s urban program was a far-reaching attempt to mark the Roman landscape to represent Fascist principles. Accordingly, the Fascist state manipulated urban space to create public spaces that could convey their message and be expressions for Fascist aims. Both the creation of these spaces and use of these spaces contributed to the fascistization of Italy by extending the reach of the state and allowing it to build a narrative that legitimized and demonstrated the state’s power. These public spaces were

¹⁶⁸ Kostof, “The Emperor and the Duce,” 309.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

not simply created for aesthetics and passive display of Fascist iconography. The most prominent urban projects, like the creation of the Via dell'Impero and the clearing of the Foro Romano, or the renovation of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni gave the opportunity for the state to demonstrate publicly. The Via dell'Impero was inaugurated by a march of the *mutilati*, the venerated wounded soldiers of the First World War. The Palazzo delle Esposizioni was used for the exhibition of Fascist propaganda, like the unveiling of the Piano Regolatore, which publicized the plans for urban redevelopment and sought to curry favor for the radical renovation of Rome's historic center; and the Mostra Augustea della Romanità, a public exhibition of "Augustan Romanness" that was marked by profound militaristic imagery and parading.¹⁷⁰

The Fascist urban plan was one of the purist extensions of Fascist doctrine implemented during the 23 years in power. The *sventramenti* saw the wholesale destruction of elements of Italian identity and put the previous thousands of years of Italian cultural development in jeopardy. In their quest to restore a Romanized Italy, Fascists obfuscated the eras separating the Empire and themselves to make claims of historical, and therefore political, legitimacy as the heirs of the Roman ideal. While

¹⁷⁰ Arnaldo Ricotti, *Prima mostra nazionale dei piani regolatori*, *Giornale Luce* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 1937); Arturo Gemmiti, *La Mostra Augustea Della Romanità*, *Giornale Luce* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 1937); Arturo Gemmiti and Basilio Franchina, *La cerimonia di chiusura, presenziata da Mussolini*, in "Mostra augustea della romanità," *Giornale Luce* (Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 1938).

all urban planning is by some extension political, and requires a certain level of destruction and historical erasure, the scale of Fascist action was of such a level that it represented a violence against both the population and the physical city itself. The scars of that violence are still evident in the hundreds of Fascist buildings spread across Rome, now largely unrecognized and unvalued. Rome was once the capital of the Mediterranean. The Fascist destiny could only be fulfilled when the Rome of their day exceeded the Rome of antiquity, and it was in that goal that Mussolini engaged in a conflict with what he saw as the urban elements of decay.

Battle for Chinatown: The Adaptive Resilience of the Chinese American Community in the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire

Claire Carr

In April 1906, San Francisco's most devastating earthquake and fire destroyed most of the city in northern California. The centrally located neighborhood of Chinatown, home to some 14,000 residents of Chinese heritage, was particularly devastated. The Chinese, for decades despised, disenfranchised, and relegated to the small area of Chinatown, appeared by all means condemned to suffer inordinately in the aftermath of the disaster without the aid provided to white citizens, especially as city officials launched an initiative to relocate Chinatown and its residents outside of the city to rid San Francisco of what white residents considered a public nuisance. San Francisco's Chinese community proved tenacious, however, and the neighborhood recovered almost entirely within its original parameters in just two years. In examining the case of Chinatown's rapid recovery, it is necessary to ask what entities contributed to the community's adaptive resilience

in the wake of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. I argue that Chinese Americans' history of social isolation from other ethnic groups in fact generated Chinatown's resilience; individuals' community ties, the Chinese language newspaper *Chung Sai Yat Po*, and the merchant organization called the Chinese Six Companies were the products of Chinatown's isolation and the agents of its recovery.

Much of the scholarship that investigates human disasters and their aftermath is concerned with those who are most vulnerable—that is, groups or individuals that suffer most during and after disastrous events. In his social autopsy of the Chicago heat wave of 1995, Eric Klinenberg argues that the most vulnerable communities are poor minority groups where individuals are socially isolated. Social isolation, according to Klinenberg, typically refers to people living alone, with distant or no family ties, segregated from wealthier populations and out of touch with agents of government aid and political attention.¹⁷¹ Social isolation, Klinenberg writes, becomes fatal when a disaster occurs and the effect is similar whether the event is a slow disaster like a heat wave or the prolonged aftermath of an earthquake. Other investigators of disaster explore means of combatting this fatal isolation. In her book, *The Social Roots of Risk: Producing Disasters, Promoting Resilience*, Kathleen Tierney described 'adaptive resilience' in terms of preparedness and recovery in disaster situations. She argues

