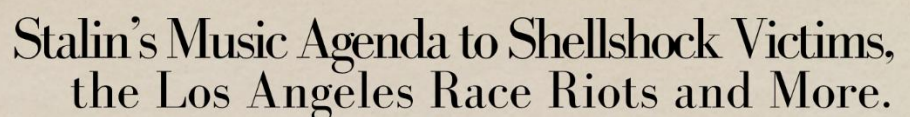


*winter 2025*



# ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The Hopkins History Journal is a high school student-run, peer-reviewed history research journal that provides high schoolers with an opportunity to have their exceptional work published. The journal was originally started in 2022 to showcase some of the research papers required in many Hopkins history courses, with the broader aims of providing more humanities opportunities to high school students, generating enthusiasm for the study of history, and promoting the diffusion and discussion of historical ideas.

## ABOUT THE COVER

This cover includes symbols - land, paper, and migration - which represent the papers in this issue. A bison, a time-spanning symbol of Native American identity, stands atop mountains made of paper. The land represents the theme of land conflicts included in many of this edition's works. One "mountain" consists of Cherokee land allotments and shows that, despite centuries of ancestral ties to land, federal recognition of legality rested on mere pieces of paper. Another mountain is a report of shell shock victims during WW1. The remaining paper mountains are pieces of sheet music, referring to Stalin's failed attempts at propaganda through music. Vertical black lines stand above the paper mountains. One set of these lines is sound waves, representing the value of oral traditions and storytelling amidst paper records and documents. The other set is a fence, symbolic of the LA riots, which in large part originated from inequitable differences between wealthy suburbs and lower-income areas. The lines further constrain the bison, now trapped by both paper land allotments and in a gated enclosure. When looking further up, there are "clouds" of signatures in the sky. Signatures hold significant power over land and their people. Here, this is shown by the ominous blending of the various signatures that dictated various legal and land policies present in this edition's papers. The red pin, whose vibrant color and different visual style make it stick out from the rest of the land, embodies the expansionist presence in war, colonization, and racial gentrification. The bottommost mountain, as well as the thin streak of fire stemming from the pin, shows the act of burning paper.

Livia Liu, Cover Design

ISSUE III

# HOPKINS HISTORY JOURNAL

A High School Research Publication

WINTER 2025

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## Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to present the third edition of the Hopkins History Journal! This issue is the result of months of tireless work by our editorial team and authors to publish outstanding scholarship and carry forward a growing Hopkins tradition.

This edition features work from every term-paper writing course. From the neglect of Indigenous perspectives throughout history to Stalin's failed attempt to advance propaganda through music, these five research papers highlight the range and depth of inquiry pursued by your fellow Hopkins scholars. Many of the authors featured here have also earned recognition both within and beyond the Hopkins community.

This year, in our effort to expand beyond the journal itself, we hosted our very first launch party to unveil the new edition. We hope this marks the beginning of a yearly tradition accompanying each release. We also encourage readers to visit our website to explore additional scholarly papers published exclusively online. You can revisit our past editions for a true "blast from the past."

We begin our thanks with Claire Billings and Theo Friedman, our previous editors-in-chief. Without their remarkable organization and rigorous guidance, the *Hopkins History Journal* would quite literally be a blank PDF. We hope future generations of the journal's editors will continue to cherish the legendary Google Drive folder. A special thank you goes to Livia Liu, who was roped in to create the cover art (after school on a Friday, no less). Her digital design skills truly know no bounds. Finally, our deepest gratitude goes to the faculty and staff who make the *Journal* possible. We are especially thankful to Mr. Levy for his continued support and enthusiasm, and to Ms. Williams, without whom this beautiful edition would not be in your hands.

We hope you enjoy reading!

Sincerely,  
Elona Spiewak and Shriya Vaid  
*Editors-in-Chief*

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# POINTLESS AND PITIFUL PROPAGANDA:

## STALIN'S FAILURE TO USE MUSIC AS A MEANS OF PROPAGANDA

Noah Novemsky '27

*Atlantic Communities II, Mr. Peters*

2025 Recipient of the *Julia B. Thomas Prize in History*

On January 28, 1936, the Soviet-controlled newspaper *Pravda* published a review of Dmitri Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, calling it a "petty-bourgeois, 'formalist' attempt to create originality through cheap clowning."<sup>1</sup> This criticism, widely understood to reflect Stalin's disapproval, marked the beginning of a difficult period for classical composers such as Shostakovich. Under Stalin's reign of the Soviet Union, music was expected to serve the state and promote Soviet ideals while avoiding anything deemed too experimental or individualistic by the Soviet Union. Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev, Soviet composers who lived under Stalin's rule, pushed back against Stalin's constant pressure to conform musically to the Soviet Union's ideas. While composers like Shostakovich and Prokofiev were pressured to conform, they found ways to resist subtly. Along with many of the other arts, Stalin strived to use music as a medium for propaganda, suppressing dissent, and promoting nationalism. Stalin's attempt to censor contrary ideas and use music as a means of propaganda ultimately ended in failure.

To understand how Stalin's regime failed in its use of music as propaganda, it is first necessary to examine his goals. In 1932, the Soviet government established the Union of Soviet Composers (U.S.C.), an organization designed to regulate and control musical output. Membership in this union was

mandatory for composers who wished to have their work performed and earn a living. The U.S.C. functioned as a gatekeeping institution, ensuring that music adhered to government-approved themes and ideologies.<sup>2</sup> A 1934 interview with eight members of the U.S.C. outlined its priorities:

The U.S.C. stimulates activity in the following directions:

1. Musical composition in general.
2. Music for children, Pioneers, Komsomols, &c.
3. Music for workers in factories and collectives, the Red Army, &c.
4. Music for the theatre.
5. Musical criticism and historical research.
6. Books on theory, pedagogics, &c.
7. Investigation and encouragement of national folk-music.
8. Gramophone recording.
9. Mass propaganda-i.e., encouragement of amateurs in the appreciation and performance of music.
10. Concerts, opera production, radio.<sup>3</sup>

These objectives can be categorized into two main groups: stimulating musical propaganda and suppressing undesirable artistic expressions. The Soviet Union strived to use music for "mass propaganda" and to criticize music that did not adhere to their rules, especially those that fit their nationalistic

<sup>1</sup> Pravda, 28 January 1936 "Muddle instead of Music," Wayback Machine, Internet Archive <https://web.archive.org/web/20110127123117/http://www.arnoldschalks.nl/tl1e1sub1.html>

<sup>2</sup> George G. Weickhardt, "DICTATORSHIP AND MUSIC: HOW RUSSIAN MUSIC SURVIVED THE Soviet REGIME," *Russian History* 31, no. 1/2 (2004): 6, JSTOR.

<sup>3</sup> W. H. Kerridge, "The Union of Soviet Composers," *The Musical Times* 75, no. 1102 (1934): 1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/919586>.

ideals. This was the basis for the governmental intervention targeted at Shostakovich in 1936.

However, these 1936 attacks on Shostakovich were a counterproductive tactic by the Soviet Union to use him as propaganda. The aforementioned *Pravda* excerpt was part of a wave of criticism that culminated in the loss of his job as a teacher at the Leningrad Conservatory and almost resulted in his death in February of 1936.<sup>4</sup> Shostakovich attempted to regain the regime's approval through his fifth symphony, including subtitling it: "A Soviet Artist's Response to Just Criticism."<sup>5</sup> When he premiered it in November of 1937 it was received incredibly well. In fact, the crowd that was mixed with Soviet officials and critics gave an ovation that lasted for over 40 minutes, almost as long as the piece itself; this officially put Shostakovich back in good favor with the regime.<sup>6</sup> But even this work, meant to glorify the regime and put him back in the good will of the union, contained elements of irony. Musicologist Jennifer Gerstel noted that in the finale of the fifth symphony, Shostakovich exaggerated the optimism and triumph to a ridiculous extent.<sup>7</sup> Shostakovich commented on this exaggerated triumph:

I think that it is clear to everyone what happens in the Fifth. The rejoicing is forced, created under threat, as in Boris Godunov. It's as if someone were beating you with a stick and saying, "Your business is rejoicing, your business is rejoicing," and you rise, shaky, and go marching off, muttering, "Our business is rejoicing, our business is rejoicing."<sup>8</sup>

Shostakovich felt that the triumph in his fifth symphony was exaggerated because of how forced it was. This is a failure on the part of the regime; the excessive fear they put him in after the attacks in 1936 caused his fifth symphony to contain hyperbolic triumph, which itself made a mockery of the regime's excessive forced optimism. This also marked a more general failure of the regime to effectively use Shostakovich's music as effective propaganda, as instead of glorifying the regime, this work mocked it.

Subsequently Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony demonstrates Stalin's failure to use music to effectively glorify the Soviet Union. After the Russian victory against Germany in World War II, Stalin expected Shostakovich to write a grand symphony to celebrate the victory.<sup>9</sup> Historically, a composer's Ninth Symphony is grand and profound, so the regime expected him to produce a similarly monumental Ninth Symphony. Stalin was obsessed with the significance of ninth symphonies because of their history as majestic works. Examples of grand ninth symphonies include Beethoven's Ninth and Bruckner's Ninth; he demanded a majestic and grandiose work like these that glorified the regime with very grand orchestration.<sup>10</sup> Having no other choice, Shostakovich wrote his Ninth Symphony for the Regime, but filled it not with grand, epic melodies, but with ironic "Haydn-esque, joke-like reaction[s] to the Communist Party's expectation of a victory symphony."<sup>11</sup> That is one way Philip Lenberg describes this piece in his PhD dissertation about Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony. Lenberg concludes in this dissertation that Shostakovich's Ninth

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<sup>4</sup>Jennifer Gerstel, "Irony, Deception, and Political Culture in the Works of Dmitri Shostakovich," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 32, no. 4 (1999): 5, JSTOR.

<sup>5</sup>"Symphony No. 5 in D Minor," Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, <https://www.indianapolissymphony.org/backstage/program-notes/shostakovich-symphony-no-5-in-d-minor/>.

<sup>6</sup>Ian MacDonald and Raymond Clarke, *The New Shostakovich*, new ed. (London: Pimlico, 2006), 148.

<sup>7</sup>Gerstel, "Irony, Deception," 48.

<sup>8</sup>Solomon Volkov, *Testimony the Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1980), 183.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid*, 140.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*, 140.

<sup>11</sup>Phillip Lenberg, "Shostakovich's Ninth Symphony: An Analytical Exploration and Keys to Interpretation" (PhD diss., The University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2016), 1-2.

Symphony was “mocking the anti-Semitic martial state of Stalinist Soviet Union.”<sup>12</sup> Along with mocking anti-Semitism, further analysis reveals many other forms of ridicule.

The brevity of the piece makes a mockery of the regime’s expectations of an excessively grand Ninth Symphony. First, this piece is under 25 minutes in length, which is historically short for a symphony, even for Shostakovich. For comparison, Shostakovich’s fifth symphony is slightly under an hour and his eighth is slightly over an hour. The excessive brevity of this piece undermines the grandiose nature that Stalin expected from this work.



Fig 1. A-theme in strings in the introduction of piece 0:10-0:17, and 1:28-1:35 after the repeat.



Fig 2. A-theme in strings, notice how Shostakovich doubles and accents the g-flat in every voice 0:44-0:49, and 2:02-2:07 after repeat

The piece consists of many themes, labeled in the order they are introduced: A-theme, the B-theme, etc. The A-theme mocks the excessive triumph expected from Shostakovich. It starts in E-flat major, a historically heroic key, the same one used in Beethoven’s “Eroica” Symphony. In the very first phrase, this heroic key is undermined with the G-flat trill (Figure 1). Since G in an E-flat major chord defines the major chord (the only difference between an E-flat major chord and an E-flat minor chord is the third, either G or G-flat), it undermines the heroism of

the key, as if he is saying, “Look at how heroic we really are.” Furthermore, this G-flat is the climax of the phrase; the music builds in volume towards it, it is accented, and it is twice as long as any other note in the phrase. Shostakovich emphasized this note to undermine the heroism throughout the piece. He then repeated this figure several more times throughout the movement to highlight the lack of heroism of the key (Figures 2, 3 & 4), and thus mock the Soviet Union.



Fig 3. A-theme in clarinet 4:42-4:50 after the repeat.



Fig 4. A-theme in strings, notice how the brass joins to double the g-flat 3:50-4:00.

Lastly, Shostakovich’s use of brass instrumentation further mocks the Soviet Union’s excessive patriotism. Shostakovich includes a pseudo-patriotic brass theme in his ninth symphony in a musically unfitting place in order to mock the misplaced patriotism of the regime. The symphony includes a cliché V-I resolution (one of the most basic melodic motifs) that becomes very loud and promises the grand march sound that Stalin wanted (Figure 4), only to suddenly get quiet to cause the reverse effect. This theme is then followed by a delicate, silly-sounding piccolo solo (Figures 5 and 6). He later reuses the brass motif, but makes it even more out of place; the trombone is meant to sound like it comes in

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, iii.





Fig 5. Out of place brass theme 0:49-55, and 2:07-2:14.

early until it finally comes in on time (Figures 8 and 9). This is a comment on how the Soviet Union, just like how the trombone literally gets ahead of itself and repeatedly comes in early, Shostakovich comments here that the excessive patriotism of the regime often metaphorically gets ahead of itself. Even Stalin understood how great a failure this piece turned out to be, thus he decided to ban it in 1948, three years after its premiere.<sup>13</sup> Therefore this Ninth Symphony marks a complete failure of the regime to use Shostakovich as a tool for propaganda.

Just as Shostakovich used musical motifs to undermine the success of the Soviet Union, Prokofiev also rebelled against the Soviet Union's restrictions through his music. Even when Prokofiev composed

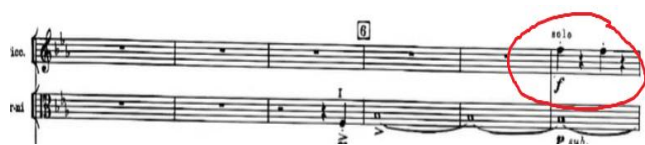


Fig 6. Start of "silly sounding" piccolo solo after brass theme 0:50-1:00, and 2:11-2:20.



Fig 7. Continuation of piccolo solo 0:50-1:00, and 2:11-2:20.



Figs 8 & 9. Trombone "getting ahead of itself" motif 3:57-4:22, and 2:02-2:07 after repeat.

grandiose works for the Soviet Union, Stalin's paranoia prevented him from using the music effectively. For example, the ban of Prokofiev's *Ivan the Terrible* exemplifies a failure on the part of the regime to effectively use music for propaganda. To understand this, it is necessary to understand the background of the Stalin Prize. The Stalin Prize, conceived in 1939, was presented from 1941 to 1953 as a Soviet alternative to the Nobel Prize and was given across various artistic fields. It had 3 tiers: first-, second-, and third-class.<sup>14</sup> Prokofiev was awarded 6 Stalin Prizes total, but he was not respected by the regime as much as Shostakovich.<sup>15</sup> Two of the pieces that won Prokofiev a Stalin Prize were his *Aleksandr Nevsky* (1938) and the two parts of *Ivan the Terrible* (1942, 1945).<sup>16</sup> The *Ivan the Terrible* project took five years to complete, largely due to the interference of an intrusive Soviet committee that meticulously scrutinized its production to ensure it aligned with Soviet ideology and glorified the regime.<sup>17</sup> Despite this

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, 1-2.

<sup>14</sup>Oliver Johnson, "The Stalin Prize and the Soviet Artist: Status Symbol or Stigma?," *Slavic Review* 70, no. 4 (2011): 3-4, <https://doi.org/10.5612/slavicreview.70.4.0819>.

<sup>15</sup>"Prokofiev, Sergei (1891–1953)," in *Europe since 1914: Encyclopedia of the Age of War and Reconstruction*, ed. John Merriman and Jay Winter (Detroit, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2006), 4:2098, Gale eBooks.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, 2098.

<sup>17</sup>"Shostakovich and Prokofiev's Musical Struggles under Soviet Government Restrictions" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2024), 69, <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/7d64cdab-d2e4-432b-b22b-ade19c748886/content>.

extensive oversight, making it one of Prokofiev's least rebellious works, Stalin still chose to ban the second part in 1946.<sup>18</sup> The ban of *Ivan the Terrible* marked a substantial failure of the Soviet Union to effectively use Prokofiev as a tool for propaganda. Stalin succeeded at commissioning a successful work of propaganda that supported the regime, yet his excessive paranoia got the best of him. Not only was this a large waste of time and resources, but it also reduced the credibility of the Stalin prize, which it had been awarded to this piece before the ban. In trying to suppress rebellion, Stalin destroyed a nationalistic piece of propaganda because he was too paranoid about his public image.

