



ABERDEEN HISTORICAL REVIEW

Volume 5 Issue 1

The University of Aberdeen  
May 2026



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Dear readers,

We are delighted to present the first issue of the 2025/26 Academic Year, the ninth issue overall of the Aberdeen Historical Review (AHR). Our Summer 2025 issue, which was published on our website (<https://abdnhistory.co.uk/published-issues>) has remarkably welcomed more readers than ever! We hope that with each new issue published, this engagement with the Review will continue to grow.

The Aberdeen Historical Review began in February 2021 amid the second semester of online teaching when a group of students from the university came together to discuss how they missed the uplifting atmosphere created by being on campus. As a result, the Review was established to celebrate the successes of Aberdeen University's students and continue to inspire academic accomplishments throughout the pandemic and beyond. The AHR is an open-access academic undergraduate journal that publishes first-class scholarship produced by students at the University of Aberdeen. Each paper was written for a History Honours course at the university and thoroughly peer-reviewed by a dedicated board of students. Authors and reviewers partake in an anonymised dialogue, through which authors are challenged to review and develop their papers. In this way, the essays are allowed to reach their greatest potential. Simultaneously, peer reviewers are enabled to take a unique approach to each paper and utilise their creativity, critical thinking, and academic writing skills in advising the author on improvements.

Throughout the 2025/26 academic year, we introduced our project to many Honours students. We were delighted to see students and staff referring to the journal as a continuing source of inspiration and a vital student-led project. Although the AHR is part of a global network of undergraduate publications it is primarily intended as a tool for its community in Aberdeen. We hope that students from across the year groups will use the AHR as a guiding voice as they write their assessments. This volume includes the course number and title for which each essay is produced, allowing students and tutors alike to refer to first-class essays from a specific History course.

As per usual, we have tried to sort the essays chronologically. This issue hosts papers from a variety of courses, as well as time periods and historical approaches! We begin with Ronan Lynch's paper exploring the Scottish Middle Ages and the topic of the influence on its cultural landscape by Scandinavian settlers. Afterwards, you can enjoy Cillian Mackay's case study of the 'Lost Cause' mythology in the American Civil War, covering the importance of military history in relation to broader social and political concerns. Staying in the 19th century, we are happy to publish a HI306G History of the Body essay by Ty Robins exploring the class divide in Victorian England through the lens of death and burial. Sophie Walker then takes us back over the Atlantic Ocean to the U.S., where she explores the Native American children's agencies, or lack thereof, at the first boarding school for Native Americans, Carlisle Indian School. An analysis of the Russian visual propaganda during the Great War can be enjoyed in Kaitlyn O'Donnell's essay. Staying on the topic of the World Wars, Conrad Funk presents his research on hunger as a tool for post-WW2 reconciliation between France and Germany. The most modern essay by Emma Trillot then explores the rise of 'Lesbian chic' in the 1990s U.S. popular culture!

On behalf of the 2025/26 editorial board, I would like to thank everyone who was involved in helping to create the Aberdeen Historical Review. Specifically, we wish to thank our peer reviewers who were crucial in the editing process. On the same note, thanks go to the student authors who submitted their essays to the journal. We were honoured to work with so many talented and dedicated undergraduate students who now embark on new paths within academia and beyond. Personally, I wish to take a moment and appreciate the hard work of this year's editorial team. Your help and diligence made the continuation of the AHR possible, and the time and care put into this issue are a testament to the importance of this project!

Producing the ninth issue of the AHR has been a rewarding experience, but we could not have achieved this without the support of our faculty advisors, Dr. Bradford Bow and Dr. Owen Walsh. We also want to thank the History Department for their continuing guidance and support. Finally, thank you to the readers for supporting us. We hope you enjoy reading the journal, as much as we enjoyed making it.