¹⁷¹ Eric Klinenberg, *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 231.

that although communities have no way of anticipating disaster, some are nonetheless better equipped than others to endure and rebound. This is because adaptive resilience is not a level of preparedness achieved by designing stronger buildings, increasing numbers of emergency personnel, or providing emergency federal aid. Instead, Tierney stresses the importance of “enhancing the resilience of our critical *civic* infrastructure—the community, faith, and culturally based institutions and groupings that provide connection and support for community residents on a day to day basis and to which vulnerable populations turn during times of crisis.”¹⁷² According to Tierney, these civic infrastructures are an important ‘safety net’ in the wake of disaster. In her own examination of post-disaster utopianism, Rebecca Solnit argues much the same, adding that rather than panicking and becoming self-interested and only working for their own survival, people are social animals and in disaster situations they tend to become altruistic and interested in serving the needs of the community at large.¹⁷³ Both Tierney and Solnit advance the argument that civic infrastructure, including altruistic interpersonal exchanges, contribute to the survival of individuals and the adaptive resilience of a community as a whole.

Despite Sinophobic efforts to isolate and disenfranchise the community, the Chinese immigrants in

¹⁷² Kathleen Tierney, *The Social Roots of Risk: Producing Disasters, Promoting Resilience* (California: Stanford Business Books, 2014), 197-200.

¹⁷³ Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009), 3-5.

San Francisco exhibited a remarkable determined resilience. In the early part of the 19th century, San Francisco was a small frontier town in a territory whose ownership was disputed until the defeat of Mexico at the hands of the United States in the Mexican American War. With American ownership of California granted in 1848 and the discovery of an abundance of gold in the region, an influx of settlers seeking land and wealth began in earnest. Among these new arrivals were American citizens arriving from the eastern states as well as immigrants, and in large numbers, Chinese.¹⁷⁴ Between 1850 and 1880, around 200,000 Chinese individuals arrived in California. Chinese immigrants arrived in California in such high numbers beginning around 1850 seeking employment and fortune, but also seeking stability and a respite from turbulent conditions in China, which had suffered crop failures and famine in the years prior to 1850 in addition to the social unrest caused by the Taiping Rebellion, a civil war which lasted from 1850-1864.¹⁷⁵ Of this first wave of Chinese immigrants, greater than 90% were single men seeking employment who were either unmarried or had left their wives and families behind in China.¹⁷⁶ Very few initially intended to stay as permanent residents in California, but planned, rather, to return to China. At the start of the gold rush, Chinese miners were tolerated, though heavily taxed, but as gold began to

¹⁷⁴ Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 34-41.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-19.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

dwindle American miners became indignant toward the success met with by Chinese miners and strove to drive them out of the mines entirely.¹⁷⁷ Beginning in 1865, as they were being expelled from the gold mines by increased taxation and violence, Chinese laborers went to work on the Pacific portion of the First Transcontinental Railroad. They were severely underpaid – oftentimes they earned less than one third of what white laborers were paid, though they were employed to work on the most taxing and dangerous projects. Once the railroad was completed in 1869, most Chinese workers moved to the cities to seek steady employment.¹⁷⁸

San Francisco's Chinatown and chinatowns in other Western cities were formed due to intense housing discrimination and restrictive housing policies enacted in the mid-19th century.¹⁷⁹ By the 1860's, the Chinese presence in California was met with widespread hostility and discrimination. White property owners had for years refused to rent their spaces to Chinese individuals, and only in certain areas of the cities were they allowed to purchase and inherit property.¹⁸⁰ These spaces became exclusively Chinese neighborhoods. The largest of these was located in San Francisco and was settled so heavily due to its proximity to

¹⁷⁷ Judy Yung, Gordon H. Chang, and H. Mark Lai, *Chinese American Voices: From the Gold Rush to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 429-431.

¹⁷⁸ Scott Alan Carson, "Chinese Sojourn Labor and the American Transcontinental Railroad," *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* 161, no.1 (Mar. 2005): 80-102.