Prokofiev's Seventh Piano Sonata also marks a failure on the part of the regime to effectively suppress musical rebellion. Prokofiev's Seventh Piano Sonata, one of his so-called "War Sonatas," won him a Stalin prize and was glorified by the regime in a similar way to Shostakovich's seventh ("Leningrad") symphony.<sup>19</sup> Prokofiev's seventh sonata contains many rebellious elements. Most of the seventh sonata's themes were composed in 1939 when the Soviet Union and Germany were still in a state of non-aggression.<sup>20</sup> George Weickhardt, the author of "Dictatorship and Music," argues that many elements of the piece including the so-called "invasion theme" in the first movement can just as easily be interpreted as a reflection of Prokofiev's struggles under the regime.<sup>21</sup> The regime failed to notice the rebellion in this sonata, and they even rewarded Prokofiev for it.

The 1948 Meeting of the Soviet Union was one of Stalin's most successful tactics, yet it only was effective until Stalin's death in 1953. On February 10, 1948, composers and critics were under scrutiny; the USSR held a meeting in which limitations were placed on major Soviet composers including Prokofiev and

Shostakovich. They published a resolution accusing many of these composers of formalism.<sup>22</sup> Ian Macdonald, musicologist and author of *The New Shostakovich*, defines the word formalism as, "one of the pejoratives that could be attached to a Soviet citizen that year [...] despite the fact that few had any idea of what it meant."<sup>23</sup> By labeling music as formalist, the government could condemn any work that did not align with their ideological expectations, even if its meaning was unclear or subjective. This ambiguity allowed the state to wield formalism as a political weapon rather than a concrete artistic critique. Since "few had any idea of what it meant," the accusation was nearly impossible to refute, forcing composers into a precarious position where any deviation from state-approved styles could result in professional ruin, exile, or death.

The image shows a page from a musical score for Prokofiev's Seventh Piano Sonata. The top system includes staves for Oboe (Ob.), Flute (Flg.), Clarinet (Clar.), Bassoon (Fag.), Trumpet (Tr.) and Trombone (Tromba), and Tuba (Tuba). The bottom system includes staves for Violin (Vn.), Viola (Vla.), Cello (Vcl.), and Double Bass (Cb.). The Trombone part is circled in red, highlighting a specific motif. The score is in G major, 3/4 time, and features various dynamics and articulations.

Fig 9. Trombone motif finally lands "at the right time" 3:57-4:22.

<sup>18</sup>"Prokofiev, Sergei," 4:2098.

<sup>19</sup>Weickhardt, "DICTATORSHIP AND MUSIC," 10.

<sup>20</sup>Shostakovich and Prokofiev's," 33.

<sup>21</sup>Weickhardt, "DICTATORSHIP AND MUSIC," 10.

<sup>22</sup>Harold C. Schonberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers*, rev. ed ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), 548.

<sup>23</sup>MacDonald and Clarke, *The New Shostakovich*, 209.

For Shostakovich, however, the 1948 attacks failed to silence his musical defiance, as he continued to compose works that critiqued the regime, even if they could not be premiered at the time. Shostakovich had just started writing his violin concerto when the 1948 meetings started, finishing it only a few months later in March.<sup>24</sup> In November of 1948, Stalinist anti-Semitism intensified to an extreme.<sup>25</sup> During this period, 400 Jewish artists, musicians, and writers were arrested and killed.<sup>26</sup> Shostakovich firmly opposed anti-Semitism, declaring that he would break off “with even good friends if [he] saw that they had any anti-Semitic tendencies.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, in response to the increasing repression, Shostakovich composed the song cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry* that challenged Soviet anti-Semitism. Though he could not premiere it under Stalin’s rule, the piece was finally performed in 1955, after Stalin’s death, and was met with widespread public acclaim.<sup>28</sup> That same year, he also premiered his Violin Concerto No. 1, another work composed in secret during the height of Soviet censorship.<sup>29</sup> After losing his job, the pent up anger from Shostakovich against the regime was so great that he made a composition called *Rayok* that was too rebellious to even be performed in his lifetime; MacDonald comments, “This piece was not so much ‘for the drawer’ as for the sake of its composer’s sanity.”<sup>30</sup> Some of his pent up anger towards the regime was still present in the two other works mentioned: *From Jewish Folk Poetry* and his Violin Concerto both critique Stalin’s regime and anti-Semitism during this period, and there is no doubt the 1948 meetings contributed to the feelings of distaste for

the Soviet Union expressed in these pieces.<sup>31</sup> Stalin’s 1948 attacks failed to silence Shostakovich, who continued composing in secret and published many of his works after Stalin’s death, including these two pieces, which featured critiques and mockery of the regime.

Stalin’s attempt to mold Soviet music into a vehicle for propaganda ultimately failed, as composers like Shostakovich and Prokofiev found ways to resist, even under intense scrutiny. His efforts to exploit these artists were thwarted not only by their resilience but also by the regime’s fundamental misunderstanding of music’s expressive power. By imposing rigid ideological demands, the government inadvertently pushed composers towards greater defiance, fueling works that concealed subversive critiques beneath their seemingly patriotic surfaces. The experiences of Shostakovich and Prokofiev demonstrate that, even under one of history’s most oppressive authoritarian regimes, music can serve as a powerful instrument of resistance. As Shostakovich himself famously said, “Words are not my genre. I never lie in music.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>MacDonald and Clarke, *The New Shostakovich*, 211.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid*, 215.

<sup>26</sup> Joachim Braun, “The Double Meaning of Jewish Elements in Dimitri Shostakovich’s Music,” *The Musical Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (1985): 72, JSTOR.

<sup>27</sup>MacDonald and Clarke, *The New Shostakovich*, 157.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid*, 232.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid*, 233.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 211-213.

The existence of this work was actually revealed by a footnote in Volkov’s *Testimony*, and was only published once Shostakovich’s wife deemed it was safe to do so in 1989.

<sup>31</sup>Braun, “The Double,” 75-77.

<sup>32</sup>Gerstel, “Irony, Deception,” 40, As seen in Volkov, *Testimony*.

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# SILENT SUFFERING:

## THE TREATMENT OF BRITISH SHELL-SHOCK VICTIMS IN WORLD WAR I

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I wondered what was happening because anything that went off, bang, over there somewhere made me jump. And I suddenly realized I'd got this thing called shell-shock, which I'd never believed in before. Simply I think because of all these shells going off quite close to one, there was a lot of concussion about it. And I realised this and I didn't know what to do because I wasn't going to tell anybody and I didn't tell anybody about it.<sup>1</sup>

British Lieutenant Francis William Seymour Jourdain describes his involuntary startle after a bang went off, illustrating the fear associated with his symptoms and potential diagnosis—shell-shock—and explains his preconceived idea of other soldiers with the same condition. Jourdain's description is similar to that of other British soldiers who, while fighting for their country, developed shell-shock and faced harsh treatments, accusatory stigmas, and governmental neglect.

World War I was a global conflict lasting from July 28, 1914, to November 11, 1918, involving the Allied Powers of France, Great Britain, and Russia, and the Central Powers of Germany, the Ottoman Empire, and Austria-Hungary. The war was primarily fought along the Western Front of France and Belgium and the

Eastern Front of Poland and Russia, where both the powers set up defensive trenches, long narrow ditches where soldiers lived and fought, to protect themselves from enemy fire. The horrific nature of trench warfare, with artillery warfare lasting hours and sometimes days, left no place to escape, while the terrible living conditions and spread of disease added to soldiers' troubles. These circumstances contributed to the rise of shell-shock, now known as a form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a condition of unyielding emotional and mental strain occurring as a result of a traumatic experience.<sup>2</sup> The term shell-shock was first used by Lieutenant Colonel Charles Myers of Britain's Royal Army Medical Corps in a 1915 publication of the medical journal *The Lancet*; Myers applied the term to soldiers suffering from a large range of symptoms including tics, trembling, functional paralysis, hysterical blindness, and deafness, speech disorders ranging from stuttering to mutism, confusion, extreme anxiety, headaches, amnesia, depression, unexplained cramps, fainting, and vomiting. While the real cause—intense psychological stress and trauma—is now known, doctors treating World War I veterans believed the condition was a result of an injury to the nervous system during heavy bombing and shell attacks. The problem with that assumption is that

<sup>1</sup> "Voices of the First World War: shell-shock," *Imperial War Museums*.

<sup>2</sup> "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)," *Mayo Clinic*.



men not directly exposed to shelling showed similar symptoms, forcing medical professionals to look for different causes.

The absence of clear-cut evidence due to shell-shock's array of symptoms led the British government and its medical professionals to promote many different stigmas and misconceptions about the disease: that it was predisposed to weak individuals, was contagious, and would lower the morale of other men, or that it was exaggerated by soldiers who just wanted extra rest and recuperation. All of these incorrect beliefs shifted the blame from the devastating war onto the victims who were now mocked and dismissed by doctors and officers. Adding to the strain on shell-shocked men, the British government neglected sufferers by focusing more on balancing its budget and maintaining military order than on providing treatment. Soldiers were forced to contend with their condition or face the consequences, such as a court-martial; however, when they were treated, they had to endure excruciating, abusive care. The British government inhumanely treated shell-shocked victims during and after World War I, prioritizing its finances and military needs over proper treatment, dismissing the acknowledgement and diagnosis of victims' conditions, and improperly punishing and imprisoning these men, exacerbating the suffering of soldiers and their families.

Shell-shocked soldiers faced harsh stigmas regarding their condition, with officers and doctors ignoring symptoms, assuming it was a predisposed illness, and mocking and underappreciating sufferers, adding to their emotional turmoil. Because there was insufficient

information on mental disorders in the early twentieth century, doctors and officers had varying viewpoints on proper treatment and the true causes of shell-shock, most of which placed the blame on the soldiers. Assuming it was contagious and would make others nervous, some doctors and military officers believed the condition would undermine Britain's army's ability to keep fighting; Colonel J.F.C Fuller, the British Deputy Director of Staff Duties and late General Staff Officer, said, "If a crowd of men are reduced to a low nervous condition 'shell-shock' becomes contagious," while others believed shell-shock was mostly malingering, cowardly soldiers looking for ways to leave the war.<sup>3</sup> Because mental health was generally viewed as a result of a lack of discipline, officers dismissed emotionally wounded men as evading their duty to Britain. Royal Fusilier Private William Holbrook explains his opinion regarding officials reprimanding distressed soldiers:

I was reading some time ago where some general said, 'There's no such thing as shell-shock.' He ought to have, he should have been there. I mean it's ridiculous to say things like that. You get a man, even if he was a strong man, you get a terrific burst from a shell within say three or four yards of you, you know. It does, it does upset them. shell-shock, oh my god yes.<sup>4</sup>

R.F. Holbrook's account highlights officers' disregard for suffering victims, emphasizing the officers' apathy for treating their condition, but contradicts their opinion, illustrating soldiers' contempt for their supervisors, arguing that these men needed the treatment they weren't receiving.

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<sup>3</sup> Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into "shell-shock" (London, United Kingdom, 1922), 30, Internet Archive.

<sup>4</sup> "Voices of the First"

A more widely accepted belief regarding the cause of shell-shock was that it was predisposed, provoking sufferers to feel cowardly and weak. The 1922 Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into "shell-shock" sought to investigate the causes, treatment, and management of the illness during and after World War I, describing predisposition as the primary cause of shell-shock. It highlights Dr. Lewis Bruce and Professor Graham Brown's belief that "In the large majority of persons showing emotional 'shellshock,' there was present in the family history or in the personal history, evidence of weakness, instability or defect of the nervous system."<sup>5</sup> The assumption of personal weakness took the liability from the war's harrowing trenches and placed it on soldiers, making them feel as though they were responsible, and creating a culture of secrecy. Soldiers would ignore their symptoms, scared to face the judgmental opinions of officers whose callousness would further aggravate their emotional turmoil. British officer F. Jourdain describes his experience after thinking he might have shell-shock, fearing, "Am I [the] coward or what?" and explains that "People always thought it was cowardice, you see."<sup>6</sup> Jourdain's account highlights the fear and responsibility he and other victims felt, deeming him a coward based on the common assumption. Jourdain then illustrates the unwilling secrecy that stemmed from the stigma as he and others would "do [their] best to hide it. Because you're scared thinking that you're being a coward," adding additional stress and pressure on their likely shell-shock and already traumatic war.<sup>7</sup> Soldiers

suffered insult after injury because of different misconceptions, as military officers would mock, ridicule, and not appreciate victims' contributions to their country, highlighting the officers' failure in recognizing the seriousness of men's trauma despite understanding the disturbing nature of the war. Many doctors agreed with French historian and soldier Marc Bloch's assessment that a shell-shock victim was a "neurasthenic man of the world, not much of a warrior," suggesting that those suffering from anxiety and emotional distress were incapable of succeeding as a soldier.<sup>8</sup> This mockery exemplifies the lack of appreciation these men faced, as their symptoms were mostly psychological and not physical. W.D. Esplin stresses the despair of a fellow countryman after reaching Netley Hospital in Southampton and seeing an unwelcoming crowd. He explains, "...it so happened not many of our number wore bandages: we bore few signs, outward and visible, that we had been wounded. We were not the battle-stained heroes who had been expected. There was a silence that could be felt. We hung our heads in inexplicable shame."<sup>9</sup> He and others felt shame and a lack of recognition as their wounds were invisible. Doctors and military officers' unfair stigmatization of shell-shock victims blamed these already troubled soldiers, making them feel extra shame, cowardice, and responsibility, as well as leading them to keep secrets, resulting in untreated conditions.

The British government severely mistreated shell-shocked soldiers during and after World War I, physically and emotionally abusing

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<sup>5</sup> Report of the War Office, 95.

<sup>6</sup> "Voices of the First."

<sup>7</sup> "Voices of the First."

<sup>8</sup> Leonard Smith, *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers' Testimony of the Great War* (2007), 32, Internet Archive.

<sup>9</sup> Joanna Bourke, "Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma: The Sufferings of 'shell-shocked' Men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-39," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 1 (2000): 63, Jstor.

injured men during therapy and wrongly court-martialing and executing sufferers, leading to intensified hardship and humiliation of soldiers and their families. The extreme maltreatment of patients was caused by the lack of proper mental health training, the overwhelming number of cases, and governmental and patient neglect. Captain Frederick St John Steadman, a doctor who ran a field ambulance unit in the Somme, highlighted his inexperience in a letter to his wife, saying, "I have become fairly expert in diagnosing the degree of shell-shock a man has, as I have seen so many cases now."<sup>10</sup> Steadman's description of his newfound ability to diagnose shell-shock exemplifies the lack of training doctors had, contextualized by the fact that the Royal Army Medical Corps-trained psychiatrists to treat war trauma as of 1914, while also illustrating the increasing number of patients doctors were overwhelmed with.<sup>11</sup>

British Medical Officers saw their patients as weak and used torture as a method to cure their weakness, adding more strain to soldiers' already traumatized minds. Lewis Yealland, Resident Medical Officer at the National Hospital for the Paralyzed and Epileptic in London, describes a patient, a twenty-four-year-old suffering from mutism, who endured physical abuse before receiving treatment from him in his *Hysterical Disorders of Warfare*. He explains how this victim had been strapped down and a "strong electricity was applied to his neck and throat; lighted cigarette ends had been applied to the tip of his tongue and 'hot plates' had been placed at the

back of his mouth."<sup>12</sup> Instead of stopping these painful and ineffective treatments as they "proved to be unsuccessful in restoring his voice," Yealland doubled down and continued to wound his patient by "placing the pad electrode on the lumbar spine and attaching the long pharyngeal electrode" and later administering "strong shocks to the outside of [his] neck."<sup>13</sup> Yealland acknowledged his cruelty when, after his treatments were not working, he told the man, "I do not want to hurt you, but, if necessary, I must," illustrating the emotional abuse the victim faced, and Yealland's conscious decision to injure him.<sup>14</sup> Yealland's violent therapies represent the broader mistreatment of soldiers, psychologically and physically traumatizing them in an attempt to cure their distress.

Instead of receiving gruesome and inhumane treatments, some servicemen were tried and executed for cowardice. The extent of Britain's scapegoating of soldiers, men who were suffering and instead of receiving treatment took the blame for weakness, was considerably greater than in other countries, executing a total of 306 men compared to a less significant 25 in Germany.<sup>15</sup> Private Harry Farr, a member of the 1st Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, was killed on October 16, 1916, for cowardice. On September 17, 1916, Farr was part of a ration party moving towards the front lines of the Battle of the Somme. When he was unable to continue, Farr asked to see a medical officer but was told by his superior, Regimental Sergeant Major Haking, "You are a fucking coward and you will go to the

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<sup>10</sup> Taylor Downing, "shell-shock Cover-up at Passchendaele," *Military History Matters*.

<sup>11</sup> Downing, "shell-shock."

<sup>12</sup> Lewis R. Yealland, *Hysterical Disorders of Warfare* (1918), 8, Internet Archive.