On behalf of the Editorial Team,

Anna Dvořáková  
Managing Editor

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## **In what ways did Scandinavian settlers impact Scotland throughout the Middle Ages?**

Ronan Lynch

*Ronan Lynch is a fourth-year joint honours student in Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Studies and History. Throughout his time at Aberdeen, his interests have wandered from Norse Mythology to the Wild West. He is currently writing a dissertation project in which he is using songs and ballads from the 1800s United States, and the stories they tell, to try and piece together what constitutes an American identity on the frontier. This essay was written for CE301E: Celtic Scotland: Gaelic Cultural Moments Middle Ages to Present.*

The cultural landscape of Scotland was profoundly and irrevocably changed as a result of Scandinavian settlers throughout the Middle Ages, as this essay will attempt to broadly compile and break down. Between a mixture of protracted raiding and widespread settlement in the Highlands and islands, it appears undeniable, argues Barrett, that the ‘long-term Scandinavian influence on what is now Scotland was considerable’.<sup>1</sup> While this is widely agreed upon to be the case, effectively summarised by Hillerdal as a ‘watershed moment in the history of Scotland’, there is significantly fewer evidence and contemporary sources to draw from when comparing the Norse impact on Scotland, with that on England or Ireland.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, drawing definite conclusions as to the ways in which the nature of Scandinavian activity played out in Scotland across the Middle Ages is difficult. It is clear, however, that the Scandinavian settlement remained widespread in Scotland much longer than the typically Anglo-centric ‘Viking Age’ timespan that is usually given when dealing with Norse raiders, often seen as ending in 1066 CE with the Battle of Stamford Bridge. There was, it seems, a great deal of

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<sup>1</sup> James H. Barrett ‘The Norse in Scotland’, in *The Viking World* ed. by Stefan Brink (Routledge, 2008), pp. 411-427 (p. 411).

<sup>2</sup> Charlotta Hillerdal, ‘North-eastern Vikings?: The presence and absence of a Norse–Scottish cultural landscape in north-east Scotland’, in *Cultural Landscapes of North-East Scotland: Collaborative Research in History and Archaeology* (Oxbow Books, 2025), pp. 95-104 (p. 95).

violence that took place within this period, characterised in many wars and conquests across the sporadically emerging and declining kingdoms of Scotland. Despite the violence, there was a great deal of settlement in the Northern and Western Isles, which lasted for several hundred years. As a result of this, ‘Scandinavian place names blanket the Northern Isles, giving us crucial insight into the extent of this Scandinavian settlement and impact.’<sup>3</sup> Tying in with the place names, the languages of Scotland received a wealth of influence from the Old Norse language of the Scandinavian settlers, with words being adopted or taken for inspiration in the Gaelic language as well as the emerging dialect of Scots.

It cannot be denied that the viking Age saw a great deal of violence and conflict within Pictish and Gaelic kingdoms that populated Scotland at the time. Rosamund Barraclough argues that the reputation of the vicious viking[<sup>4</sup>] raiders is rightly earned, gaining titles such as ‘Erik Bloodaxe’ and ‘Ivar the Boneless’, claiming that they can ‘hardly complain about the bad press’.<sup>5</sup> This reputation is gained particularly from Anglo-Saxon sources, who depict them as devils as a result of the ‘despicable ravaging of the heathen men annihilated God’s church on Lindisfarne with plundering and slaughter’, as well as many other Christian monasteries.<sup>6</sup> The same can be said for Iona Abbey, which was the first recorded Norse raid on Scotland in 795CE, and ‘in 802 they burned it, in 806 they killed sixty-eight of the community’.<sup>7</sup> Whilst the violence here is undeniable, Downham highlights that ‘the political history of vikings has

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<sup>3</sup> Barrett, ‘The Norse in Scotland’, p. 411.

<sup>4</sup> I am using a lower-case ‘v’ for ‘viking’ in this essay to align with Clare Downham’s argument that the term was not used to describe Scandinavians in the Middle Ages. The word comes from the Old Norse ‘masculine noun *vikigr*’, meaning ‘sea-raider’, and was ‘not an ethnic label’. Please see Clare Downham’s article, ‘Viking Ethnicities: A Historiographic Overview’ (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough, ‘Inroads from the Sea’, in *Beyond the Northlands: Viking Voyages and Old Norse Sagas* (Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 3-22 (p. 3).