¹⁷⁹ Masao Suzuki, "Important or Impotent? Taking Another Look at the 1920 California Alien Land Law," *Journal of Economic History* 64, no.1 (Mar. 2004): 125-135.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

railroad construction and because San Francisco served as the major port of entry for Chinese arriving in America. Residents of San Francisco's Chinatown, which was located in the heart of the growing city, worked as laborers, servants, launderers, and in cigar factories in other parts of San Francisco.¹⁸¹ Interestingly, the majority of Chinese laborers after the end of construction on the Transcontinental Railroad flocked to densely populated urban areas rather than remaining in rural areas. Yong Chen argues that this is because the population leaving China for California was not necessarily an originally rural population. Although affected by famine and sociopolitical upheaval, Chen posits that many Chinese immigrants who settled in Chinatown had prior exposure to commercial activities rather than strictly agricultural backgrounds.¹⁸² Following the financial depression of the Panic of 1873, concern among whites increased over Chinese occupation of the workforce. Supporters of the White Workingman's Party, led by Denis Kearney and backed by the government of California, felt that Chinese workers were responsible for lowered wages and worsening working conditions.¹⁸³ In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred any Chinese laborers from entering the U.S. and prevented those already present in the States from becoming citizens. Chinese immigrants living in the United States, most of whom were

¹⁸¹ Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco*, 47-50.

¹⁸² Yong Chen, "The Internal Origins of Chinese Emigration to California Reconsidered," *Western Historical Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 520-546.

¹⁸³ Yukari Takai, *OAH Magazine of History* 23, no. 4 (Oct. 2009): 35-42.

in California, were effectively stranded there with limited rights.¹⁸⁴ In the wake of systematic discrimination and legalized racism, Chinatown became simultaneously a prison and a refuge for the Chinese population of San Francisco.

Chinatown itself was regarded by whites as blight and a dangerous hotbed of vice in the very heart of San Francisco. Because the Chinese population in the U.S. was still overwhelmingly male and the Exclusion Act ensured that no women would be permitted to emigrate to the states, prostitution flourished in Chinatown. At its peak, 61% of the 3,356 Chinese women in California were identified as prostitutes by the U.S. Census.¹⁸⁵ Law enforcement considered the prevalence of prostitution a major issue and worked to close brothels, with limited success. The other major concern of whites over Chinatown was the opium trade. Opium dens were believed to be much more numerous than they actually were, and there was fear that opium addiction would create “white slaves of yellow masters” out of San Francisco’s respectable white men.¹⁸⁶ Nonetheless, Chinatown began to attract a significant tourist industry beginning in the late-1880s. While white residents of San Francisco avoided the neighborhood at all costs, many Caucasian travelers of white middle class

¹⁸⁴ “Chinese Exclusion Act.”

¹⁸⁵ Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 52-101

¹⁸⁶ Susan Wladavaer-Morgan, “Pacific Visions,” *Pacific Historical Review* 76, no. 1 (February 2007): 155-156; Raymond W. Rast, “The Cultural Politics of Tourism in San Francisco’s Chinatown, 1882-1917,” *Pacific Historical Review* 76, no. 1 (February 2007): 29-60.

backgrounds paid guides for safe tours of the exotic and treacherous, the lure of a romanticized Oriental culture simply too strong to resist.¹⁸⁷

More than any other clash between Chinese and white San Franciscans, the actions of the local government during the bubonic plague outbreak were symptomatic of extreme Sinophobia. Chinese reactions, on the other hand, could have been seen to diagnose the latent power of the Chinese community. Since the 1870's, outbreaks of diseases such as malaria, leprosy, and smallpox were erroneously blamed upon Chinatown. Because whites imagined the neighborhood as overcrowded, filthy, and distinctly 'other' from the ordered society of the rest of San Francisco, the Chinese made perfect scapegoats as the cause of disease as well as a number of other social problems. Even as miasma theory dwindled in popularity in favor of the germ theory of disease transmission, city health officials continued to blame outbreaks upon the 'disgusting vapours' emanating from Chinatown, and some suggested relocation of the Chinese outside of central San Francisco.¹⁸⁸

When the plague outbreak occurred, Chinatown was quarantined and blockaded. Health officials mandated that every inhabitant in Chinatown receive an experimental vaccine which proved highly toxic with dramatic side effects. The Chinese would not consent to being corralled or

¹⁸⁷ Barbara Berglund, "Chinatown's Tourist Terrain: Representation and Racialization in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco," *American Studies* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 5-36.