<sup>13</sup> Yealland, *Hysterical Disorders*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Yealland, *Hysterical Disorders*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> John Sweeney, "Lest We Forget: The 306 'Cowards' We Executed in the First World War," *The Guardian/Observer Archive*.

trenches. I give fuck all for my life and I give fuck all for yours and I'll get you fucking well shot."<sup>16</sup> Farr was escorted to the front lines, but when a fight broke out, he fled; he was arrested for showing cowardice in the face of the enemy the following day. The Field General Court Martial found Farr guilty and sentenced him to death, despite his medical records, which included three hospital stays between 1915 and 1916 for the treatment of shell-shock.<sup>17</sup> Farr was not the only one who suffered as a result of his execution; his family also endured significant hardship and humiliation as a result of his cowardice. Gertrude Harris, Farr's daughter, explained how she and her mother were left penniless without an army pension, how they went homeless as a result, and how she was so embarrassed that only she "knew the truth about what happened to [her] father when [she] was 40. [Her] mother never, ever spoke about it."<sup>18</sup> While he was posthumously pardoned in 2006, as Mr. Browne, Minister of Defense, stated, "I believe it is better to acknowledge injustice were clearly done in some cases," admitting Britain's wrongdoing, the damage was already done, as Farr faced neglect, verbal abuse, and death while his family lived in shame and poverty.<sup>19</sup> The British government's mistreatment of shell-shocked soldiers, characterized by torture, neglect, and execution, profoundly harmed both soldiers and their loved ones, who endured shame and hardship as a result.

### The British government disregarded

soldiers' symptoms and prioritized its finances and military discipline, attempting to lower bills by removing pensions, ignoring medical therapy in favor of military treatment, and encouraging doctors to be skeptical about soldiers' trauma, all of which left victims without proper care. Pensions, which were typically awarded as a percentage of the thirteen-shilling flat rate based on the severity of soldiers' injuries, were often contested for shell-shock victims, as their injuries were psychological rather than physical.<sup>20</sup> Claimants were forced to go to a medical board which would determine if their trauma was 'attributed', solely a result of the war, or 'aggravated', derived from an underlying condition that was worsened by soldiers' military service.<sup>21</sup> By 1931, the British Ministry of Pensions, focusing on lowering their bills, warned medical officers to look out for pension neurosis, shell-shocked men who exaggerated or maintained their improving symptoms to receive a higher pension.<sup>22</sup> John Collie, a leading specialist in shell-shock, explained how "gross exaggeration" was "often met," highlighting the dismissive attitude of the government, trying to downplay soldiers' trauma to lower its bills.<sup>23</sup> Robert Dent, a private who suffered from shell-shock after the Battle of the Somme, started showing symptoms of emotional distress in the summer of 1924. Dent's wife, Hannah, attested that he was "strong and healthy before enlistment" but came back from the war as a

<sup>16</sup> Simon Wessely, "The Life and Death of Private Harry Farr," *National Library of Medicine*.

<sup>17</sup> Wessely, "The Life."

<sup>18</sup> Sweeney, "Lest We Forget."

<sup>19</sup> Genevieve Roberts, "Hundreds of Soldiers Shot for 'Cowardice' to Be Pardoned," *Independent*.

<sup>20</sup> Downing, "shell-shock."

<sup>21</sup> Downing, "shell-shock."

<sup>22</sup> Bourke, "Effeminacy, Ethnicity," 63.

<sup>23</sup> Bourke, "Effeminacy, Ethnicity," 63.

“total wreck.”<sup>24</sup> He was sent to the Morpeth Mental Hospital, and doctors put in a pension claim for a recurrence of shell-shock. The Ministry of Pensions refused to give Dent any money, asserting that there was “no evidence to connect the shell-shock to his present disability.”<sup>25</sup> While he was reluctantly given his pension after his vicar contested the decision, Dent’s story is an example of the British government’s failure to acknowledge the war’s impact on soldiers, prioritizing its finances over the well-being of soldiers and their families.

The British government treated shell-shocked patients based on common sense and military experience, while other nations based their therapies on medical knowledge. By 1915, France’s military services, using medical expertise to determine treatment, started to concentrate on casualties with neurological disorders. The French Service de Santé, responsible for providing medical and sanitary support to the French Armed Forces, established 12 neurology centers around Paris, with more than 200 beds per center, and set up other institutions throughout the country.<sup>26</sup> Neurological patients would be treated in neurological-focused facilities to deal with cases before they became overwhelmed, exemplifying a comprehensive treatment plan for injured soldiers. Britain, however, used a less coordinated approach. In the 1922 Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into ‘shell-shock’, Major Adie, physician at the Great Northern Central Hospital in London and special reserve of the Royal Army Medical Corps, described his approach to treating shell-shock:

“He should get to know the soldier and to live with him. He need not know much medicine – a smattering of neurology would be useful. He should not be a peacetime psychologist, this would be a great disadvantage.” Major Adie emphasizes how medicine and medical training are generally unneeded, as understanding patients’ trauma is enough to properly treat them, and that military experience is more essential than medical training, since peacetime psychologists aren’t suited to deal with military traumas.<sup>27</sup> The contrast between each nation’s approach highlights how Britain undermined the treatment of its soldiers by focusing on a martial approach to medicine, while France had a more calculated system that emphasized rapid medical treatment. The British government prioritized finances and military treatment, as well as promoted suspicion between doctors and patients, leaving them without pensions, subjected to worse treatment, and with extreme distrust in physicians.

The British government’s lack of support and concern for shell-shock victims is exemplified by its ineffective attempts to properly diagnose and treat sufferers’ conditions. The creation of harsh stigmas, reinforced by medical and military officers who would mock and dismiss symptoms, placed the blame back onto soldiers, while the government’s emphasis on finances and martial discipline left victims without proper care. As a result, these already afflicted men faced further distress, having to endure emotionally and physically excruciating therapies, which doctors recognized as painful. If they were unable to follow orders because of their trauma, they faced

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<sup>24</sup> Downing, “shell-shock.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> William Hanigan, “The Development of Military Medical Care for Peripheral Nerve Injuries during World War I,” *Journal of Neurosurgery*.

<sup>27</sup> Report of the War Office, 122.



court-martial and execution for cowardice, leaving them dead and their families humiliated without needed pensions. While soldiers put their lives on the line for their country, those suffering from shell-shock were never recognized for their contributions but were seen as deceivers, either looking for money or trying to avoid combat. The World War I term shell-shock eventually became known as combat stress reaction (CSR) in World War II, where military psychiatrists were more sympathetic to victims, because of their previous experiences, and warned the public about the dangers of stress, reducing the stigma soldiers faced.<sup>28</sup> The British government's dismissal and mistreatment of shell-shocked soldiers highlights the limited understanding of psychological trauma at the time, but serves as an example of the need to recognize mental illness.

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<sup>28</sup> "Medicine in the Aftermath of War," Science Museum.

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# “THAT’S WHAT GRANNY TOLD ME!”

ORAL MEDIA PRESERVING CULTURE, HISTORY, AND PERSPECTIVE  
DURING TIMES OF ILLITERACY AND OPPRESSION

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Whole-society literacy has not long been a common thing. In European history, many populations – almost always at the lower socioeconomic level in a society – have been unable to read or write, and thus were unable to record their version of history. This is the reason why we so rarely get first person accounts from peasants, slaves, or serfs. Public education did not rise in Europe until the 19th century, so, naturally, the classes that couldn’t afford private education wound up illiterate.<sup>1</sup> The problem with this mass illiteracy is that historians today only have access to half of history: that of the educated and wealthy who are so often prejudiced against the other, illiterate half. The 1524-1525 German Peasants’ War, for example, was recorded almost entirely by those against whom the peasants were revolting: the nobles and select clergy.<sup>2</sup> As expected, there are barely any written accounts from a peasant or someone else suffering with the peasants. Illiterate or otherwise oppressed populations throughout history have managed to preserve their beliefs, accounts, and opinions of events through stories, songs, legends, and folklore. Grimm’s “Hansel and Gretel”<sup>3</sup> and Perrault’s “Little Thumb”<sup>4</sup> are examples of such preservations, as they were both derived from local folklore dating

back to the 14th century. Even in the twenty-first century, these stories give impressively cohesive accounts of events that happened near millennia ago.<sup>5</sup> In addition to preserving a population’s story over generations, oral histories can survive through periods of oppression and cultural subjugation, where written history might be destroyed and lost. The burning of books in Nazi Germany, which erased written Jewish ideas across Europe, attempted to stifle Jewish importance and experience in history.<sup>6</sup> The Holocaust attempted to further oppress and kill Jewry in Europe. Despite these erasures, the Jews still managed to pass down their experiences and history from before and during the Holocaust, simply by remembering these accounts and telling them to the later generations, some of whom wrote it down. Oral media can carry history through periods of erasure or preserve it until it can be written down. While written history is definitely a safer choice, creating written accounts is sometimes not possible for people, such as illiterate peasants or subjugated prisoners, who have a history to tell. Oral history, on the other hand, can carry a population’s story and culture through periods of oppression, cultural erasure, or simple illiteracy. For these reasons, oral tradition should not be dismissed as immediately unreliable; in reality, it is an important

<sup>1</sup> UK Parliament, "The 1870 Education Act," UK Parliament.

<sup>2</sup> Franson, Bruce, D. "Peasants' War." In *World History: A Comprehensive Reference Set*, edited by Facts on File. New York, NY, USA: Facts On File, 2016. Credo Reference.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, comps., *Hansel and Gretel*, trans. D. L. Ashliman, <https://sites.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm015.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Perrault, comp., *Little Thumb*, <https://sites.pitt.edu/~dash/perrault08.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, comps., *Hansel and Gretel*

<sup>6</sup> "Books burn as Goebbels speaks," video, posted May 10, 1933, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/books-burn-as-goebbels-speaks>.

tool to maintain cultural and regional identity.

Folklore, or other stories mothers tell their children for generations, is an important tool for preserving the experience of a group centuries prior. These stories also contribute to a region's cultural identity, cementing in place a distinct culture lasting for centuries. The Grimm brothers, as one example, collected these folktales from all around modern day Germany – collecting oral stories that had been passed down for generations – and compiled them into one written collection of stories: *Children's and Household Tales*.<sup>7</sup> Many of these stories still exist and are loved today – “Snow White,” “Rumpelstiltskin,” and “Hansel and Gretel,” to name a few – but many people do not realize that each story is a window into a real event that happened centuries ago.<sup>8</sup> The original Grimm version of “Hansel and Gretel” is a story of two children whose parents did not have enough money or food to feed the entire family. While the father is more sympathetic to the children, the mother believes they should lead the children deep into the forest and then leave them there to die – all so the household would have fewer mouths to feed. The father leaves them deep in the forest, and the children eventually end up at an old witch's cottage, where the witch lures them in and tries to fatten them up for her to eat. The children escape – having killed the witch – and bring back her fortune to their parents so they'll never go hungry again.<sup>9</sup> While stories like this sometimes have happy endings, it's typically because they were first told to children, who usually do not appreciate hearing real world events with their usually gruesome endings. The historical part of the story can usually be found in the initial context – that same context which the original storytellers would have

been experiencing in the first place. The fiction comes from the outcome of the story, the parts dreamt up by the original storytellers, who no doubt wish they had stumbled across a whole house of bread and a witch's fortune. “Hansel and Gretel” was a common German story for centuries, and while it may seem complete fiction, the story has its origins in the Great Famine of 1315 – a famine so bad (and often overshadowed by the Black Death, which followed soon after) that there were accounts of cannibalism and parents killing their children.<sup>10 11</sup> Of course, this famine was no doubt also experienced by the nobles, of whom the few literate ones recorded their accounts of it,<sup>12</sup> but the undoubtedly more far reaching accounts of the event are found in stories like “Hansel and Gretel.”

Oftentimes, the events that cause folklore to spring up are so wide reaching that multiple stories are preserved, resulting in a collection of stories that all have similar contexts, themes, and morals. This collection of stories only preserves the account further and makes it more far-reaching. “Hansel and Gretel,” for example, is not unique. The Grimm brothers and other compilers like them recorded several other folktales with similar starting contexts, many of which have origins in the Great Famine of 1315 alongside “Hansel and Gretel.”<sup>13</sup> Perrault's “Little Thumb” is one such tale.<sup>14</sup> It follows the youngest son, who was called Little Thumb, of a large family, during a time of famine. Similar to “Hansel and Gretel,” the parents decide that they must get rid of their children in order for themselves to survive: “There came a very bad year, and the famine was so great that these poor people decided to rid themselves of their children.”<sup>15</sup> The mother in this story, who advocates for the children, objects to the father's decision to leave them

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<sup>7</sup> “Chronology of their life,” in *Grimm Brothers' Home Page*, ed. D. L. Ashliman. [//sites.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm.html#chronology](http://sites.pitt.edu/~dash/grimm.html#chronology).

<sup>8</sup> D. L. Ashliman, comp., *The Grimm Brothers' Children's and Household Tales* (Grimms' Fairy Tales)

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<sup>10</sup> Jordan, W. *The Great Famine: Northern Europe in the Early Fourteenth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

<sup>11</sup> Henry S. Lucas, *The Great European Famine of 1315, 1316, and 1317*, 355, JSTOR.

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Perrault, comp., *Little Thumb*

<sup>15</sup> Charles Perrault, comp., *Little Thumb*

in the woods the next day. Little Thumb overhears this argument, and early the next morning, he grabs a pocket full of white stones with which to line their path, much like Hansel.<sup>16</sup> The father leaves them, and a few days after they find their way back home, they are led into the forest once more. This time, Little Thumb lines their path with breadcrumbs, and they are not able to find their way back home. Instead, they stumble upon the cottage of a “cruel ogre who eats up little children.”<sup>17</sup> The ogre’s wife lets them stay, and the ogre decides to eat them in the morning, but they escape and Little Thumb steals a pair of boots that allow him to run very fast, bringing him and his family a great fortune (and food) by the end of the story.<sup>18</sup> There are clear parallels between the story of “Little Thumb” and “Hansel and Gretel”: both stories include parents who cannot afford to feed their children and thus decide to leave them in the woods to die, both sets of children end up imprisoned in the home of some sort of monster (either a witch or an ogre) who wants to eat them, and both stories end with the children bringing back great fortune and saving their family from the famine. Both stories emphasize the desperation of the families (even the witch and the ogre) for food and the measures people will take simply because the famine is so bad – eating little children or leaving their own to die. The Grimm brothers (who were German and collected their folktales from around the German states) published “Hansel and Gretel” in their first edition of fairy tales in 1812.<sup>19</sup> “Little Thumb,” on the other hand, was published in Charles Perrault’s (a French folklorist, collecting his stories from around France) collection of stories in 1697.<sup>20</sup> The fact that two culturally separate regions each have their own version of the same tale

suggests that both stories stem from a common historical event, such as the Great Famine of 1315, which affected both areas.<sup>21</sup> From this duality, it is clear that the peasant populations of both Germany and France preserved the history of the Great Famine in a way that the world was sure to never forget – through folklore and oral history.

Through folktales like “Little Thumb” and “Hansel and Gretel,” oral history does not just contribute to the culture and identity of a region, but it also provides a region with access to the accounts of the ‘little people’ who lived centuries before. The literacy rate for the German region is estimated at about 5% in the early 16th century, so there is no doubt that the oral preservation and circulation of “Hansel and Gretel” is what allows people worldwide to still learn about the experiences that those original storytellers went through, despite them being illiterate.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the preservation of the peasants’ history of the Great Famine – via folk tales like “Hansel and Gretel” and “Little Thumb” – contributes to the culture of that region, which can be preserved for centuries by storytelling over generations. The original written accounts of the Famine, on the other hand, do not contribute to the culture of the region: they are stowed in a library and only referenced when historians deign to look at them. The oral preservation of these events is what allows them to still be recognized and understood by society today. This understanding would not have happened if the only surviving accounts of the events came from someone who didn’t actually experience them.

The oral preservation of history and culture via folklore is not limited to just Germany. In Finland, a country that, by 1880, had only a 12% literacy rate, the

<sup>16</sup> Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, comps., *Hansel and Gretel*

<sup>17</sup> Charles Perrault, comp., *Little Thumb*

<sup>18</sup> Charles Perrault, comp., *Little Thumb*

<sup>19</sup> Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, “Hansel and Gretel,” 1812, in *A comparison of the versions of 1812 and 1857*, trans. D. L. Ashliman

<sup>20</sup> Charles Perrault, comp., *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités: Contes de ma mère l'Oye*, trans. D. L. Ashliman (1697)

<sup>21</sup> Henry S. Lucas, *The Great European Famine of 1315, 1316, and 1317*, 6, JSTOR.