<sup>6</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. Michael Swanton (Phoenix Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Donnchadh Ó Corráin, ‘Ireland, Wales, Man, and the Hebrides’, in *Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings* ed. by Peter Sawyer (Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 83-109 (p. 83).

proved controversial due to a lack of consensus as to what constitutes reliable evidence'.<sup>8</sup> This is the biggest difficulty when dealing with this material because if the information is not coming from later sources like the 'Icelandic sagas from the thirteenth century and later', then it is coming from a primarily Christian perspective.<sup>9</sup> This is where the idea of horned helmets emerges, with the Christian texts depicting the raiders as devils, the raids of Iona and Lindisfarne causing outrage across the Christian world. 'For them it was Jerusalem destroyed', as argued by Ó Corráin, despite the Scandinavians being far from the only groups engaging in violence during this time period.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, many of the contemporary Anglo-Saxon texts, such as *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 'were each connected with the household of English kings', often 'Wessex-based accounts with less information on other parts of England' let alone Scotland.<sup>11</sup> Here, Downham effectively indicates the difficulties with the already limited information on Scandinavian settlers that is accessible today. The narrative of these viking raiders that is being created here is very limited and difficult to engage with, even more so in Scotland where the evidence is far more sparse and the engagement far lesser than in England.

However, aside from the rather problematic sources, there is plenty of evidence and records of battles and violence taking place throughout Scotland in the Viking Age and long into the period of Scandinavian settlement in Scotland. In the thirteenth century text, *A History of Norway*, a narrative of conquest does seem to be created, with the Norse having 'imposed their harsh sway now on the English, now on the Scots, and sometimes on the Irish, so that Northumbria in England, Caithness in Scotland, Dublin and other coastal towns in Ireland were

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<sup>8</sup> Clare Downham, 'Chapter Twenty Five: Vikings in England', in *The Viking World* ed. by Stefan Brink (Routledge, 2008), pp. 341-349 (p. 341).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Ireland, Wales, Man, and the Hebrides', p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> Downham, 'Vikings in England', p. 341.

brought under their rule'.<sup>12</sup> This would suggest that the activities of Scandinavian settlers in Scotland and the rest of the British Isles were of conquest, the 'harsh sway' directly referring to acts of violence against the local territories and inhabitants.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, whilst much of the Norse settlement took place in the Western Isles, there are also many conflicts recorded between them and the Pictish peoples, who mostly populated the northeast of Scotland. Noble and Evans highlight that 'in 839, the dynasty [of the greatest Pictish kingdom] seems to have suffered a terminal setback'.<sup>14</sup> This example of one of the major battles is directly referenced in the *Annals of Ulster* which describes how the members of the Pictish royal family of Fortriu and 'others almost innumerable fell there'.<sup>15</sup> Noble and Evans argue that this battle was one of the key factors which contributed to the end of the Picts, and demonstrates the ruthless nature of viking activity in Scotland. All of this supports the narrative that one of the main impacts of the Scandinavian settlers on Scotland was that of violence and conflict throughout the Viking Age.

Scandinavian settlement throughout Scotland was substantial and widespread, covering the majority of the Western and Northern Isles and lasting for a much longer period than in England. Ó Corráin argues that the defeat of the Fortriu royal family in central Pictland, 'suggests that the Western and Northern Isles and the western and north-eastern mainland were already' occupied by Scandinavians.<sup>16</sup> There is an interesting comparison here with the attempted Norse settlement in Ireland, which at the time was brimming with 'coastal kingdoms

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<sup>12</sup> *A History of Norway*, trans. by D. Kunin (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2001), p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Gordon Noble and Nicholas Evans, 'Destroyed by "the Strength of Spears and of Swords"? The End of the Picts', in *Picts: Scourge of Rome and Rulers of the North* (Birlinn, 2022), pp. 249-289 (p. 253).

<sup>15</sup> *Annals of Ulster (Annála Uladh)*, compiled by Pádraig Bambury and Stephen Beechinor (CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts: a project of University College Cork, 2000), 839.9.

<sup>16</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Ireland, Wales, Man, and the Hebrides', p. 87.

and competing lords'.<sup>17</sup> Ó Corráin makes a valuable distinction here, pointing out that in Ireland, despite 'their best efforts [viking raiders] took no large territories—quite unlike their fellows in Scotland, England and Frankia'.<sup>18</sup> As a result of this, the Irish kings were able to better make 'war on them', and even 'used them as allies and mercenaries in the shifting web of alliances' that made up the fractured political landscape of Ireland.<sup>19</sup> In direct contrast to this, Scotland saw masses of land taken from both the Gaels and the Picts, leaving open 'most of Scotland to raiding, slaving, and tribute—and probably domination'.<sup>20</sup> Whilst there were some conflicts between the different Scandinavian factions, the Dublin-based viking leader Ímar was, in the late ninth century, called 'in his obit' the 'king of the Northmen' meaning he was the 'overlord of the Vikings in Ireland and Scotland, including Pictland and Strathclyde, and possibly Wales'.<sup>21</sup> The idea that the land ruled by Scandinavian settlers had an overlord is an insight into the power and influence that had been established. This dominion over the Scottish kingdoms of the time led to an extended period of Norse settlement, which in turn led to the so-called 'second Viking Age' separate from the period of early raids that began in the 8th century.<sup>22</sup>