¹⁸⁸ Joan B. Trauner, "The Chinese as Medical Scapegoats in San Francisco, 1870-1905" *California History* 57, no. 1 (1978): 70-87.

experimented upon. Crowds of protestors gathered in protest of the vaccination mandate. The Chinese language newspaper *Chung Sai Yat Po* ran a story on March 8, 1900, entitled “Blockade is a Violation of the Law,” drawing attention to the drastic and illegal nature of the quarantine measures placed upon the Chinese.¹⁸⁹ With the help of the Chinese Six Companies the vaccination mandate was brought to court. The behavior of the individuals, the newspaper, and the Six Companies – the same principle actors that would be pivotal to Chinatown’s resilience in 1906 – demonstrated that the Chinese of San Francisco could not be so easily bullied and experimented upon as white health officials had believed. As a community, Chinatown rallied to resist insidious plague measures, though its residents would continue to suffer until the outbreak’s end in 1904.¹⁹⁰ Though the outbreak claimed almost exclusively Chinese lives, white San Franciscans continued to regard Chinatown as the source of the city’s problems.¹⁹¹ In a prophetic twist, a city physician noted this practice of placing blame years before the 1906 disaster, writing “The Chinese were the focus of Caucasian animosities, and they were made responsible for mishaps in general. A destructive earthquake would probably be charged to their account.”¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Charles McClain, “Of Medicine, Race, and American Law: The Bubonic Plague Outbreak of 1900,” *Law & Social Inquiry* 447 (1988): 453-465.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 512-513.

¹⁹¹ Joan B. Trauner, “The Chinese as Medical Scapegoats in San Francisco, 1870-1905,” 70-87.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 73.

One such destructive earthquake did occur, at the height of the animosity between whites and Chinese in April of 1906. On the morning of the 18th of April, residents along the northern coast of California observed shaking of the ground from Eureka to the Salinas Valley. Three hundred miles of the San Andreas Fault shifted as much as 28 feet and the earthquake is estimated to have had a moment magnitude of 7.8. While the earthquake itself lasted less than two minutes, the damage to San Francisco and the surrounding Bay Area was extensive. Liquefaction of the loosely packed sediment beneath much of the bay area shifted and cracked the foundations of many of the city's buildings, causing them to crumble and collapse.¹⁹³ Worse than the initial shock of the earthquake, though, was the fire that subsequently began. Constructed predominantly of wood in 1906, San Francisco burned for three days. Chinatown was decimated by the fire, and any buildings left standing were gutted by the fire and its residents were forced to flee the city. In this regard, Chinatown was not a special case; it was not, structurally speaking, impacted in any way better or worse than the other neighborhoods of central San Francisco.¹⁹⁴ Economically, the impact upon the inhabitants of Chinatown was severe because the majority of its residents were members of the laboring class.

¹⁹³ Anna Naruta, "Relocation," *Earthquake: The Chinatown Story*, Chinese Historical Society of America, <http://www.chsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Relocation.pdf>, March 12, 2016, 1-5.

¹⁹⁴ Andrea Henderson, "The Human Geography of Catastrophe: Family Bonds, Community Ties, and Disaster Relief After the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake," *Southern California Quarterly* 88, no. 4 (Spring 2006): 37-70.

Furthermore, Chinese continued to suffer at the hands of the government when they attempted to receive aid in refugee camps and were refused, frequently forced to relocate their camps, and supplied with inferior relief services.¹⁹⁵

In the aftermath of the earthquake, political figures saw the opportunity presented by the destruction of Chinatown. With its entire population being shuffled between refugee camps –many across the bay to Oakland – San Francisco’s political elites saw the opportunity to raze Chinatown, permanently relocate the Chinese, and resettle the prime real estate in the middle of the city and very near affluent neighborhoods like Nob Hill.¹⁹⁶ Reuf chaired the Committee for the Relocation of the Chinese, which planned to reestablish Chinatown outside of the city and optioned a number of locations, most of which were on marshland or far from the center of the city.¹⁹⁷ Despite the scheme for relocation, Chinatown was rebuilt, and rapidly so, as almost the entire neighborhood was restored within two years.¹⁹⁸ The Chinese, a group so untolerated and discriminated against, had rebuilt its neighborhood despite the best efforts of white political maneuvering. In fact, years of ostracism and isolation from white society rendered them well-equipped for adaptive resilience in the days and weeks immediately following the 1906 earthquake as evidenced by

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. 62-67.