<sup>22</sup> Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 38



oral accounts of their history played an incredibly important role in preserving their tradition, mythology, and culture during centuries of subjugation (under Swedish or Russian control) and illiteracy.<sup>23</sup> Despite these obstacles, and thanks to their oral history, the Finns understood their past, with some preserved oral histories dating as far back as before the year 1000, in Pagan times. These oral accounts were preserved for centuries through poems, songs, stories, and folklore, and then compiled by Charles Lönnrot (though they had been recorded before, he is the most celebrated example) in the early 1800s.<sup>24</sup> In his preface to the *Kalevala*, Lönnrot states that, “In the year 1828, [Lönnrot] travelled as far as Kajan, collecting poems and songs of the Finnish people, sitting by the fireside of the aged, rowing on the lakes with the fishermen, and following the flocks with the shepherds.”<sup>25</sup> Lönnrot’s gathering of these Finnish folktales is much like the Grimm brothers’ – he gathered the poems and songs from ordinary Finns who grew up around them (and likely were not able to write them down themselves), and then he wrote the stories down and organized them into one complete work.<sup>26</sup> One slight difference between Lönnrot and the Grimms is that Lönnrot used all of the collected folk tales as parts of one continuous story: the *Kalevala*. The *Kalevala* is the Finnish story of creation and all life afterwards, but it has roots deep in ancient Finnish mythology and Paganism, with many of its accounts dating from before the Christianization of Finland.<sup>27</sup> It tells the story of a group of mythological Finns who go on various adventures and are fighting against *Pohjola*, a region in the north, typically representing Sweden or Russia, ruled by a witch. The *Sampo*, a mill that can

generate unlimited wealth, is one of the main objectives in the story, and the characters all wish to get it back from *Pohjola*. The *Kalevala* ends with a transition from Paganism to Christianity, symbolized by Marjetta’s (the Finnish name for Mary) virgin birth and the rejection of the main character Väinämöinen (who represents Paganism from the beginning of the book, as he is a Pagan himself).<sup>28</sup> Because the story was written down and strung together by Lönnrot, Finns today have access to their own account of their history, culture, and tradition, preserved orally by their ancestors.

The *Kalevala* wouldn’t have come together without oral history having preserved ancient Finnish mythology, and, without the *Kalevala*, Finland would be lacking an important symbol of its cultural identity and individuality apart from Sweden and Russia. Published first in 1835, the *Kalevala* still remains the most prominent symbol of Finnish cultural identity.<sup>29</sup> The day it was published is still celebrated annually on February 28th as the ‘Day of the Finnish Culture.’ Each year on February 28th, there are festivities to celebrate traditional Finnish art, music, poetry, and culture.<sup>30</sup> The *Kalevala* also brought in the Finnish nationalist era by being the first example of a prominent written work in Finnish, bringing in a sense of national identity and pride.<sup>31</sup> By reminding Finns of the culture and perspective unique to them throughout history, the saga helped usher in a desire for Finnish independence.<sup>32</sup> In 1863, Finnish officially became the national language, which only helped spur on the nationalist era. In 1899, shortly after the *Kalevala*’s rise to popularity – with Finnish nationalism coming

<sup>23</sup> Latomaa, Sirkku, and Pirkko Nuolijärvi. 2002. “The Language Situation in Finland.” *Current Issues in Language Planning* 3.

<sup>24</sup> Elias Lönnrot, *Kalevala*, trans. John Martin Crawford, 46, Gutenberg-e.

<sup>25</sup> Elias Lönnrot, *Kalevala*, 47

<sup>26</sup> Elias Lönnrot, *Kalevala*, 46

<sup>27</sup> Elias Lönnrot, *Kalevala*, 93

<sup>28</sup> Elias Lönnrot, *Kalevala*

<sup>29</sup> Emma Healey, “The Different Meanings of the *Kalevala*,” Nordics Info

<sup>30</sup> “Finnish flag days,” Ministry of the Interior Finland

<sup>31</sup> Catherine Mason and Carl Waldman, “Finns,” in *Encyclopedia of European Peoples* (Facts On File, 2006), Modern World History.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

to an all time high – Russia introduced its policy of Russification, aiming to assimilate Finland into Russia.<sup>33</sup> Only 18 years later, following the Russian Revolution, Finland finally broke away from Russia and declared its independence.<sup>34</sup> Because the Kalevala existed to encourage traditional Finnish culture and customs, the country was able to develop enough of its own identity and individuality, eventually allowing it to become independent. The Kalevala would not have come to fruition without well preserved oral history, showing just how big a role oral traditions play in establishing culture and preserving identity.

In addition to preserving the culture of a nation, oral storytelling and song often preserved the experiences of those excluded from written history, such as peasants, serfs, or other laborers. This phenomenon was especially true during periods of rebellion or societal upheaval, like during the German Peasants' War of 1524-1525. In the early 16th century, the German states had a total population literacy rate of 5%, which was mostly nobility and a few clergy, but very few peasants.<sup>35</sup> The social instability brought on by the Reformation less than a decade prior had made the nobles – becoming increasingly wary of the peasants – raise rents and taxes, as well as be generally more hostile.<sup>36</sup> Naturally, the peasants, spurred on by the jarring message of the Reformation to break away from the organizations (the church, mainly) that had held power over them for centuries, were quick to revolt. The vast majority of the written accounts of the German Peasants' War were written down by the clergy or nobility, and many of the accounts were biased against the peasants, representing them as

inhuman or barbarians. Such is one account from Martin Luther: "Thereby [the peasants] become the greatest blasphemers and violators of God's holy name, and serve and honor the devil under the semblance of the gospel, so that they have ten times deserved death of body and soul, for never have I heard of uglier sins."<sup>37</sup> The few exceptions for peasant-sided accounts of the revolt would include those of Müntzer or Zwingli, but there is no doubt that there are more written accounts of the revolt from those biased towards the nobility.<sup>38</sup> The peasants, being illiterate and largely unable to preserve their viewpoint of the event through written media, still managed to pass their story on for generations following, via oral history and other songs. There are multiple examples of preserved peasant songs from the time, and likely even more that are not yet written down. Many of these songs talk about the desire for equal rights and opportunities for the peasants, topics rarely mentioned in the nobility's accounts. One such 1525 peasant song goes:

No more hard mattress nor hunger for me,  
No more will I be a serf  
In bondage, slaving without any rights.  
I am poor Conrad.  
Equal laws -- that's what we want --  
For prince and beggar alike.  
Heiho, I am poor Conrad.<sup>39</sup>

Or another unnamed peasant song from 1530, with lyrics: "Many poor people are crying for bread," and "Tomorrow the fighting will begin."<sup>40</sup> These songs give a unique perspective to the revolt, and without them, history would be lacking a vital viewpoint of the

<sup>33</sup> The Gracious Manifesto of the Imperial Majesty,

<sup>34</sup> J. Gordon Melton, "Christianity in Finland," in *Encyclopedia of Protestantism, Second Edition* (Facts On File, 2016), Modern World History.

<sup>35</sup> Mark U. Edwards, Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther*, 38

<sup>36</sup> Franson, Bruce, D. "Peasants' War." In *World History: A Comprehensive Reference Set*, edited by Facts on File. New York, NY, USA: Facts On File, 2016. Credo Reference.

<sup>37</sup> Martin Luther, *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*.

<sup>38</sup> Franson, Bruce, D. "Peasants' War." In *World History: A Comprehensive Reference Set*, edited by Facts on File. New York, NY, USA: Facts On File, 2016. Credo Reference.

<sup>39</sup> POOR CONRAD (1525) Peasant Leader

<sup>40</sup> A PEASANT SONG (about 1530)

war. Despite facing mass illiteracy and social oppression, the peasants and serfs managed to preserve their history and perspective orally through song, which allows their descendants – as well as historians – to understand their situation five centuries later.

Similar to how the peasants preserved their side of the war using song, Scottish border ballads provide insight into how a culture can preserve its narratives of fights with neighbors. Unlike with the Peasants' War, these border ballads are about two distinct cultures fighting against each other: the English and the Scottish.<sup>41</sup> The Border Wars were a series of fights and other skirmishes that happened along the English-Scottish border between the 14th and 17th centuries.<sup>42</sup> The traditional Scottish ballad was often used to recount events like these and, as it is typically sung, is an example of oral history preserving accounts and perspectives regarding the battle for centuries to come, as well as adding to the identity and culture of a region. One notable example of a pair of border ballads is the "The Battle of Otterburn" and the "Ballad of Chevy Chase," which recounts the Scottish and English perspectives (respectively) of the 1388 fight.<sup>43 44</sup> In this battle, Douglas, a Scottish Earl, fights against Lord Percy, an Englishman. The battle was bloody, and while the English outnumbered the Scots three to one, there were an estimated 1860 English deaths, while only 100 Scottish ones (this figure is debated but still, it is much lower than that of the English).<sup>45</sup> The ballads, however, both record the fight between Lord Percy (a leader of the English) and Earl Douglas (the leader of the Scots). They differ in language, details, and events, showing that they are

two separate ballads recounting the same event: one displaying the sentiments of the English, and the other of the Scots. For example, the English ballad recounts Earl Percy defiantly standing up to Earl Douglas: "I will not yield to any Scot\That ever yet was born!"<sup>46</sup> In the Scottish ballad, on the other hand, Earl Percy is recorded to have said that he would yield to Earl Douglas: "But I would yield to Earl Douglas, Or Sir Hugh Montgomery, if he were here."<sup>47</sup> Sir Hugh Montgomery is a Scottish knight who kills Lord Percy in both ballads, but the English ballad never mentions Percy's surrender to him, only that he was killed suddenly with Montgomery's "hateful spear."<sup>48</sup> These ballads provide English and Scottish perspectives on the fight, and both still contribute to the culture and pride of the surrounding regions today.<sup>49</sup> They were sung around the region on the Scottish border and preserved orally for long enough that historians can access them today.<sup>50</sup> There are still Scots singing the ballad of the Battle of Otterburn to their children and to the internet, and the English ballad was preserved long enough to have proved its relevance as well.<sup>51</sup> These ballads provide a unique example of the preservation of perspective on an issue centuries prior, fostering a sense of pride and culture for both the Scots and the English.

Another prominent – and more modern – example of culture and history being preserved orally during times of oppression can be found in interviews with Holocaust survivors, of which the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has compiled over 50

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<sup>41</sup> Anthony Goodman, "Border Ways Border Warfare.," *History Today* 38, no. 9 (1988): 6, History Reference Source.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> *The Battle of Otterburn*

<sup>44</sup> *The Ballad of Chevy Chase*

<sup>45</sup> Jean Froissart, *Chronicles*, 48.

<sup>46</sup> *The Ballad of Chevy Chase*

<sup>47</sup> *The Battle of Otterburn*

<sup>48</sup> *The Ballad of Chevy Chase*

<sup>49</sup> Anthony Goodman, "Border Ways:"

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> "Tune of the Month (May) Chevy Chase," video, YouTube, posted by Kathryn Tickell, May 30, 2019

thousand.<sup>52</sup> The Holocaust was a Jewish genocide and left many of its survivors too traumatized to immediately write down their experiences, leaving many firsthand accounts to be kept in memory or, eventually, given in an oral interview.<sup>53</sup> The Nazis also burned any book they deemed 'un-German,' especially those with Jewish ideas or by Jewish authors, ensuring that the years between 1930 and 1945 were some of the most extreme years of Jewish cultural, historical, and religious oppression.<sup>54</sup> Despite this extreme oppression and genocide, the experiences of the Nazi victims – mostly Jews – are still preserved today thanks to the preservation and dissemination of their history via oral means. Of course, there are many books and other written accounts about the Holocaust, but the vast majority of victims did not write down their experiences – a testament to just how many victims there were. One Auschwitz survivor recounts her experience with liberation in an interview: "And then we started up walking; We had no facilities – no cars, no bicycles, nothing... We took our clothes that we had on our backs and nothing else."<sup>55</sup> These interviews provide firsthand accounts of the victims of the Holocaust, many of whom (especially in the camps, where the most terror took place) were not allowed to write down or record what was happening, leaving oral history as an important tool for preserving their experiences. The experiences of Holocaust survivors continue to be passed down orally through generations, and many families and communities hold tightly to the stories their parents and grandparents share. While the Holocaust is still relatively recent compared to other major works of oral history, oral history together with collective memory is already playing a crucial role in preserving survivors' experiences.

Throughout periods of oppression, illiteracy, trauma, and poverty, Europeans were still able to preserve their unique perspectives and culture for centuries to come, using nontraditional (non-written) oral media, such as ballads, songs, poetry, folklore, and interviews. While written accounts usually prove to be more accurate, they do not add to the culture or identity of a region as oral accounts so often do. The written accounts of the Great Famine of 1315, for example, are not nearly as culturally relevant as the story of "Hansel and Gretel," or the story of "Little Thumb." As well as preserving history, oral accounts also preserve culture, and oftentimes foster a sense of cultural identity in regions where another culture is dominant.<sup>56</sup> In Finland's case, the Kalevala marked the start of the Finnish nationalist era, eventually leading up to their independence in 1917. It also established Finnish as a scholarly, credited language, further giving the Finns a sense of independence and individuality.<sup>57</sup> A dusty book tucked away in a library, only accessible to the wealthy and literate, does nothing to enhance a group's knowledge of their history or perspectives of their ancestors, whereas widespread oral accounts, existing for centuries and passed down generation by generation, add to the identity and knowledge of a group of people. The peasants of the German Peasants' War, the vast majority of whom were illiterate and unable to pass down their perspectives by written means, still managed to preserve their side of history by using song to ensure that their oral accounts lasted just as long as the written ones of the nobility. The Scottish and English Border Ballads about the Battle of Otterburn preserved both sides of a story: the perspectives of the English and Scottish over a battle fought between the two. These ballads, as well as being historically informative, contribute to the culture of the borderlands today, establishing a sense of pride at the

<sup>52</sup> "USC Shoah Foundation Testimonies," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,

<sup>53</sup> Bella Simon Pasternak, "Oral history interview with Bella Simon Pasternak," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<sup>54</sup> "Books burn as Goebbels speaks," video, posted May 10, 1933

<sup>55</sup> Bella Simon Pasternak, "Oral history:"

<sup>56</sup> Healey, Emma. "The Different Meanings of the Kalevala." Nordics Info.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

bravery of their ancestors.<sup>58</sup> The preservation of these ballads and songs for over five centuries is a testament to the ability of oral history to preserve the past just as effectively as written history. Additionally, oral history ensures that the unique perspectives of certain people and groups are preserved despite mass oppression, as seen with survivors of the Holocaust, who often pass their legacy to the next generation orally through stories. The people who often have a history or story

to share – such as illiterate peasants, subjugated prisoners, or culturally oppressed groups – often use oral history to preserve their unique perspectives and experiences through to the next generations. Being an important tool for maintaining cultural and regional identity, oral history allows them to carry their history and culture through periods of oppression, cultural erasure, or even simple illiteracy.

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<sup>58</sup> Goodman, Anthony. "Border Ways:"



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# FROM DESECRATION TO REPATRIATION:

## THE DISMISSAL OF INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES THROUGH TIME

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*"To many Native Americans, the collecting of their ancestors' bones and bodies by museums is a source of pain and humiliation—the last stage of a conquest that had already robbed them of their lands and destroyed their way of life."*

Douglas J. Preston's article "Skeletons in Our Museums' Closets" in the February, 1989 issue of Harper's Magazine.

Museums hold a staggering number of unearthed Native skeletons. Despite only composing 1% of the American population, 54.4% of the Smithsonian's collection of 34,000 human specimens is made up of Native remains. African Americans amount to 5.1%, and whites 20%.<sup>1</sup> While the Smithsonian is one of the largest holdings of Native remains in the United States, the narratives of other museums are not far removed. How did these institutions end up with so many dead bodies, and what are they doing about it in the present? From the 1800s to the 1990s, uninformed misconceptions have dictated the scientific and popular American attitude toward Native remains. Inability to empathize with and understand Native perspectives has continued to shape modern legislation around bones, evidenced by the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which rearticulates the same bigoted assumptions found in the work of colonizers and scientists in the 18th and 19th centuries. These differences between law and indigenous reality leave current research institutions such as the Yale Peabody

to navigate the delicate balance between academic inquiry and Native rights.

There are three fundamental misunderstandings of Native people that can be traced throughout American history. The first is a general perception of Natives as savage, and the elevation of scientific perspectives over Native perspectives and way of life. The second is the exoticization of Natives as if they are extinct animals or historical artifacts. The third is the forcing of the foreign, Eurocentric "property rights" idea into Native communities, causing detrimental land claim disputes and issues with ownership of remains. While not a summation of all misunderstandings between immigrated Americans and Native peoples, this paper seeks to connect and define common issues between the two groups through time in the context of Native remains, and highlight the areas where change in the academic approach to Indigenous communities is necessary in the present.

To begin, it's important to outline how Native remains ended up in collections in the first place. Armed forces and soldiers played a big role in grave disruption and remains collection. As troops surged westward in wars going as far back as the American Revolution, graves were destroyed to demonstrate a growing hate for Native people and the imperial English government, both of which stood in the way of expansion.<sup>2</sup> Colonial soldiers often collected Native heads to put on display as shows of their triumph. In

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Gulliford, "Bones of Contention: The Repatriation of Native American Human Remains," *The Public Historian* 18, no. 4 (1996): 126, JSTOR.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Arne Midtrød, "Calling for More than Human Vengeance," *Early American Studies* 17, no. 3 (2019): 299, JSTOR.

1676, after King Philip's War, the Wampanoag chief Metacom's head was put on a spike for display in Plymouth, Mass.<sup>3</sup> Later, in 1868, the drive to collect Native remains was made more explicit by officials like Madison Mills, the Surgeon General in the United States Army: "The Surgeon General is anxious that our collection of Indian crania, already quite large, should be made as complete as possible."<sup>4</sup> He requested "specimens of rare animals, poisonous insects, and reptiles along with typical crania of Indian tribes."<sup>5</sup> Mills was hoping to acquire more bodies for display in the Army Medical Museum collection, and his order led to the capture of 4,000 remains from hospitals, battlefields, and graves.<sup>6</sup> His grouping of human skulls with insects and other fauna shows how he saw Natives as no more than animals, their crania serving as artifacts to be put on display like any other.