Ó Corráin claims that 'By the early tenth century there was a long-established Hiberno-Viking area[...] in Ireland but much more significantly in Scotland and Man'.<sup>23</sup> According to this narrative, it appears these Norse settlers used the conquered lands of Scotland as a base, from which to launch attacks on parts of Ireland. It is evident that the captured territory in Scotland was far more comfortably under Norse control, with Barrett highlighting that 'much

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<sup>17</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Ireland, Wales, Man, and the Hebrides', p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Ireland, Wales, Man, and the Hebrides', p. 90.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ó Corráin, 'Ireland, Wales, Man, and the Hebrides', p. 97.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

of western Scotland remained under at least nominal Scandinavian rule until the Treaty of Perth in 1266'.<sup>24</sup> However, there is a difficulty in analysing what life would have been like in these areas of Scotland under viking occupation, because much of the contemporary literature of the time comes from Ireland. One of the few monastic and literary institutions in Scotland, before its initial sacking in 795 CE, was the Abbey on Iona. Following Norse raids, 'the whole community of Hy [Iona], together with its treasures, was evacuated to Kells at the beginning of the ninth century, as a consequence of Viking invasions'. Seemingly the book would not have survived to this day had it not been moved to and preserved in Ireland.<sup>25</sup> What would be crucial to explore here is to what extent the local Gaels and Picts became assimilated into the Norse culture, and if these lands were ruled in peace. Whilst this is very difficult to determine with the information that is accessible, there is one major impact that this Scandinavian settlement had on the local cultures of Scotland. Similar to the unification of Wessex in the face of viking threats, Barrett points out that 'it has been argued that Scandinavian raiding and settlement in the ninth century played an important – if ambiguous – role in the emergence of a united kingdom of Alba (later Scotland) from the harassed remnants' of the Gaelic and Pictish kingdoms.<sup>26</sup> This idea supports the writings of Woolf, who claims that the 'Viking Age, and specifically the settlement of large parts of northern Scotland by Scandinavians in the course of it, marks a major turning point in the country's history'.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps even more significant, and much longer standing, was the Scandinavian occupation of the Northern Isles, namely Shetland and Orkney. Despite previously establishing

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<sup>24</sup> Barrett, 'The Norse in Scotland', p. 411.

<sup>25</sup> Paul, Meyvaert, 'The Book of Kells and Iona', in *The Art Bulletin* 71.1 (College Art Association, 1989), pp. 6-19 (p. 10).

<sup>26</sup> Barrett, 'The Norse in Scotland', p. 411.

<sup>27</sup> Alex Woolf 'Scandinavian Scotland', in *From Pictland to Alba* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 275-311 (p. 275).

that the contemporary written sources cannot be fully trusted to be historically reliable, Barrett points out that there are:

‘Two assumptions inherent in the twelfth–thirteenth-century sources are particularly resilient: that an earldom of Orkney was founded in the years around AD 900[...] and that it was ruled by a single dynasty (albeit not without internal strife) into the lifetime of the medieval author in question’.<sup>28</sup>

Barrett does however warn that, with such little evidence, ‘these assumptions are potentially dangerous’.<sup>29</sup> This idea does receive support however from Bates, who argues that the earldom was possibly created ‘as early as late 9th century [CE] and gradually integrated into the kingdom of Norway’.<sup>30</sup> What is known is that there are signs of pre-viking Pictish settlement on the Northern Isles as can be seen by the figure below.<sup>31</sup>



This image shows the St Ninian's Isle treasure hoard, which matches other Pictish designs found elsewhere on the mainland of Scotland. Dated to the late eighth or early ninth century, the hoard was found buried in Shetland, most likely for protection in the face of viking

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<sup>28</sup> Barrett, ‘The Norse in Scotland’, p. 412.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Richard C. Bates and others, ‘The Norse Waterways of West Mainland Orkney, Scotland’, in *Journal of Wetland Archeology* (Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2020), pp. 25-42 (p. 25).