¹⁹⁶ Anna Naruta, “Relocation,” 1-5.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ *Earthquake: The Chinatown Story*, Chinese Historical Society of America, <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/exhibit/earthquake-the-chinatown-story/gQr-sWsc?position=0%2C2>.

individuals' community ties and altruistic actions, the Chinese language newspaper *Chung Sai Yat Po*, and the merchant organization known as the Chinese Six Companies, all entities that existed to offset discrimination from American society.

During the earthquake, fire, and subsequent evacuation of Chinatown, individual members of the Chinese community reached out to help their neighbors and family members. It was these community ties which would save lives as San Francisco's Chinese fled from the fire that spread from the market district toward Chinatown. Because Chinatown's twenty-two square blocks were so densely populated – as the Chinese were unwelcome to live elsewhere in the city – there were no single family dwellings in the entire neighborhood.¹⁹⁹ Instead, people crammed together in three story apartment buildings. Since the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 had barred Chinese from entering the United States, Chinatown was a community constituted largely of aging bachelors by 1906. In another setting these single men might have been more socially isolated, like the individuals documented in Klinenberg's examination who died during the Chicago heat wave because they had no one and nowhere to turn for help as they suffered.²⁰⁰ In Chinatown, where people lived in such close quarters and were forced together by a background and culture not shared or appreciated by white San

¹⁹⁹ Kenneth H. Marcus and Yong Chen, "Inside and Outside Chinatown: Chinese Elites in Exclusion Era California," *Pacific Historical Review* 80, no. 3 (August 2011): 369-400.

²⁰⁰ Eric Klinenberg, *Heat Wave*, 17-20.

Franciscans, there was a greater degree of social interconnection, demonstrated as evacuees took time to warn neighbors and family members as they fled the oncoming blaze.²⁰¹ Women were in particular need of assistance, as many of them had bound, disfigured feet in adherence with ancient Chinese custom. Others needed help navigating encounters with law enforcement and relief services because of the language barrier. Lily Sung, who was a young girl at the time of the earthquake, recalled “[my father] got together some of the neighbors, and some of the people from the church, and in those days people didn’t know English too well, but my three big sisters had gone to school and they knew English.”²⁰² In the case of Lily Sung’s father, the civic infrastructure of the family’s church tied together a group of refugees. It may have saved their lives, and it is certain that their connection to the Sung sisters’ English proficiency helped them negotiate their way through the destroyed city. As Tierney argues, the embeddedness of individuals in community organizations of which churches are a key example is essential to the adaptive resilience of individuals and the community as a whole.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Connie Young Yu, “Chinatown, 1906: The End and the Beginning,” *Earthquake: The Chinatown Story*, Chinese Historical Society of America, accessed April 5, 2017, <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/>.

²⁰² Connie Young Yu, “Interview of Lily Sung on her 1906 Earthquake Experience,” *Earthquake: The Chinatown Story*, Chinese Historical Society of America, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://www.chsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Lily-Sung.pdf>.

²⁰³ Kathleen Tierney, *The Social Roots of Risk*, 185-189.

The Chinese were unwelcome in many refugee camps, however, and many found they could not gain access to the health services, food, or shelter provided to white refugees.²⁰⁴ One wealthy individual, Lew Hing, remedied this problem in Oakland. Lew Hing had spent most of his life in Chinatown, but had become a successful businessman and owned a cannery across the bay. He established a refugee camp and housed Chinese as well as other immigrant groups on the grounds of his cannery. He hired cooks to supply refugees with food and eventually recruited several hundred of them to work in his business. In the months following the disaster, Lew Hing brought attention to the discrimination faced by the Chinese who were refused aid and shelter in white refugee camps.²⁰⁵ Lew Hing's response to the plight of refugees exemplifies Solnit's statement that altruism, rather than fear and self-interest, is most prevalent in post-disaster situations. Though Hing's success had allowed him to move out of Chinatown some years earlier, his response was not the elite panic Solnit attributes to upper class whites following the earthquake. Instead Lew Hing acted selflessly in feeding and housing large numbers of refugees, Chinese or not.

Chung Sai Yat Po was a Chinese language newspaper published in San Francisco beginning in 1900. While in April of 1906 it was one of four Chinese American newspapers

²⁰⁴ Andrea Henderson, "The Human Geography of Catastrophe," 41-45.