Another motive for grave desecration was its ability to erase the tribal claim to land. During the War of 1812 and throughout the 19th century, western land expansion ideas were gaining popularity, and land debates between tribes and American officials were intensifying.<sup>7</sup> As the young Cherokee leader John Ross writes aptly to American expansionist Lewis Cass, Natives refused to "dispose of their heritage in the soil which moulders the bones of their ancestors."<sup>8</sup> American officials remedied this obstacle to expansion by removing the bodies from the soil altogether, ostensibly nullifying the native claim to land. In traditional Native culture, a life centered around

sharing land, property rights did not exist.<sup>9</sup> Forced assimilation of Indigenous tribes into Eurocentric standards put their land and remains at risk.

A third motive for grave looting was in the financial gain that resulted from popular demand for Native skulls. A 1982 New York Times article reads "Professional looters...work night and day at Indian burial sites in the Arizona desert...There are very few large sites in Arizona that have not been hit to some extent."<sup>10</sup> Grave looting was incentivized with large sums of money for "prehistoric bodies", up to \$10,000. If remains were not sold to the government or museums as they were, they would be turned into ashtrays or candle holders for sale.<sup>11</sup> This complete dehumanization of the Native body, stretching in these examples from 1676 to 1982, shows the ways in which Native Americans and their stories have been exoticized and depersonalized throughout time.

In the mid-1800s, a new type of anthropological science developed that allowed scientists' to further justify remains collection: craniology. Craniology was the study of skulls, often focusing on the variation between skulls of different races. From the birth of this scientific study, the prospect of discovering a biological difference that uncovered the assumed innate inferiority of the darker-skinned races drove its research.<sup>12</sup> One of the most well-known craniologists was Samuel George Morton. In *Crania Americana* (1839), Morton writes detailed

<sup>3</sup> D. S. Pensley, "The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990): Where the Native Voice Is Missing," *Wicazo Sa Review* 20, no. 2 (2005): 41, JSTOR.

<sup>4</sup> Madison Mills, Surgeon, United States Army, January 13, 1868

<sup>5</sup> D. S. Pensley, "The Native," 43.

<sup>6</sup> Gabrielle Despain, "A Look Into NAGPRA: Application, Issues, and the Future," *Wyoming Law Review*, nos. Manuscript 1500: 142, <https://scholarship.law.uwyo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1500&context=wlr>.

<sup>7</sup> Midtrød, "Calling for More," 285.

<sup>8</sup> John Ross et al. to Lewis Cass, April 29, 1834, in The Papers of Chief John Ross

<sup>9</sup> Ted Perry, *Film Script for Home*, produced by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, 1972, reprinted in Rudolf Kaiser, "Chief Seattle's Speech(es): American Origins and European Reception," in *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature*, ed. Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 525–30.

<sup>10</sup> Special to The New York Times, "Looting of Indian Graves Widespread in West," New York Times (1923-) (New York, N.Y.), September 19, 1982, [Page 32], ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (2189133870).

<sup>11</sup> Gulliford, "Bones of Contention," 130.

<sup>12</sup> Midtrød, "Calling for More," 311.

descriptions of the intelligence, demeanor, and way of life of many different races on the American continent. Here, he describes the Appalachian branch of North American Natives: "In character these nations are warlike, cruel and unforgiving. They turn with aversion from the restraints of civilized life, and have made but trifling progress in mental culture or the useful arts."<sup>13</sup> Not only does Morton dismiss Natives as savage, but he elevates the white colonial perspective over the native way of living, particularly in his critique of their aversion to the "restraints of civilized life" as he knows it. Morton's observations are made more harmful to common perception of Natives in his juxtaposition of racist commentary with empirical scientific results. After measuring 256 skulls, Morton made a chart of different races and their approximated cranial size (Figure 1).<sup>14</sup>

Morton determined through his measurements that Native Americans had the smallest cranial circumferences, while Caucasians had the largest. 57% of all of his skulls were of Native American origin, a disproportionate amount in comparison with the other

RACES.	No. of skulls.	Mean internal capacity in cubic inches.	Largest in the series.	Smallest in the series.
Caucasian.	52	87.	109.	75.
Mongolian.	10	83.	93.	69.
Malay.	18	81.	89.	64.
American.	147	80.	100.	60.
Ethiopian.	29	78.	94.	65.

Fig 1. Samuel George Morton, *Crania Americana* (Philadelphia, J. Dobson; London, Simpkin, Marshall & Company, 1839), 250.

racess in his collection. Morton's focus on collecting Native crania more than other races shows the ways in which he perceived them differently, as something to be collected and studied rather than let rest. While Morton never explicitly made the racist correlation between cranial circumference and intelligence, that conclusion is inferred by the intellectual elite that reads his work, and some bridge that gap in their own writing.

Two of these men are Josiah Clark Nott and George Robins Gliddon, who in 1854 co-authored their book *Types of Mankind* with Morton after his death, borrowing lots of information from his *Crania Americana* and similar published works. They take a very explicit approach to the craniology question in their research: "The general law laid down by craniologists [is] that size of brain is a measure of intellect."<sup>15</sup> This conclusion permeated the world of craniology and anthropology until it was widely accepted, and the ideas in Morton's work were used to justify racism and land expansion. Nott and Gliddon were so convinced of the racial inferiority idea that even when they saw contradictions in their own work, they dismissed them as anomalies:

The average volume of the brain in the Barbarous tribes is shown to be from 83 to 84 cubic inches, while that of the Mexicans is but 79, and in the Peruvians only 75, thus, exhibiting the apparent anomaly of barbarous and uncivilized tribes possessing larger brains than races capable of considerable progress in civilization. This discrepancy deserves more investigation than time permits at present.<sup>16</sup>

The continuation of backwards scientific study of craniology and racial theory, even when proven

<sup>13</sup> Samuel George Morton, *Crania Americana* (Philadelphia, J. Dobson; London, Simpkin, Marshall & Company, 1839), 64, <https://archive.org/details/Craniaamericana00Mort/page/n83/mode/2up>.

<sup>14</sup> Morton, *Crania Americana*, 260.

<sup>15</sup> Josiah Clark Nott and George R. Gliddon, *Types of Mankind* (Lippincott, PA: Grambo and Company, n.d.), 278, <https://archive.org/details/typesmankindore01pattgoog/page/n14/mode/2up>.

<sup>16</sup> Mr. J. S. Phillips's Appendix to Morton's memoir on the Physical Type of the American Indians, Found in *Types of Mankind*, 278.

incorrect, shows the lengths these men would go to prove that Natives were innately less intelligent than Caucasians. If men like Nott, Gliddon, and Morton could distance themselves biologically and scientifically from Natives and other racial minority groups, they could further justify westward expansion as God's will for the white race and find peace of mind in the idea that Natives are not at all related to whites.<sup>17</sup>

Morton theorized the reason for his discovered innate differences in the human origin story. He believed in polygenism, the idea that multiple different human ethnic groups appeared in different places in the world independent of each other. This contrasts the more radical Darwinian idea of monogenism, a theory that all humans developed from the same sole ancestors. If monogenism was correct, it would disprove the idea of innate racial differences. Morton did not believe that the environment played a role in the appearance or biological adaptations of different races.<sup>18</sup> Post-Morton, Darwinian ideas began to grow in popularity, and racial anthropologists needed new justifications for the biological differences they had perceived. One of these justifications can be found in a letter between Humboldt, the renowned French natural scientist, and Gliddon, appearing in the text of *Types of Mankind*: "it makes little difference whether the mental inferiority of the Negro, the Samoiyede, or the Indian, is natural or acquired; for, if they ever possessed equal intelligence with the Caucasian, they have lost it ; and if they never had it, they had nothing to lose."<sup>19</sup> Humboldt argues that whether polygenism or monogenism is correct does not matter because even if Darwin is right, Natives and other minorities are still clearly inferior to Europeans in other ways and do not compare to the intelligence and civilization of the Caucasian race. Once again, these scientists recognize the holes in their theories and circumvent

them with more unproven racist observation.

Another one of the post Darwin justifications for white superiority comes in the White Racial Dominance Theory. As *Types of Mankind* writes:

The Creator has implanted in this group of races [Caucasians] an instinct that, in spite of themselves, drives them through all difficulties, to carry out their great mission of civilizing the earth. It is not reason, or philanthropy, which urges them on ; but it is destiny. When we see great divisions of the human family increasing in numbers, spreading in all directions, encroaching by degrees upon all other races wherever they can live and prosper, and gradually supplanting inferior types, is it not reasonable to conclude that they are fulfilling a law of nature?<sup>20</sup>

Gliddon and Nott conclude that the continued expansion of the Caucasian race justifies its superiority in and of itself. They believe God's divine will must be the driving force behind their prosperity, and even if Darwin's theories are correct, Caucasian success in racial war must prove their biological greatness. This theory also softens the consciousness of the land expansionists in their displacement and mass killing with the idea that it was inevitable, ridding the individuals of any blame in their minds.

Land expansion confrontations come up again and again in Native history, and one of the main issues was the expansionists' disregard for the way the Indigenous tribes had historically treated the land. Natives had no perception of the idea of private property, and due to language barriers and fundamental misunderstandings between the two groups about the way land should be treated, some tribes signed treaties early on without fully

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<sup>17</sup> Midtrød, "Calling for More," 311.

<sup>18</sup> Penn Museum, "A History of Craniology in Race Science and Physical Anthropology," Penn Museum, <https://www.penn.museum/sites/morton/craniology.php>.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Humboldt to Gliddon, found in *Types of Mankind*, lii.

<sup>20</sup> Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, 77.



understanding what they were agreeing to.<sup>21</sup> The dissection and selling of Native land in the Dawes Act of 1887 is a clear example of the divide between Native and American society: the federal law forced Native families onto singular plots of land against their customs, and sold the remaining acres to white western expansionists, shrinking reservation lands by as much as 90 million acres once the Dawes Act was revoked in 1934. The same can be said for Indigenous remains: the idea that a person or institution can own another person's remains is completely foreign to Native tradition.<sup>22</sup>

The three main themes of racist underwriting and misconceptions toward Native communities—the elevation of white perspective, the exoticizing of Natives and their remains, and dismissing of traditional land customs—all appear in the early acquiesce of remains and the intellectual debate surrounding it. Morton, Nott, Gliddon, and other anthropologists of this century characterize Natives as savage, and impose their own societal norms and standards upon them in order to judge their civility. They create justifications for white superiority based primarily on Christian religion, and use backward science to prove biased and harmful conclusions about Native intelligence. Those same craniologists, as well as men such as Surgeon General Mills, exoticize and dehumanize Natives in the incentivizing of grave pillaging and collecting, and large, disproportionate collections of Native crania demonstrate how they are treated with marked difference from other races. Eurocentric craze for land ownership and dismissing of the way Native communities historically ran their land led to the desecration of graves and relocation of tribes into plots and reservations, leaving large scars on indigenous sovereignty and identity and set the stage for land related repatriation issues in the modern sphere.

Push for the protection of native graves and the repatriation of remains from museums has existed within Native communities since the 1700s, but popular American sentiment did not take a strong stance for this movement until the mid 1980s. By 1980, private collectors, educational institutions, and the federal government held anywhere between three hundred thousand and 2.5 million remains, as well as other cultural artifacts.<sup>23</sup> One of the turning points toward change came in the form of a *National Geographic* article in 1989, titled “Who Owns Our Past?” The article detailed a 1987 case in Kentucky where a group of ten men paid a land-owner \$10,000 to lease digging rights on their land. The men had prior knowledge of Indian remains and relics being found in the area, and tried their luck, digging over 450 small craters in the earth to excavate the old burial ground (Figure 2).<sup>24</sup>



Fig 2. "Who Owns Our Past?," *National Geographic*. 1989, 379

The looters were motivated by the popular market that had developed at the time for old Native artifacts and skulls, and many of the unearthed remains were suspected of being showcased at an annual Indian relic show sale weeks later.<sup>25</sup> Miles

<sup>21</sup> D. S. Pensley, "The Native," 54.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> D. S. Pensley, "The Native," 43.

<sup>24</sup> "Who Owns Our Past?," *National Geographic*, 1989, 378.

<sup>25</sup> "Who Owns," 386.



Hart, the detective sergeant of the Kentucky State Police at the time, spoke of his initial reaction entering the field: "There were jawbones, leg bones, finger bones, human teeth everywhere. We got a cease and desist order until we could figure out which laws had been broken."<sup>26</sup> As it turned out, only one law had been broken under Kentucky state legislation. There was existing legal protection for graveyards, but it was based on traditional American Christian burial. Cemeteries were defined as having municipal dedication, underground interment, headstones, walls, and gates, all identifiers that traditional Native burials did not have, leaving them unprotected by law.<sup>27</sup> The men were charged with "desecration of a venerated object," a violation punishable by \$500 fine or one year in jail, and only applicable to those currently residing in Kentucky, which four of the ten men were not. Kentucky legislation later unanimously modified all grave desecration to felony status in 1988.<sup>28</sup>

Some were hopeful for stronger federal law implementation after the event: "Because of the scale of the Slack Farm operation and the diggers' brazen disregard for human sensibilities, we're hoping this case will spur a national burial preservation act,"<sup>29</sup> said David Wolf, a forensic anthropologist for the Kentucky medical examiner's office. Wolf proved to be correct. An image of a protest outside a Kentucky hotel holding an Indian relic show was publicized in the same National Geographic article (Figure 3), demonstrating the shifting tides of public opinion toward regulation and justice for Native communities.<sup>30</sup> On July 10, 1990, a bill was introduced to the House regarding grave protection and repatriation of Native remains. On November 16,

1990, President George H.W. Bush signed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) into law.<sup>31</sup> NAGPRA provides federal protection for traditional Native burial, and "requires federal agencies and institutions that receive federal funds to repatriate or transfer Native American human remains and other cultural items to the appropriate parties."<sup>32</sup> The law mandated institutions to report and categorize their holdings of Native artifacts and remains under given timelines, and is a large milestone in crucial legislation for Native American rights.<sup>33</sup>



Fig 3. "Who Owns Our Past?," *National Geographic*.

While NAGPRA remains a powerful victory for the Native community, loopholes in its regulations remained that held stark similarities to the assumptions and racist underwriting that was seen through the 19th century. NAGPRA continually elevated scientific and Christian perspective over Native perspective. Traditionally, many Native cultures believe that the disruption of buried people awakens their spirits and causes them great unrest. The Navajo tribe writes that "Improper burial of a corpse,

<sup>26</sup> "Who Owns," 378.

<sup>27</sup> D. S. Pensley, "The Native," 47.

<sup>28</sup> "Who Owns," 380.

<sup>29</sup> "Who Owns," 383.

<sup>30</sup> "Who Owns," 386.

<sup>31</sup> Despain, "A Look," 144.

<sup>32</sup> "Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act - Getting Started," National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nagpra/getting-started.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

holding back belongings of the deceased ... disturbing or taking away from the grave parts of the earthly body or things buried with it ... may impel the ghost to return to claim belongings or to locate missing parts.”<sup>34</sup> Just like the traditional themes of American history, these religious beliefs were not honored by the legislation. If Indigenous tribes asked for the repatriation of remains or artifacts, the federally-funded agency would have had to comply unless the “items [were] indispensable for completion of a specific scientific study, the outcome of which would be of major benefit to the United States.”<sup>35</sup> NAGPRA did not define what “major benefit” meant in this context. Giving institutions what is essentially a free pass to override repatriation kept Native bodies perpetually in scientific collections. Scientists consider themselves the stewards of historical truth, and in their legislation, they trample on Native history and religion deemed invalid by the same standards their own could be. As Walter and Roger Echo-Hawk write:

The laws and social policy, to the extent they affect Native dead, do not treat this class of decedents as human, but rather define them as "non-renewable archaeological resources" to be treated like dinosaurs or snails, "federal property" to be used as chattels in the academic market-place, "pathological specimens" to be studied by those interested in racial biology, or simple "trophies or booty" to enrich private collectors.<sup>36</sup>

Scientists dehumanize and exoticize individuals by keeping them in collections, in the name of a “science” that individual never consented to being an object of study for. While the direct quotations Echo-Hawk mentions are not seen in the official NAGPRA legislation, the overall sentiment is

one that reflects the spirit in which NAGPRA regulations were written, as well as the history of the treatment of Native remains that preceded them.