<sup>31</sup> *St Ninian's Isle Treasure Hoard*, National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, 8th or 9th century.

arrivals. It is difficult to know whether the Pictish inhabitants became assimilated into the arriving Norse culture, or if the viking raiders killed off any that they found on the Northern Isles. However, it does show that both Orkney and Shetland very quickly fell under total Scandinavian dominion, control which lasted until ‘1468 and 1469 respectively’ when political power was ‘transferred to Scottish authority’.<sup>32</sup> Another key piece of insight into the nature of the polities of these northern kingdoms comes from the conflict of 1066 CE, in which Harald Hardrade invaded England. Ringen highlights that this king of Norway gathered ‘additional forces in the Shetlands, Orkneys and Scotland’, before launching his attack’.<sup>33</sup> If this was the case, it is evidence that the Shetland and Orkney Isles were still closely unified with the rest of the Scandinavian world, suggesting a strong political presence able and willing to offer military support to a Norwegian king.

The settlement of Shetland and Orkney directly links into the next form of impact that the Scandinavian settlers had on the local cultures, the influence of place-names. ‘The Vikings were outstanding geographers’, a skill which they used across their ‘sea-empire’ which covered ‘the great rivers of continental Russia to reach Byzantium, while extending westwards to colonise Greenland and even the edges of North America’.<sup>34</sup> Something that was key to their navigational strategy, was the naming of places as landmarks and geographical markers. Smyth offers that ‘early pathfinding studies of Scandinavian influences on Gaelic Scotland demonstrated that massive Gaelicisation of Norse names made it difficult for Scottish scholars to decipher their deeper Scandinavian roots’.<sup>35</sup> Whilst this doesn’t make for the easiest task of

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<sup>32</sup> Barrett, ‘The Norse in Scotland’, p. 411.

<sup>33</sup> Stein Ringen, ‘Chapter 1: The Vikings’, in *The Story of Scandinavia* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2023), pp. 17-74 (p. 29).

<sup>34</sup> William J. Smyth, ‘The Scandinavian Impact—A Geographical Exploration’, in *History Ireland, Vol. 28, No. 2* (Wordwell Ltd., 2020), pp. 14-17 (p. 14).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

tracing the history and origins of place names, it does offer insight into the extent of Old Norse influences on the Scottish place names, Gaelic ones in particular. Smyth also points out that ‘in both the Hebridean islands of Lewis and Islay, about 250 Old Norse loan-words—involving personal, topographic and habitative names—were found embedded in the local place names’.<sup>36</sup> Shetland also has Norse routes, ‘the old name for Shetland was Hjaltland’, based on the Norse word for “hilt”, as a result of the islands on a map having the appearance of a sword hilt, another example of geographical place-naming.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly Jennings and Kruse point out that ‘a multidisciplinary study of the settlements in certain areas of Lewis, Skye, and Islay, concluded that the settlements with Norse topographical names were amongst the oldest and first established by the Norse’.<sup>38</sup> This is likely the result of the later establishment of Gaelic as the dominant language in Scotland, overwriting many Norse place names, but the oldest seem to have been left. The influences of Norse place names in Scotland are still widely engaged with and appreciated in public engagement today. The Old Man of Storr on the Isle of Skye remains a popular tourist attraction and it is easy to see how it would have been used as a navigational landmark. The word Storr is of ‘Old Norse origin and means *great man*’.<sup>39</sup> It is evident then that Scandinavian place names had, and still do have, an enormous impact on the local cultures and regions of Scotland.

The final key impact of Scandinavian settlers, continuing directly on from place names, is the influence of the Old Norse language itself and the ramifications it had for Scottish cultures. Woolf argues that ‘by about 1200 most of Scotland north of the Dornoch Firth seems

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> George T. Flom, ‘Review: The Language of Shetland’, in *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (The John Hopkins University Press, 1902), pp. 55-59 (p. 56).

<sup>38</sup> Andrew Jennings and Arne Kruse, ‘From Dál Riata to the “Gall-Ghàidheil”’, in *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, Vol. 5 (Brepols, 2009), pp. 123-149 (p. 138).