²⁰⁵ Connie Young Su "Lew Hing: A Kinsman to the Rescue," *Earthquake: The Chinatown Story*, Chinese Historical Society, accessed April 5, 2017, <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/>.

circulating in San Francisco, it was by far the most popular.²⁰⁶ *Chung Sai Yat Po* was founded and edited by Ng Poon Chew, a Protestant minister and Chinese American civil rights activist.²⁰⁷ It began its circulation in San Francisco in order to serve the massive and concentrated Chinese population there. The paper covered a variety of topics both foreign and domestic which affected the Chinese American population, but it primarily worked to connect the Chinese community with the broader community and to encourage assimilation into Western culture, views not shared by all Chinese living in America.²⁰⁸ During the earthquake, the printing press used to publish the newspaper was destroyed, but hand-lettered versions of the paper were circulating among refugees less than one week after the disaster.²⁰⁹

After the earthquake, *Chung Sai Yat Po* reported on the living conditions and housing of Chinese Americans living in refugee camps.²¹⁰ As city officials' plans to relocate Chinatown outside of the city became clear when Abe Reuf's Committee for the Relocation of the Chinese was assembled, *Chung Sai Yat Po* reported on the plans and the legality of uprooting Chinese landowners. On April 29, 1906, the paper read:

²⁰⁶ Yumei Sun, "San Francisco's *Chung Sai Yat Po* and the Transformation of Chinese Consciousness, 1900-1920," in *Print Culture in a Diverse America*, eds. James Philip Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 83-96.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 83

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 85

²⁰⁹ Anna Naruta, "Relocation," 1-5.

²¹⁰ Yumei Sun, San Francisco's *Chung Sai Yat Po*, 89.

Ever since the city has been devastated by [the earthquake], all Chinese yearn to rebuild their community and their homes. However, though everyone wants to rebuild, everyone insists in different ways. Why? Westerners have suggested moving the Chinese people out of Chinatown . . . If the Chinese living in Chinatown are also themselves landlords, they should restore their buildings as soon as possible. And there is no need to inform local officials. According to U.S. laws, if the land belongs to the building owner, the landlord has the right to build on his land. Local officials have no right to stop him. The present city officials are [with the anti-Chinese union faction]. If we apply through them, they will try to stop us. So it's better not to go through them.²¹¹

Very few Chinese in fact owned buildings of their own in Chinatown. Much of the community lived in poverty and could afford no more than to rent small apartments intended for single occupancy, which were often uncomfortable and overcrowded due to the high population density and legal inability to obtain lodgings elsewhere. The majority of San Francisco's Chinese rented within Chinatown from White building owners who practiced a negligent sort of absentee stewardship of their properties.²¹²

²¹¹ Anna Naruta, "Relocation," 1-4.

²¹² Christopher Lee Yip, *San Francisco's Chinatown: An Architectural and Urban History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

If the Chinese rented from the western landlords, the Chinese renters should speak with their landlords as soon as possible and ask them to rebuild and rent them the building. Western landlords like to rent their houses to Chinese because the rent in Chinatown is higher than elsewhere...[These] strategies should be implemented by we Chinese quickly, or we will soon regret it.²¹³

The writer of the article encouraged the Chinese to return to the neighborhood hastily. Rather than advocating using official channels and asking permission to return, the residents of Chinatown were advised to return, and quickly, before Reuf and city officials could fully develop and undergo any of their own plans for Chinatown's land. In the weeks after the earthquake, Chinatown was reclaimed by the Chinese community before Reuf and his cohort could fully estimate the resolve with which San Francisco's Chinese clung to their community.

Chung Sai Yat Po aimed in the days and weeks following the earthquake to unite the residents of Chinatown, displaced as they were, to ensure that they would not unwittingly allow their homes to be claimed by the city unlawfully. A general concern of the newspaper was to ensure that Chinese Americans understood the laws that could at times work in their favor despite Chinese disenfranchisement, as it was feared that individuals who

²¹³ Anna Naruta, "Relocation," 2.

either could not speak English or simply did not understand United States law could easily be taken advantage of, as might have been the case with Chinatown following the earthquake. On May 1, 1906, an editorial in the paper explained that "According to the U.S. constitution, Americans and Chinese in the United States are both protected by its provisions to choose freely where they want to live. Therefore, the city government cannot tell the Chinese where they should relocate; we Chinese can simply ignore them as well."²¹⁴ The ultimate effort of *Chung Sai Yat Po's* distribution following the earthquake was to awaken and mobilize the scattered Chinese community into rapid action in reclaiming Chinatown as their own. Although *Chung Sai Yat Po* was not technically a form of civic infrastructure, it was an organic product of the Chinatown community, written for the benefit of its residents. It had been established in 1900 as the only form of media exclusively aimed at California's Chinese, speaking to and for them with the interest of improving the community. Following the earthquake, it was the best form of communication available to the Chinese, and was effective in reconnecting those who had been isolated by the evacuation process. As a medium for the transport of community issues and ideas, *Chung Sai Yat Po* acted as a lynchpin for the resilience of Chinatown.