The story of Kennewick Man, a skeleton that became the center of a legal confrontation from 1996 to 2004,<sup>37</sup> presents another case where scientific perspectives were elevated over Native oral history. Kennewick man was a 9,000-year-old skeleton uncovered from a Washington State riverbed. Multiple tribes were calling for his repatriation based on geographical location and their own oral tradition, but eventually all of these historical proofs were dismissed as unfounded.<sup>38</sup> Despite NAGPRA’s extremely explicit statement in section 3005 part 4, reading Native American human remains and funerary objects shall be expeditiously returned where the requesting Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization can show cultural affiliation by a preponderance of the evidence based upon geographical, kinship, biological, archaeological, anthropological, linguistic, folkloric, oral traditional, historical, or other relevant information or expert opinion,<sup>39</sup> the ninth circuit determining Kennewick man’s repatriation held that:

[Oral] traditions include myths that cannot be considered as if factual histories . . . and because the record as a whole does not show where historical fact ends and mythic tale begins, we do not think that the oral traditions . . . were adequate to show the required significant relationship of the Kennewick Man’s remains to the Tribal Claimants.<sup>40</sup>

Due to lack of written language, all of Native heritage and history has been passed down by oral storytelling. Questioning the validity of this form of history questions all Native accounts of their own

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in John J. Collins, *Native American Religions* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991)

<sup>35</sup> 25 U.S.C. § 3005(b).

<sup>36</sup> Echo-Hawk and Echo-Hawk, "Repatriation, Reburial, and Religious Rights," 6.

<sup>37</sup> Ann M. Kakaliouras, "An Anthropology of Repatriation," *Current Anthropology* 53, no. S5 (2012): S211, <https://doi.org/10.1086/662331>.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> 25 U.S.C. § 3005(a).

<sup>40</sup> *Bonnichsen v. United States*, 367 F.3d 864, 882 (9th Cir. 2004)

history. It is not proven that any one religious perspective is accurate or inaccurate, and the discounting of Native storytelling represents an elevation of science over Native history that has been seen for centuries.

NAGPRA's inability to recognize and address diverse land related problems revealed similar long-standing issues around Native remains. If graves were found in city-owned or privately-owned land that was not supported by federal funds, they did not have federal protection under NAGPRA. Under its "definitions" section, NAGPRA defined federal lands as "any land other than tribal lands which are controlled or owned by the United States."<sup>41</sup> This definition became an issue when tribal burials were at risk of being uprooted for industrial developments. In 1999, the Western Mohegan Tribe fought the State of New York in an attempt to protect the development of a state park into a recreational area, claiming the park as an old tribal village and burial ground. The district court ruled in favor of the State, claiming that the tribal lands did not have protection under NAGPRA because the park was not federally funded.<sup>42</sup>

Another land-related issue seen in NAGPRA resides in remains found on reservation land. When remains are found on tribal lands, ownership is given to the tribe that owns that land, without consideration of the past occupants of that same land. As Kurt E Dongoske writes in the *American Indian Quarterly*, "In the past, the Hopi Tribe actively maintained its stewardship over a far greater area than now currently comprises the Hopi Reservation. As a result of unilateral political actions by the United States Government, much of the Hopis' ancestral land claim is now contained within the jurisdiction of the Navajo Tribe."<sup>43</sup> The American government forced Native communities into reservations that did not at all

represent their original origin, causing rippling negative effects to modern affairs. Under this law, cultural artifacts and remains of Hopi origin that are found on the reservation will fall into the hands and will of a "culturally unrelated tribe".<sup>44</sup> In disregarding Native land customs and origin even in remains repatriation, legislation continues to undermine traditional Indigenous identity and rights. As is verbalized in *Native Americans and Archaeologists: Stepping Stones to Common Ground*: "property law is, in many ways, completely unsuitable to address the legal rights of Indian people with regard to their ancestors."<sup>45</sup>

Connecting the threads between initial taking of remains and the legislation regarding their return shows the ways in which Indigenous populations and their ideas have been relegated throughout time. Early anthropologists forced their own traditions and beliefs on Natives, deeming tribes uncivilized when they did not live up to biased standards, and using pseudoscience to prove racist suspicion. In 1990, modern scientific perspective was once again given higher standing than Native belief in the text of legislation and the courts where that legislation was enacted. Mass collection of Native remains from cases in the 1700s like Surgeon Mills to the 1980s with cases like Slack Farm show the continued exoticization of Native remains, and accentuate the way dead Indigenous bodies are stripped of their humanity. NAGPRA allowed institutions to perpetually hold Native remains if deemed important enough to scientific study, further placing Native bodies on the same level as animals. In the 1800s, Native land claims were not respected and tribal communities were forced to assimilate into money-based "property" ideals. 1990's NAGPRA continued the tradition of not recognizing original Native land claims in its inability

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<sup>41</sup> 25 U.S.C. § 3001(d).

<sup>42</sup> Despain, "A Look," 152.

<sup>43</sup> Kurt E. Dongoske, "The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act: A New Beginning, Not the End, for Osteological Analysis--A Hopi Perspective," *American Indian Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1996): 290, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1185706>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Nina Swidler et al., eds., *Native Americans and Archaeologists: Stepping Stones to Common Ground* (AltaMira Press, 1997), 31.

to recognize issues with reservation land and its protection of only federally funded areas. The similarities in approach to Native affairs 150 years apart reveal the need for change in the American mindset to give tribes the respect and national protection they deserve.

In January of 2024, in response to many of the previously outlined critiques, the Biden administration implemented new regulations to NAGPRA that increased pressure and shortened timelines for repatriation on institutions holding Native remains.<sup>46</sup> The Yale Peabody Museum in New Haven is currently navigating its own efforts to repatriate under NAGPRA. David Skelly, a Professor at Yale and the Director of the Museum, shed light on the difficulties the Peabody has had with repatriation in the past, and the ways Yale is trying to right past wrongs. Many of the remains that came into the Peabody's holdings were through the state. Any time before approximately 1950, when Connecticut needed to build something and came across a Native burial, those remains would be sent to the Peabody. When they came across a Christian burial, those remains would be reinterred.<sup>47</sup> Skelly spoke about how he could not undo the past, and his only option is to move forward with repatriation and do the right thing in the present. He laments: "it feels like that was such a different time...I don't understand what they were thinking."<sup>48</sup>

The Peabody is maintaining an active effort to repatriate, and in response to heightened regulations, they have hired two more members to an official repatriation team.<sup>49</sup> However, getting remains back

into the hands of tribes is not an easy endeavor. Skelly articulates: "I get the question quite often, well, why don't you just give all this stuff back?...believe me, if I had a magic button under here I could hit, I would do it."<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, repatriation has proved to not be that simple. In combination with logistical complications that take lots of time, Skelly expressed discontent with the NAGPRA regulations and their inability to aid non-federally recognized tribes. He mentioned how under NAGPRA, federally recognized tribes get to "call the shots in many cases,"<sup>51</sup> leaving at least 200 tribes that are not federally recognized without protection for their remains and any promise of repatriation.<sup>52</sup> In response to this issue, Skelly described the importance of repatriating remains outside of NAGPRA and developing relationships with the tribes to come to agreements beyond the restrictions of the law. The Peabody has done multiple repatriations outside of North America in the past, and when asked whether the institution would continue giving back remains if NAGPRA regulations were loosened under the current administration, Skelly said "Absolutely. Because again, it's not the text of the regulations that is the basis for a relationship. It's a framework for some of our interactions, but not all of them."<sup>53</sup> He mentioned a specific repatriation with the Mohican tribe that was not done within NAGPRA.<sup>54</sup> Because the museum had claimed the items were not sacred or ceremonial for decades, the repatriation got tied up in old legal issues, and the tribe agreed to do the repatriation outside of NAGPRA to avoid the complications.

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<sup>46</sup> Benjamin Hernandez, "Peabody continues repatriation efforts amid opening, new federal regulations," *Yale Daily News* (New Haven, CT), April 2, 2024, <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2024/04/02/peabody-continues-repatriation-efforts-amid-opening-new-federal-regulations/>.

<sup>47</sup> David Skelly, Director of the Yale Peabody Museum, interview with (interviewer omitted for HHJ), March 18.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Yale Peabody Museum, "The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act," Yale Peabody Museum, <https://peabody.yale.edu/explore/collections/anthropology/native-american-graves-protection-repatriation-act>.

<sup>50</sup> David Skelly, Director of the Yale Peabody Museum, interview with Nora Brock, March 18, 2025.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Despain, "A Look," 150.

<sup>53</sup> David Skelly, Director of the Yale Peabody Museum, interview with Nora Brock, March 18, 2025.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

In some cases, these active partnerships result in the continued display of artifacts. Skelly explains: “the right thing to do can also mean developing a partnership with the culture where they say, actually, you know, we could claim this, but we would rather have it here, and by the way, would you preferably uplifts tribes and continues to give them the respect they deserve, even when regulations complicate exchanges.

In the madness of current political affairs, it is important to continue to pay attention to NAGPRA

and its regulations, as well as the efforts academic institutions are making to repatriate and communicate with tribes. While NAGPRA of 1990 served as an important step in the right direction, it also illuminated the ways society was still stuck in a mindset of elevating the white perspective, exoticizing native narratives, and not recognizing the traditional Native approach to land. Undermining past pervasive racist thought can only be done through vigilance and continued public action to preserve what’s right in the present. It is everyone’s duty to hear Native voices, respect them, understand them, and fight for them.

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# SOLIDARITY AND DIVISION

## THE POLITICS OF RACE RELATIONS IN THE 1992 LOS ANGELES RIOTS

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On March 3, 1991, Rodney King, a twenty-five-year-old Altadena, California resident was speeding down a freeway in San Fernando Valley at 117 mph, when he was spotted by four Los Angeles (LA) police officers. Following an eight-mile chase, King was stopped, shot with a stun gun, and beaten multiple times. However, a videotape by George Holliday, a nearby resident, captured King's beating, setting the incident of police brutality apart from others. To the shock of millions, a multiracial Simi Valley jury acquitted all officers standing trial. In response, angry demonstrations, rioting, and civil disobedience spread across America. In San Francisco, for the first time since the 1906 earthquake, a curfew was declared; in Las Vegas, uprisings occurred for four weekends in a row; in Seattle and Atlanta, disturbances shook city centers. Out of the many cities affected by violence, South Central Los Angeles, a neighborhood southwest of the city center downtown, felt the damage the hardest. After three days, later known as the 1992 LA riots, the worst urban upheaval since the 1965 Watts riots and perhaps since the New York City Draft Riots, LA saw an estimated "58 dead, 2,400 injured, 11,700 arrested, [and] \$717 million in damages."<sup>1</sup> At first, the cause of the riots seemed obvious: police brutality, accompanied by centuries of racism and tense

relations between white and Black Angelenos. However, the prevalence of Korean signs in downtown Los Angeles and armed Korean Americans on rooftops suggested that unlike the 1965 Watts riot, Black-white relations were not the only factor at play. Approximately 2,000 Korean businesses had been affected, resulting in an estimated 400 million in damages.<sup>2</sup> Examining the background of the riots revealed a larger picture. A year before the 1992 LA riots, Korean grocer Soon Ja Du shot Black teenager Latasha Harlins after a shoplifting accusation and was sentenced to merely probation, leading to backlash in LA's Black communities. Taking in the context of the riots, many believed that "Latasha Harlins...was the key to the catastrophic collapse of relations between LA's Korean and Black communities."<sup>3</sup> America no longer wanted to "settle for black and white conclusions when one of the most important conflicts was the tension between Koreans and African-Americans."<sup>4</sup> In the aftermath of the protests, the tension became known as the Black-Korean conflict. Emerging as a politically convenient and oversimplified explanation for the 1992 Los Angeles riots, the narrative of Black-Korean conflict was driven by the flawed frameworks of the model minority myth and urban underclass theory, ultimately serving to legitimize mainstream conservative policy agendas.

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Abelmann, and John Lie. *Blue Dreams : Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995. eBook History Collection (EBSCOhost).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Katz, Cindi, Neil Smith, and Mike Davis. "L. A. Intifada: Interview with Mike Davis." *Social Text*, no. 33 (1992): 19–33. <https://doi.org/10.2307/466432>.

<sup>4</sup> Rodriguez, Richard. "HOLLOW AT THE CORE : Multiculturalism With No Diversity." *LA Times* (Los Angeles, CA), May 10, 1992. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-05-10-op-2288-story.html>.

In the aftermath of the 1992 riots, the model minority myth and urban underclass theory justified the Black-Korean conflict. While to an extent, animosity between the two communities did play a role in the riots, the conflict overwhelmingly dominated social and media discourse as a primary factor behind the uprising. The reported source of the tension was due to the prevalence of Korean small business ownership in South Central. Over 16.5% of Korean Americans were self-employed— over double the rate of European Americans— and in 1989, 40% of Korean men owned their own businesses.<sup>5</sup> Correspondingly, the *LA Times*, the largest US metropolitan paper in 1992, reported the perspective of a white merchant in southern Los Angeles: “I’m so goddamn mad. Let these people burn their own stuff down. If you don’t like the Koreans, why don’t you go get your own grocery store, mis-ter?”<sup>6</sup> The merchant cited tension between the Korean and Black communities over economic dominance as the driving force behind the riots. Three years later, Black activist and shopkeeper Johnnie Tillsman-Blackston told the *LA Times* that “the Koreans run the liquor store and don’t let no black people work in there, and they treat black people like they’re dogs.”<sup>7</sup> Both *LA Times* interviewees referenced Korean economic control in South Central, at the expense of Black merchants, as the primary instigator of the riots. These claims were founded in grains of truth. Republican commentator *Heterodoxy* summarized the reasoning that drove the narrative’s popularity:

[It] was permissible to explain black antagonism toward Koreans in Los Angeles in terms of “anger” over Soon Ja Du, the Korean shopkeeper who, having shot and killed a 15-year-old black girl named Latasha Harlins who had assaulted her, was then released by a judge. But it was impermissible to note that 25 Korean merchants had been murdered in the ghetto in the last two years. It was permissible to mention that blacks were “frustrated” by Korean economic success. It was impermissible to specify that this rise was based on 14-hour work days, personal sacrifice often approaching indenture, and family solidarity.<sup>8</sup>

The success of first-generation Korean immigrants drove a historical feud that culminated in the death of Latasha Harlins. These achievements, a product of cultural values like hard work and family solidarity, were better known as the model minority myth. According to a 1975 *Newsweek* article, “Koreatown is abound with Horatio-Alger success stories.”<sup>9</sup> The article alluded to the success of Korean immigrants in business without government assistance. A decade later, *Time Magazine* reinforced the model minority myth: “Like previous generations of immigrants many Asians seek to realize their personal American dream not just by finding a good job but by starting their own business, the ultimate statement of independence.”<sup>10</sup> William Doerner, the article’s author, believed that Koreans were inherently predisposed to small business ownership, as the “the entrepreneurial impulse runs strongest among

<sup>5</sup> Daisy Ball, and Nicholas Daniel Hartlep. *Asian/Americans, Education, and Crime: the Model Minority as Victim and Perpetrator. Race and Education in the Twenty-first Century*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017. eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost).

<sup>6</sup> Platte, Mark. "On a Block in South L.A., Merchants Ponder Future." *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, United States), May 22, 1992. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-05-22-mn-281-story.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Goldman, Abigail. "Welfare Rights Pioneer Tillmon-Blackston Dies : Activism: In the 1960s, a single mother in a Watts housing project helped form a group that sought better treatment and services for the poor." *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), November 25, 1995. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-11-25-me-7043-story.html>.

<sup>8</sup> *Heterodoxy* (1992), p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 1991–1992, MS 1965, Series Accession 2016-M-050, Box 19, Folder 1, stored offsite, Natural Resources Defense Council Records, MS 1965, Manuscripts and Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Doerner, William R. "Asians to America with Skills." *Time Magazine*, July 8, 1985. <https://time.com/archive/6704408/asians-to-america-with-skills/>.

Koreans.”<sup>11</sup> This perspective of “natural talent” was amplified by the testimony of Korean shop owners like Peter Kim, who informed the *LA Times* that “most Koreans would rather be self-employed than work for someone else. They’re hard-working people, [with] high goals, and very competitive on the average.”<sup>12</sup> While the perceived success of Korean shopkeepers was often attributed to cultural values like hard work and business acumen, as Kim suggested, this “inherent” success fostered tensions with African American communities. At the same time, the rise of the model minority myth coincided with the emergence of urban underclass theory in the 1980s, framing these dynamics within a broader narrative of racial and economic divides. The theory argued that poverty culture was pervasive in low income urban areas regardless of government support.<sup>13</sup> Emerging in a time when poverty was on the rise, the theory defined an underclass as more than just low income:

When Americans talk about an "underclass" in their cities, they do not simply mean the poor; they mean poor but healthy young people who cannot or will not, but anyway do not, get a job. The images are vivid: an unmarried mother who lives off welfare cheques; a young man who drifts from girlfriend to girlfriend, selling drugs to get by. Estimates of the size of this underclass vary hugely from about 5% to 50% of all the poor-2m-15m people, of whom some two-thirds are black, a tenth Hispanic...Conservatives tend to stress the "will not": jobs exist, but people do not take them; jobs do not pay enough, or people do not try hard enough to find them.<sup>14</sup>

Instead of being defined merely by their income, cultural differences also dictated what it meant to be part of the American urban underclass. As a result of the growing urban underclass living side by side with the entrepreneurial model minorities, “the feelings of many in the black community toward Koreans had become comparable to that of a vanquished populace to the occupying army.”<sup>15</sup> According to the model minority myth and the urban underclass concept, Black communities like South Central Los Angeles resented the economic control of Korean immigrants, who obtained success without outside aid. California-based rapper Ice Cube’s highly anticipated song “Black Korea,” released in 1991 with over one million advanced orders, confirmed that resentment, alluding to Korean shops in South Central: “So pay respect to the Black fist, Or we’ll burn your store right down to a crisp, And then we’ll see ya, ‘Cause you can’t turn the ghetto into Black Korea.”<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, as believed by the two theories, the tension between the two communities came to a standstill during the 1992 LA riots.

However, rather than stemming from isolated racial tensions, racist sentiments by white Angelenos that prevented minorities from accessing housing and public businesses drove the uprisings while disproving the idea of an “urban underclass.” In 1968, the Open Housing Act eliminated legal housing barriers, stating that it was the “policy of the United States to provide, within constitutional limitations, for fair housing throughout the United States”<sup>17</sup> for minorities in Los Angeles, but informal racism by civilians persisted. In 1993, over one hundred fifty neighborhoods attempted

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> “Presence of Koreans Reshaping the Region: Immigrants: A developing Koreatown in Gardena symbolizes changes a growing population is bringing to the area.” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), February 2, 1992.

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-02-02-me-1860-story.html#:~:text=%E2%80%9CMost%20Koreans%20would%20rather%20be,was%20a%20high%20school%20teacher.>

<sup>13</sup> Auletta, Ken. *The Underclass*. Open Road Media, 1982.

<sup>14</sup> “Appendix C: America’s Wasted Blacks.” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 136, no. 3 (1992): 399–409. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/986913>.

<sup>15</sup> McNelis-Ahern, Margret. “Anything changed since the riots? Irked by slow pace, many retain hope for the future.” *Los Angeles Business Journal* 15, no. 17 (1993). <https://www.proquest.com/docview/233608332?sourcetype=Trade%20Journals>.

<sup>16</sup> Jackson, O’Shea, Sr. “Black Korea Lyrics.” *Genius.com*. <https://genius.com/Ice-cube-black-korea-lyrics>.

<sup>17</sup> 1968 Civil Rights Act, S. 90-284. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-343/pdf/COMPS-343.pdf>.

to physically gate their communities from encroaching Black residents.<sup>18</sup> Whitley Heights, an influential neighborhood directly northwest of Los Angeles, was among those leading the effort: “Whitley Heights is a lush, sunny mound of the best of the old glamour and charm of Hollywood in the 1920s, rising above the worst of the trash and transience of Hollywood in the 1990s...a judge ruled last week that the city of Los Angeles could not allow the neighborhood up the hill to close its gates to the rest of the world.”<sup>19</sup> Inequitable access to housing severely limited social mobility, with the educational disparity in LA deepening as a result: in 1990, two-thirds of minority students attended schools funded below neighboring suburban districts like Whitley Heights.<sup>20</sup> While gating practices were eventually banned in the mid-1990s, the attitude toward minorities remained. Mary Paik Lee, a Korean immigrant in Southern California, recalled that “in the 1950s, most of the ‘For Whites Only’ signs on public restrooms, swimming pools, and so forth, were removed. But although there were no signs on barber shops, theaters, and churches, Orientals were told at the door that they were not welcome.”<sup>21</sup> Though the city government no longer enforced racist policing, Los Angeles residents took on the role, suggesting cultural differences hadn’t sentenced the urban underclass to economic stagnation. Instead, racist sentiments affected social mobility, from gating practices to limited public resources.

Beyond general racist sentiments in LA, deindustrialization in South Central Los Angeles affected Black Americans disproportionately, leading to economic stagnation. Lack of social mobility was

not a result of “laziness,” but rather circumstance, undermining the urban underclass theory. In the 1970s, the US economy experienced deindustrialization, as large corporations moved overseas for lower operating costs. From 1970 to 1985, US manufacturing declined by 1.5%, but Southern California’s manufacturing increased exponentially, with a 24.2% gain that established Los Angeles as a national manufacturing powerhouse.<sup>22</sup> However, the data hid discrepancies. In reality, while areas like Orange County thrived as high-tech industries grew, the auto industry and rubber plants in South Central, which had been the second largest in the 1970s, had essentially vanished by the mid-1980s. Ten of the twelve aerospace factories closed down, displacing over 50,000 workers.<sup>23</sup> As a result, low-wage, nonunionized labor industries emerged in southeast LA in order to compete with overseas manufacturing, such as the garment sector, which saw its workforce double from 1972 to 1992.<sup>24</sup> African American communities in South Central felt the effects of deindustrialization the hardest, with the annual median family income falling \$5,900-\$2,500 below the city median in the 1970s.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the new preference for nonunionized laborers in low-wage industries, due to lower wages and likelihood of striking, affected African Americans at a higher rate than other ethnic groups. Throughout Los Angeles in the 1980s, unionization rates of manufacturing workers fell from 30 percent to 23 percent in Los Angeles County and from 26.4 percent to 10.5 percent

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<sup>18</sup> Luis Daniel Gascón, and Aaron Roussell. *The Limits of Community Policing: Civilian Power and Police Accountability in Black and Brown Los Angeles*. New York: NYU Press, 2019. eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost).

<sup>19</sup> Moffat, Susan. “Both Sides of the Fence: Issue of Gated Public Streets Echoes Through Hollywood After Ruling.” *LA Times* (Los Angeles, CA), January 5, 1993. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-01-25-me-1635-story.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Gascon, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Lee, Mary Paik. *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America*. Edited by Sucheng Chan. University of Washington Press, 1990. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvs9fh4m>.

<sup>22</sup> Camille Zubrinsky Charles. *Won't You Be My Neighbor : Race, Class, and Residence in Los Angeles*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006. eBook Academic Collection (EBSCOhost).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Abelman, 1995.

<sup>25</sup> Charles, 2006.

in Orange County.<sup>26</sup> However, 10 percent of African Americans were union members, despite composing only 6 percent of the LA workforce. On the other hand, “preferred” workers like Hispanic and Asian laborers were severely underrepresented in unions. Hispanic workers made up 16 percent of employees in L.A., but only 9 percent of union members; similarly, foreign-born Asians were 11 percent of the workforce, but only 5 percent of union members (Figure 1). Due to language barriers and employment in non-unionized industries, Asian and Hispanic workers were less likely to join unions, whereas African Americans had a longer history of labor organizing in the US and stronger union networks in industrial sectors.<sup>27</sup> The effect of deindustrialization on South Central’s Black communities and its corresponding preference for non-unionized workers suggested that economic slowdowns were an impact of circumstance, rather than the “poverty culture” cited by the urban

underclass theory.

By the 1960s, as large corporations left South Central for overseas opportunities, low-wage industries entered Southeast LA, drawing immigrant laborers to the area. In response, urban renewal and redevelopment projects aimed to transform the majority-immigrant neighborhoods into thriving urban business centers, as the communities didn’t fit a Eurocentric image of modern, urban Los Angeles.<sup>28</sup> Driven by the development of the Los Angeles freeway system, urban renewal often had the unintended consequence of displacing and segregating minority populations, leading to static growth. Rather than inherent stagnation as a result of culture, city redevelopment programs condemned urban populations to underdevelopment with little hope of social mobility or job opportunities. One such neighborhood was Bunker Hill, a district north of South Central, which received federal grant funding

Figure 5. Employed Workers and Union Members in Greater L.A., 1994–97, by Sector, Nativity and Ethnicity

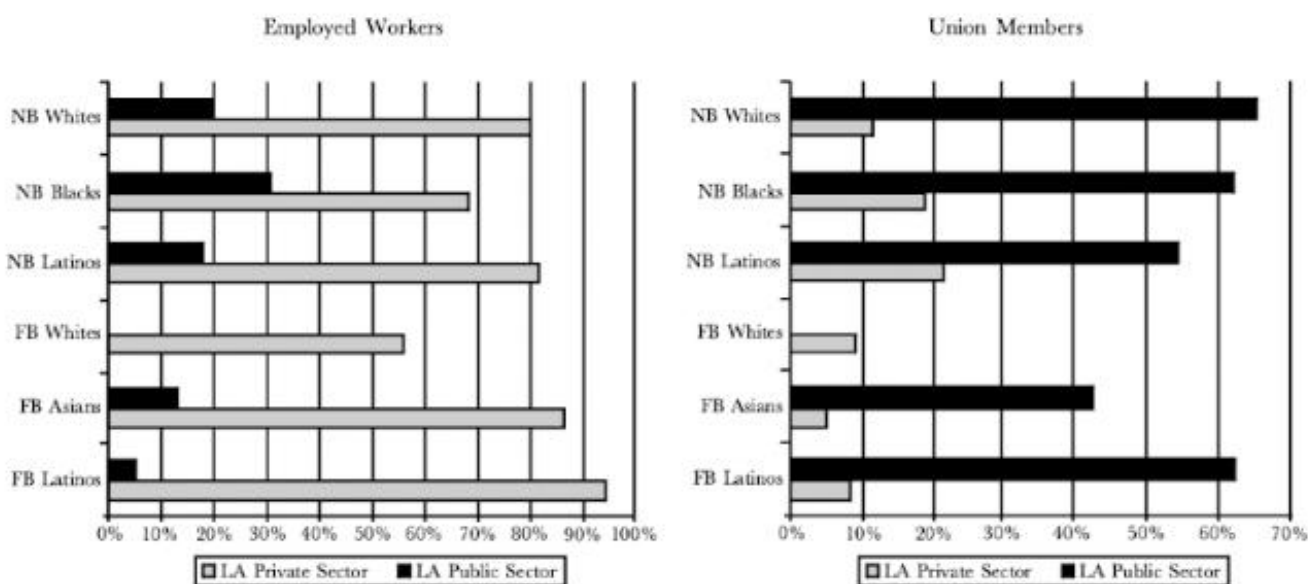


Fig 1. Ruth Milkman, “Immigrant Organizing and The New Labor Movement in Los Angeles” (2020). [1]

<sup>26</sup> Ball, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Perez, Jovanni. 2017. “The Los Angeles Freeway and the History of Community Displacement”. The Toro Historical Review 3 (1). <https://doi.org/10.46787/tthr.v3i1.2670>.

for urban renewal in 1955. The 133-acre residential neighborhood, lined with stately Victorian homes, had originated in the 1860s. However, a wave of immigration in the 1920s and 30s prompted a “white flight” from the area—residents moved east of Alameda Avenue and into the westside suburbs of Brentwood and the Pacific Palisades. The Pacific Electric Company enabled the “flight” by establishing trolley and railway lines: “H. E. Huntington [owner of Pacific Electric] yesterday asked the city council for a street railway franchise for the Pacific Electric...The plan is to lay direct tracks down Sixth street to Figueroa and cut off three Bides of the square, reducing the running time several minutes.”<sup>29</sup> The Pacific Electric trolleys and railways increasingly lured wealthy, white residents into the new “street car suburbs” like Angelino Heights, Highland Park, and West Hollywood. With the development of trolleys, Angelenos could live in residential areas further away from city centers than ever before. In addition, the creation of the LA freeway system, such as the Pasadena Freeway, accelerated the white “flight” started by trolley companies like Pacific Electric. The Victorian houses left behind were subdivided into housing for workers arriving from the Midwest, Europe, and Mexico, quickly making Bunker Hill a target for the Los Angeles Community Reinvestment Agency. A public agency dedicated to revitalizing economically struggling areas, the CRA became determined to rid Bunker Hill of its reputation as the setting of crime novels and film noir movies, or American crime dramas. Between 1959 and 1968, the CRA demolished Bunker Hill’s dilapidated buildings, displacing 9,000 residents without relocation assistance (Figure 2).<sup>30</sup> The displacement helped cement what became known as the “Cotton Curtain” along Alameda Avenue, a physical and racial barrier

that divided Black and white working classes in South Central. Testimony before the state Congress explained the effects of the divide:

When you look at the conditions and needs, the planning process in Watts has been some of the most negative planning I have ever seen in my life. The high school in Watts sits at the most negative end of the community. Jordan High sits next to the junkyards, General Motors, and the Cotton Curtain where a black couldn't even cross Alameda Street before 1965 to live. Where the elementary school is down there, junk is piled up in front of it as tall as this building. This environment itself would build a negative kid. There is not one of you sitting in this room who would want your daughter to go to Jordan High School and walk that corridor down there.<sup>31</sup>

The Cotton Curtain took a psychological and educational toll on the students attending Jordan High School. With underfunded maintenance, lack of access to basic services, and environmental hazards like industry waste from the junkyards or General Motors, by 1981, at the time of the testimony, Jordan High School had a 60% graduation rate, significantly



Fig 2. Olive Street block being leveled south of 1st Street, (1963). [2]

<sup>29</sup> Los Angeles Herald (Los Angeles, CA, United States). "HUNTINGTON ASKS RAILWAY FRANCHISE." June 23, 1909. <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=LAH19090623.2.72&e=en--20--1--txt-txIN>

<sup>30</sup> Marks, Mara A. "Shifting Ground: The Rise and Fall of the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency." *Southern California Quarterly* 86, no. 3 (2004). <https://doi.org/10.2307/41172224>.

<sup>31</sup> Hearings Before the SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES OF THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR, 97th Cong., 1st Sess. 49 (1981) (statement of Watkins). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED215134.pdf>.



lower than the state average of 72.2%.<sup>32</sup> While funding for high schools in predominantly Black communities was significantly reduced, the CRA directed investments toward white neighborhoods instead, at the expense of Black-owned businesses. For example, a small shopping complex near Charcoal Alley in Watts languished after fifteen years of “planning.” Similarly, the Crenshaw Shopping Center—the leading retail district in Watts—suffered after the CRA prioritized redevelopment subsidies for the wealthy promoters of Fox Hills Plaza in Culver City.<sup>33</sup> Rather than a cultural predisposition to poverty, it was urban renewal initiatives, redevelopment projects, and corresponding segregating boundaries such as the Cotton Curtain that condemned low-income neighborhoods to long-term economic stagnation.

As deindustrialization and urban renewal reshaped the city’s landscape, Korean immigrants increasingly filled the retail spaces in neighborhoods once dominated by Black-owned businesses. Since Los Angeles licensing policy prevented Korean professionals from entering the American workforce, small business ownership was a last resort for first-generation Korean Americans, contradicting the model minority myth’s insistence on the natural predisposition of Koreans to business. Though 40% of South-Central businesses in 1990 were Korean-owned,<sup>34</sup> small business ownership had been a choice made out of necessity, not desire. When Korean immigrants from academic backgrounds entered the US, the California Commission on Civil Rights noted in 1975 that “these [Korean] professionals are encouraged to immigrate—given preference by our immigration laws...Yet ... these same men and women are often told that their educational credentials are inadequate, their experience inapplicable, and their certification not recognized.”<sup>35</sup> Due to state

licensing practices, foreign-educated professionals’ degrees and credits were not recognized by Californian employers. When Korean professionals, such as pharmacists, attempted to enter licensing exams, they were often met with rejection:

Kong Mook Lee, a Korean-educated pharmacist and vice president of the Korean Pharmacist Association of California, estimates that there are at least 300 experienced pharmacists in Southern California born and educated in Korea, who cannot practice their profession. He noted that the Immigration and Naturalization Service gives high priority preferences to Koreans with pharmaceutical training, with the implication that persons of their educational training and experience would be welcome additions to the United States. Yet when these practicing pharmacists come to California, they are denied the opportunity even to take the examinations. The majority of the Korean-educated pharmacists have neither the time nor the money to go back to school. To survive and support families, these professionals must take unskilled jobs often paying low wages, he said.<sup>36</sup>

Korean pharmacists, like many other professionals, were denied even the opportunity to enter licensing examinations. In the rare cases when foreign-educated professionals were allowed to take the examinations, lack of proficiency in English and inadequate financial assistance for review courses meant passing the exam would be difficult. Employed in low-wage sectors such as the service industry, Korean immigrants found self-employment as small business owners, where language barriers were not as consequential, more appealing than wage labor. To Koojin Choi, a Korean grocer originally trained as a nurse in Seoul, owning a supermarket was the only

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Marks, 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Hsu, Madeline Y., and Ellen D. Wu. “Smoke and Mirrors’: Conditional Inclusion, Model Minorities, and the Pre-1965 Dismantling of Asian Exclusion.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 34, no. 4 (2015): 43-65.