The Chinese Six Companies, the San Francisco branch of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, were

²¹⁴ Yumei Sun, "San Francisco's *Chung Sai Yat Po*," 89.

originally six independent groups of merchants that represented and benefited Chinese Americans.²¹⁵ The Six Companies provided services that dealt with legal disputes, merchant relationships, and receiving permissions from the U.S. government for travel to and from China.²¹⁶ Importantly, the Chinese Six Companies helped to set up the Tung Wah Dispensary, a clinic where traditional eastern medicine was practiced and which served as an alternative to white-run hospitals, where Chinese patients were often discriminated against, or were too poor to seek help. It was destroyed along with the rest of Chinatown in the fire following the earthquake, but it was quickly rebuilt in order to provide care to the sick and injured. The Tung Wah Dispensary was a community-developed substitute for state infrastructure which served the unique needs of Chinatown's residents, promoting resilience while offsetting the discrimination against the Chinese practiced by wider city institutions.²¹⁷

Serving as an official link between the Chinese American community and government entities, the Chinese Six Companies appealed to the Chinese government for relief funding and supplies such as clothing and cookware

²¹⁵ Him Mark Lai, "Historical Development of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association/Huiguan System," *Him Mark Lai Digital Archive*, Chinese Historical Society of America, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://himmarklai.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Historical-Development-of-the-Chinese-Consolidated-Benevolent-Association.pdf?9388f2>. 13-43.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ Lauren D. Hom, "Early Chinese Immigrants Organizing for Healthcare," in *Handbook of Asian American Health*, eds. Grace J. Yoo, Mai-Nhung Le, Alan Y. Oda (New York: Springer, 2013), 357-258.

after the earthquake.²¹⁸ Perhaps most importantly, however, the Chinese Six Companies represented the legal complaints of the Chinese community, both for individual members and the community as a whole. Large numbers of Chinese who were legally in the United States had lost their birth certificates and proof of legal immigration forms in the fire, and had to obtain replacement documents.²¹⁹ The Chinese Six Companies had and continued to negotiate the fragile relationship between the U.S. government and Chinese Americans. The Six Companies dealt with helping individual Chinese Americans recover, which would help the entire community to get up and running once again.

As the public face of the Chinese community, the Companies formally opposed plans to relocate Chinatown without the consent of the Chinese immediately after the disaster. In a meeting with the Committee on the Relocation of the Chinese, the *San Francisco Call* reported on May 17, 1906:

Behind closed doors the Chinese Consul General, Vice Consul and secretary of the Legation and representatives of the Six Companies met with the local committee on the permanent location of Chinatown and formally represented a vigorous protest against being “located” in any section of San Francisco other than that chosen by the individual members of the race. The Chinese maintain that they

²¹⁸ Him Mark Lai, “Historical Development,” 13-19.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

have the privilege of building and living next door to any citizen, and while appreciating the advantage to themselves of having a quarter, demand that the quarter be of their own selection.²²⁰

The Chinese Six Companies were apparently willing to negotiate the relocation of Chinatown, but were adamant that such a move would be on Chinese terms, and not simply the expulsion of the Chinese by white San Franciscans. Once it was settled, mainly by the Chinese population moving back into the city, that Chinatown would be rebuilt, the Companies played a significant role in the way the neighborhood would be rebuilt. The *Call* reported in August of 1906:

The Chinese Six Companies which is at all times the dominating spirit in the local Chinese world is preparing to revive the oriental quarter of old San Francisco . . . it was decided to construct temporary quarters at the organization's former meeting place, 785 Commercial Street, pending negotiations for a larger and more conventional building on Dupont Street, near Clay.²²¹

²²⁰ "Chinese Protest Against Forcible Change of Site," *San Francisco Call*, May 3, 1906, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=SFC19060503.2.25&srpos=8&e=01-04-1906-01-01-1908-190-en--20-SFC-1--txt-txIN-Chinese+Six+Companies+-----1>.

²²¹ "Chinese to Hurry Building Work," *San Francisco Call*, August 15, 1906, accessed March 12, 2016,

Like the editor of *Chung Sai Yat Po*, the Companies also understood the immediate need for return to the space which Chinatown had occupied prior to the earthquake. In part, occupying this space would cement the Companies' presence in Chinatown once again, making it difficult for white city elites to circumvent their authority on all matters Chinese. Furthermore, the Companies were the only reliable agency providing various types of aid to the Chinese community, and their restored presence meant that they could be sought out for help once again. The Chinese Six Companies was also exerting its interest in preserving Chinatown, insisting that the neighborhood not only be rebuilt in its original setting, but rebuilt in a stronger manner:

The agent of the company is already engaged in leasing property at the latter location, around which Chinatown will be built. The Chinese have decided to build within the bounds of Kearny, Stockton, California and Pacific Streets, and to erect the most modern buildings. Most of these will be constructed of three stories in height and will be constructed of steel and reinforced cement.²²²

<http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=SFC19060815.2.65&srpos=7&e=01-04-1906-01-01-1908-190-en--20-SFC-1--txt-txIN-Chinese+Six+Companies+-----1>.

²²² Ibid.

The Companies assembled to lay out new regulations and designs for a cleaner, more spacious Chinatown which they hoped would decrease white consternation toward the neighborhood and which remains the face of Chinatown today.²²³ Though Chinatown would retain its old outward and upward dimensions, the Chinese Six Companies planned in conjunction with landowners a more structurally sound neighborhood, and proved to be the ultimate authority in detailing the rebuilding once plans for relocation had failed. The Chinese Six Companies acted as both the authority of Chinatown and the concerned neighbor, actively looking after the well-being of the Chinatown and its residents. In his analysis, Klinenberg decries a lack of official effort to check on and provide care centers for the vulnerable in episodes of disaster.²²⁴ The Six Companies played this role in Chinatown in 1906 because no government group cared to do so. By running the Tung Wah Dispensary, providing legal representation, and establishing building codes, the Chinese Six Companies provided a support system that attempted to ensure that the Chinese were not isolated, but were connected to figures of authority who could help them recover.

As Chinatown was rebuilt *in situ* in the months and years following the disastrous San Francisco earthquake of

²²³ Vanessa Hua, "The Great Quake: 1906-2006/Out of Chaos Came New Chinese America, *The San Francisco Gate*, April 13, 2006, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/The-Great-Quake-1906-2006-Out-of-chaos-came-2537469.php>.

²²⁴ Eric Klinenberg, *Heat Wave*.

1906, local newspapers such as the *San Francisco Call* and the *Oakland Tribune* reported with relief that Chinatown was being repopulated, citing that the neighborhood was good for tourism and international trade. Though unknown numbers of Chinese died in the earthquake and fire, and some chose not to return, the neighborhood was rebuilt in its entirety and the Chinatown of today looks much the same as it did in 1908. The Chinatown community, forged as an isolated and outcast community because of widespread discrimination against Chinese Americans, was astoundingly resilient in the wake of the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906. Though Chinatown was entirely destroyed, it was rebuilt quickly and with a sizeable rebound in population by 1908. Other communities that enjoyed benefits not afforded to Chinatown – social acceptance, wealth, access to relief aid – did not rebound as expected. The neighborhood of Nob Hill, virtually next door to Chinatown, was largely abandoned by its preexisting residents after the earthquake.²²⁵ To ask why neighborhoods like Nob Hill failed to recover is to ask what Chinatown had that they did not. In *A Paradise Built in Hell*, Rebecca Solnit writes that, in a disaster setting, “among the factors determining whether you will live or die are the health of your immediate community and the justness of your society.”²²⁶ The society faced by Chinese Americans of San Francisco in 1906 was certainly an unjust one. As a result,

²²⁵ Andrea Henderson, “Human Geography of Catastrophe,” 37-70.

²²⁶ Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Built in Hell*, 7.

however, the Chinatown community was a thriving, insulated one that often worked to make up for the social injustice of the surrounding city, state, and country. Individuals' community bonds, *Chung Sai Yat Po*, and the Chinese Six Companies were entities which arose to combat discrimination and attempts to isolate the residents of Chinatown, and proved to be powerful aspects of its adaptive resilience in the wake of the 1906 earthquake and fire. Above all it was a sense of community – intense care for the neighborhood and the people in it which arose out of necessity and shared cultural heritage – that saved Chinatown.