<sup>35</sup> California Advisory Body US Commission on Civil Rights. *Asian Americans and Pacific Peoples: A Case of Mistaken Identity*. February 1975. <https://www2.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr12as4.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

option due to her lack of proficiency in English:

'I don't know the language,' said Koo-in Choi, who has owned the West End Superette, at West End Avenue and 72d Street, with her husband, Jai Sung Choi, for four years. "That is why so many from my country own grocery stores and fruit shops. It doesn't need too much English. It needs the thinking, the acting, the working hard."<sup>37</sup>

Self-employment was an adaptive response to language and credential barriers Korean immigrants faced, leading highly educated individuals like Choi to own shops and stores. In fact, many Korean immigrants abandoned business ownership in Koreatown once they accumulated enough capital:

The geographic mobility of the Koreans in the Korea Town area and its vicinity is extremely high. According to a survey based on the telephone directory listings of Korean residents in 6 zip code areas of Korea Town including 90004, 90005, 90006, 90010, 90019, and 90020, only 11% of the residents in 1972 remained in the same area in 1977, implying that 89% of the Korean residents moved out of this area during the five years. On the other hand, about 38% of the 1972 telephone listings of the Korean residents in Monterey Park, a middle-class residential area, were still found in the 1977 listings. The difference is indicative of the relatively high mobility of the Koreans in the Korea Town area.<sup>38</sup>

Poverty trapped Korean immigrants in

Koreatown as shop owners. When Korean shop owners accumulated enough capital, many relocated to middle-class neighborhoods like Monterey Park to pursue professional careers—highlighting that small business ownership was often a stepping stone rather than the ultimate goal. Between 1980-1990, the affluent South Bay community saw its Korean population double,<sup>39</sup> with South Bay Korean residents like Ik Soo Kim believing there was “no reason to go to Koreatown these days”<sup>40</sup> as there wasn't a small business tying Kim to Koreatown. Facing high barriers to enter the American professional workforce, Korean immigrants increasingly chose to pursue small business ownership.

When former professionals entered careers as small business owners out of necessity, advantages like network, capital, labor, and timing ensured their success, rather than cultural values of the minority myth stereotype. The businesses of early Korean immigrants in the early to mid-1900s struggled, as they lacked capital and communal support. However, strong connections to East Asian markets separated later Korean immigrants from other groups of newcomers. When capital export laws loosened in the 1980s, Koreans could come to the US with increasingly more capital, and family members or relatives could support around 60% to 80% of initial startup costs.<sup>41</sup> By 1986, Korean-owned enterprises in southern California became the largest import

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<sup>37</sup> Belkin, Lisa. "FOR THE CITY'S KOREAN GREENGROCERS, CULTURE OFTEN CLASHES WITH THE LAW." *New York Times* (New York City, NY), August 11, 1984. <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/08/11/nyregion/for-the-city-s-korean-greengrocers-culture-often-clashes-with-the-law.html>.

<sup>38</sup> National Center for Bilingual Research Department of Education. KOREAN-AMERICANS IN LOS ANGELES: THEIR CONCERNS AND LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE. By Kenneth Kong-On Kim, Kapson Lee, and Tai-Yul Kim. May 1981. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED205666.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> Park, Lisa Sun-Hee. "Continuing Significance of the Model Minority Myth: The Second Generation." *Social Justice* 35, nos. 2 (112) (2008): 134-44. JSTOR.

<sup>40</sup> Millican, Anthony. "Presence of Koreans Reshaping the Region : Immigrants: A developing Koreatown in Gardena symbolizes changes a growing population is bringing to the area." *LA Times* (Los Angeles, CA), February 2, 1992. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-02-02-me-1860-story.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Alesina, Alberto, and Geoffrey Carliner. "U. S. Trade Policy-making in the Eighties." In *Politics and Economics in the Eighties*, by IM Destler, 270. UChicago, 1991. Previously published in *In Politics and Economics in the Eighties*. UChicago Press, 1991. <https://www.nber.org/books-and-chapters/politics-and-economics-eighties>.

concerns for South Korean products.<sup>42</sup> South Korea also experienced a per capita GNP increase from below 1,000 to 5,040 between 1980 and 1990, further increasing the invaluable advantages of flexible export policy.<sup>43</sup> Once in the United States, immediate family members reduced labor costs, as unpaid relatives would become unofficial employees for Korean small businesses. In the 1980s, 30% of Korean businesses had no official employees.<sup>44</sup> Besides startup costs and staff recruitment, location was another pressing question for potential business owners. South Central Los Angeles, a low-income inner-city area, appeared to be an answer. In the aftermath of the Watts rebellion, large chain and retail companies had left South Central for wealthier suburbs in search of higher profits, disposable income rates, and lower operating costs due to less petty crime. At the same time, the area experienced an exodus of German and Italian merchants as a result of acquired capital and the post-Watts instability, which opened up space for Korean immigrants.<sup>45</sup> The difficulty of early Korean immigrants in opening Los Angeles businesses emphasized the significance of network, capital, labor, and timing. In the early 1900s, “many Koreans took the first opportunity to go into business, no matter how small ... Many Korean small businesses exacted long hours of work from the owners and their families and yet yielded little income.”<sup>46</sup> Early Korean immigrants didn’t benefit from favorable capital export laws and higher value currency, cutting off support from overseas relatives, so their businesses failed. Even Syngman Rhee, who later became president of South Korea, experienced dire setbacks and failure in his 1924 attempt at entrepreneurship in Los Angeles.<sup>47</sup>

Circumstantial advantages ultimately aided later Korean immigrants in small business ownership, rather than cultural values brought to the US from South Korea.

The reality of South-Central Los Angeles in the aftermath of the 1992 riots was much more complex than the reports of mainstream media and social discourse. The urban underclass theory and model minority myth justifying a Black-Korean conflict as one of the primary factors of the 1992 riots were just that — *myths*. The urban underclass theory, predicated on the idea that poverty was a cultural phenomenon, was undermined by structural racism, deindustrialization, and urban redevelopment programs, while the model minority myth was disproved by the circumstantial advantages as well as professional goals of Korean immigrants. Correspondingly, public perception of the riots was equally distorted—often sensationalized by media coverage or challenged by optimistic reports that created a more nuanced image of Los Angeles after the riots. For Angela Oh, a 32-year-old Korean American trial lawyer who found herself as the spokesperson for the Korean community after the riots, the media often controlled her TV appearances. In reference to an NBC “Sunday Today” show, Oh explained in a speech that her words were often twisted:

What’s happened is that the producer will call you up and say, we are going to talk about where we go from here, and they interview you and do this whole little prep, and when you go to the station—and this literally happened to me on a national network station—the issue becomes ‘Black-Korean conflict, the reason for

<sup>42</sup> National Center for Bilingual Research Department of Education. KOREAN-AMERICANS IN LOS ANGELES: THEIR CONCERNS AND LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE. By Kenneth Kong-On Kim, Kapson Lee, and Tai-Yul Kim. May 1981. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED205666.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Davis, Mike. "Chinatown, Part Two? The 'Internationalization' of Downtown Los Angeles." The New Left, July 1987. <https://newleftreview.org/issues/i164/articles/mike-davis-chinatown-part-two-the-internationalization-of-downtown-los-angeles>.

<sup>46</sup> Yim, Sun Bin. "The Social Structure of Korean Communities in California, 1903-1920." In Labor Immigration under Capitalism, 534. University of California Press, 1984.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

the riots in LA.' Then I sat on the panel with people who are 3,000 miles away whom I couldn't even see, who are saying these really inflammatory things, leaving me in a position to do nothing more than respond...you've [NBC] just fucked the whole city of Los Angeles as far as I'm concerned, and all the hard work we've put into building coalitions...<sup>48</sup>

NBC, like many other news companies, manipulated Oh's perspective, who was one of the few Korean American voices during the riots. The livestream severely damaged the coalition-building progress made by Los Angeles community leaders. While tension *did* exist, as NBC claimed, so did a sense of community solidarity. In Santa Cruz, a group of "Korean shopkeepers took a step toward easing tense relations with blacks by agreeing last week to hire a few gang members to work in their South-Central Korean shops which were especially hard hit by rioters."<sup>49</sup> The gang truce was one of many community coalition programs initiated between Korean and Black Americans. More casual day-to-day interactions confirmed that relations between the communities were more nuanced than at first glance. For example, while accounts like Tillsman-Blackston's dominated discourse, stories like those of Korean shopkeeper Chung Jin Moo existed as well. Upon Chung's return, he was welcomed home by former patrons:

'You made it! You made it! Thank you, Jesus' yelled Lashon Henry, a customer of Chung's 47th Broadway Food Market...Her eyes full of tears and disbelief, she wrapped her arms around him for a long embrace...'How ya

feelin', man?' asked Carlester Hall, 17, slapping Chung with a handshake. 'OK,' Chung said. Several other youths got out of a car to greet Chung. 'What's up, man' one asked. 'You comin' back?' 'Yes,' Chung said. 'All right!' the youth said.<sup>50</sup>

While tense relations between Korean shopkeepers and their largely Black customers certainly existed, so did positive interactions. Ultimately, the public's perception of the riots, undermined by optimistic journalism and supported by media sensationalization, reflected the same oversimplifications that obscured the deeper structural forces at play.

Yet, the persistence of the Black-Korean conflict narrative in mass media and social discourse was no minor accident. Instead, it served as a politically convenient explanation that aligned with mainstream conservative efforts to undermine social welfare programs and defend conservative policy agendas, shifting the blame onto marginalized groups. The Bush administration was among the most prominent of conservative politicians who took advantage of the riots to advance criticism of social welfare. Marlin Fitzwater, a spokesperson for the administration, claimed that welfare contributed to the uprisings: "Many of the root problems that have resulted in inner-city difficulties were started in the '60s and '70s and that they have failed."<sup>51</sup> Since welfare in the 1960s and 1970s had caused the riots, "a conservative agenda that creates jobs and housing and home ownership and involvement in the community"<sup>52</sup> was required to solve the social problems in LA. The Bush administration had

<sup>48</sup> Hicks, Joe. Speech presented at ACLU Forum, Los Angeles, CA, October 1992. Marxist Online Archive. <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/atc/5111.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Santa Cruz Sentinel (CA). "Gang truce offers hope in wake of LA riots." May 29, 1992.

<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SCS19920529.1.8&srpos=6&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-1992+LA+riots----1992>

<sup>50</sup> Napa Valley Register (CA). "A Miracle on 47th Place ; Chung Jin Moo returns." December 27, 1992

<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=NVR19921227.1.16&srpos=4&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-1992+LA+riots----1992--->

<sup>51</sup> Horvitz, Paul F. "White House Blames the Unrest On the Democrats and Welfare In Scarred L.A., Political Fallout as Curfew Is Lifted." International Herald Tribune (Paris, France), May 5, 1992. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/05/IHT-white-house-blames-the-unrest-on-the-democrats-and-welfare-in-scarred-la.html>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

capitalized on the opportunity to attack welfare programs and propagate conservative policy. While the White House “refused to say publicly whether President Bush would offer any detailed alternative”<sup>53</sup> to welfare programs, in the weeks following the riots, the Bush administration “on March 20 [sought] to eliminate from the budget for the 1993 fiscal year \$547.7 million to build new public housing.”<sup>54</sup> The housing proposal was one of many reductions part of the 3.6 billion in federal programs Bush hoped to eliminate in an effort to paint the Democratic-majority Congress as irresponsibly free-spending. For Bush and other conservative politicians, the riots couldn’t have happened at a better time. Conservative platforms like that of the Bush administration were recently facing heavy criticism from the left for significant welfare reductions. Welfare relied on the inherent government duty to provide aid, as the people needed support in order to succeed, whereas conservative rhetoric operated on the understanding that success was an individual burden. Therefore, direct government aid was unnecessary and better utilized elsewhere. Ronald Reagan first introduced this concept in 1987, noting before Congress that “this is the time to reform this outmoded social dinosaur and finally break the poverty trap.”<sup>55</sup> To Reagan, Bush, and conservatives, the “...thrust of European-American identity is to defend the individualistic view of the American system, because it portrays the system as open to those who are willing to work hard and pull themselves over

barriers of poverty and discrimination.”<sup>56</sup> However, in 1992, conservative politicians were still grappling with the lasting impact of the 1960s civil rights movement and the 1965 Watts Rebellion in LA, which directly challenged the ideals of American individualism. The frustration voiced by one LA resident captured a broader national sentiment: “I’ve had it with equality and all these lies about opportunities.”<sup>57</sup> The disillusionment was not unfounded. Americans suffered from high rates of discrimination and poverty, fueling the demands of social movements for meaningful change. Between 1979 and 1989, 4.3 million Americans joined the ranks of those living below the poverty level, undermining the claim that hard work can overcome systemic challenges.<sup>58</sup> If barriers like discrimination and poverty required government support, then reducing welfare spending and the national budget would harm minorities, undermining mainstream conservative policy. Frustrated by seemingly blind Republican executives, critics began to make their presence known. In reply to Marlin Fitzwater’s attack on social welfare in LA, Democratic nominee Bill Clinton stated, “Republicans have had the White House for 20 of the last 24 years, and they have to go all the way back to the 60’s to find somebody to blame. I don’t care who’s to blame. I want to do something about the problems.”<sup>59</sup> Ordinary citizens shared Clinton’s accusation that reducing welfare would fail to solve the tension in LA: “You don’t have to look any further

<sup>53</sup> Wines, Michael. "RIOTS in LOS ANGELES: The President; WHITE HOUSE LINKS RIOTS to WELFARE." *The New York Times* (New York City, NY), May 5, 1992. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/05/us/riots-in-los-angeles-the-president-white-house-links-riots-to-welfare.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Reagan, Ronald. "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union." Speech, January 27, 1987. Ronald Reagan: Presidential Library and Museum. National Archive. <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-joint-session-congress-state-union-1987>.

<sup>56</sup> Alba, Richard. "Conclusion: The Emergence of the European Americans." In *Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White America*, 317. Yale University Press, 1990. JSTOR.

<sup>57</sup> Jones, Jack. "You're Black and That's All There Is to It!" *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA, United States), October 1965, 1. <https://documents.latimes.com/view-watts-seven-part-times-series-1965/>.

<sup>58</sup> Jencks, Christopher, and Paul E. Peterson. *The Urban Underclass*. Brookings Institute, 1991.

<sup>59</sup> Pear, Robert. "THE 1992 CAMPAIGN: Democrats; CLINTON, IN ATTACK ON PRESIDENT, TIES RIOTS TO 'NEGLECT.'" *New York Times* (New York City, NY), May 6, 1992. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/06/us/the-1992-campaign-democrats-clinton-in-attack-on-president-ties-riots-to-neglect.html>.

than the White House's barbed claim that 60s liberal social programs were responsible for the riots."<sup>60</sup> In response to Clinton and other critics, Bush used the Black-Korean conflict narrative to defend the conservative platform. The conflict verified that it was possible for minorities to succeed in America without aid, just like Korean immigrants. The resentment of African Americans toward Koreans was concrete, undeniable evidence of their success. In fact, the Bush administration reasoned, welfare had actively harmed the main recipients of welfare in Los Angeles, Black residents.<sup>61</sup> Given Bush's defense of conservative policy, the president's address to the nation after the riots was predictable:

What we saw last night and the night before in Los Angeles is not about civil rights. It's not about the great cause of equality that all Americans must uphold. It's not a message of protest. It's been the brutality of a mob, pure and simple. And let me assure you: I will use whatever force is necessary to restore order.<sup>62</sup>

Rather than recognizing and addressing the underlying issues that had fueled the riots, like poverty and discrimination, Bush opted for a show of force—a superficial response to a problem deeply rooted in decades of injustice. Accepting the social issues in Los Angeles would force Bush to admit that systemic barriers could not be overcome without government aid, upending decades of conservative rhetoric.

In the early morning of April 17, 1993, a federal jury convicted two of the four LAPD officers involved in the Rodney King beating, avoiding the riots that followed the previous year's acquittals. Though many, including Attorney General Janet

Reno, felt "justice was done,"<sup>63</sup> the country turned to speculating on the deeper causes behind the 1992 unrest. A popular explanation—framed as the Black-Korean conflict—attributed the riots to tensions between African Americans and Korean immigrants, justified by the model minority myth and the urban underclass theory. However, this oversimplified view, despite being undermined by systemic issues such as deindustrialization, discriminatory urban policy, and structural racism, advanced conservative attacks on social welfare spending. While progress has been achieved in the years since, the political weaponization of racial conflict remains a powerful force, shaping public discourse and policy. As Black and Korean community leaders continue their work toward solidarity and understanding today, the challenge remains for *all* minorities: ensuring that racial tensions are not distorted into political rhetoric to exploit and divide ethnic groups, but instead understood in their full complexity, paving the way for real solutions to systemic injustice.

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<sup>60</sup> LA Weekly (Los Angeles, CA). "The Culmination." May 14, 1992.

<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=LAW19920514.1.10&srpos=3&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-1992+LA+riots----1992--->

<sup>61</sup> Abelman, 1995.

<sup>62</sup> Bush, George H. W. "Address to the Nation on the Civil Disturbances in Los Angeles, California." Address presented at Oval Office, White House, Washington DC, Maryland, United States, May 1, 1992. US Government Publishing Office. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-1992-book1/html/PPP-1992-book1-doc-pg685.htm>.

<sup>63</sup> Fulwood, Sam, III. "Clinton Praises Judgment of Jury, Urges Healing, Harmony Across U.S. : Administration: President speaks before giving address on economy. His new attorney general, Janet Reno, says, 'Justice was done.'" LA Times (Los Angeles, CA), April 18, 1993. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-04-18-mn-24495-story.html>.



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