<sup>39</sup> *Visitors Guide to Scotland*, Nigel Cole (2020), date accessed, 16/03/2026.  
<https://www.visitorsguidetoscotland.com/2020/05/old-man-of-storr/>

to have been entirely Norse-speaking and that Norse place names had replaced those which had been in existence before the arrival of the Scandinavians'.<sup>40</sup> This idea of Old Norse having 'replaced the Pictish and Gaelic' languages would support the idea of total Scandinavian dominance in the areas they came to control.<sup>41</sup> However, Woolf points out an interesting discrepancy that may complicate the narrative further. He claims that evidence for speaking of the Norse language in the west is 'more ambiguous' before explaining that for western Scotland 'most of our earliest documents date from the very end of the middle ages, or even later, when Gaelic had, in its turn, replaced Norse as the main language of the regions'.<sup>42</sup> This results in a complicated debate as to 'the extent to which Gaelic may have survived in some areas throughout the period'.<sup>43</sup> This idea of the dominant languages fighting for control, creating layers throughout the period, does make it difficult for scholars to determine with precision where and when each language was spoken. This setback is made more unfortunate given the reliance on later texts, which is why any place names that have been gathered are all the more valuable.

The Old Norse language did not only affect Gaelic directly, it also helped to produce several of its competitors across Scotland. One example, as examined by Barrett, is the Scandinavian dialect, Norn, which 'continued to be spoken in the Northern Isles into the eighteenth century'.<sup>44</sup> This fascinating descendent of Old Norse illuminates the extent of Scandinavian language and dialect in Scotland, being spoken in the Northern Isles long after they were officially reclaimed as political bodies of Scotland. The same can be said about Scots, a dialect which took much inspiration from Old Norse. Flom explains that although the

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<sup>40</sup> Woolf, 'Scandinavian Scotland', p. 276.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Barrett, 'The Norse in Scotland', p. 411.

establishment of Scots came about across several centuries, ‘political separation from Norway brought with it linguistic isolation, the power to resist continued Scotch influence became weaker and weaker’.<sup>45</sup> This manifested as another major impact on Scotland, the beginning of the decline of Gaelic.

In conclusion, the Scandinavian settlers brought about major changes and formed catalysts to the cultural and political reshaping of Scotland and a significant stage in the nation’s origin story. Despite the initial violence, settlement was also widespread, the Norse settlers eventually occupying much of the Western and Northern Isles as well as parts of the western mainland. This era of settlement brought with it longevity, the Scandinavian settlers remaining in their occupied land for several centuries, much longer than that of England or Ireland. The control Norse settlers had over their conquered areas indirectly led to a more political unity across Scotland, eventually forming the kingdom of Alba. Another major impact on the local cultures of Scotland was the use of place names. Across settled areas of Scotland there are hundreds of Norse place names that have become mixed amongst the Gaelic, resulting in a complicated field of analysis, but still demonstrating the influence of the Scandinavian settlers. Finally, the languages these settlers brought with them also profoundly reshaped the cultural landscape of Scotland, leading to the birth dialects in Scotland such as Norn and Scots, which eventually led, in part, to the beginning of the decline of Gaelic. Overall then, whilst the evidence in this field still remains sparse, archeological discoveries are being made year by year as technology and understanding progresses. It is the job of the historian and scholar to marry up the often tricky contemporary texts with the physical primary evidence in order to determine the most accurate conclusion possible. Hopefully, in time, this will become a more illuminated topic of research.

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<sup>45</sup> Flom, ‘The Language of Shetland’, p. 56.

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## **How can researching military history help our understanding of broader social or political concerns? With Reference to the Confederate ‘Lost Cause’ Mythology of the American Civil War**

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### **Introduction**

Military history has frequently been seen as rather peripheral within the larger academic field. It is frequently reduced to comprehensive explanations of combat preparations, war campaigns, soldiers marching in line, or other repetitive images that are created in one's mind whenever the subject is mentioned. Historians such as Kevin M. Levin and Adam Dombey have argued that careful study of military history reports, diaries, battle plans, and other primary sources provides a unique perspective on how events are remembered, categorised, and sometimes deliberately reshaped for political purposes. At the same time, historians such as Shelby Foote and Douglas Freeman have, in some way, perpetuated these myths of the Confederacy by the misinterpretation of evidence. Thus, examining Confederate sources reveals how certain events were memorialised, romanticised, and used to promote a post-war Southern ideology.

This essay will look at how the Confederate 'Lost Cause' mythology of the American Civil War influenced popular opinion and romanticised Southern identity, glorifying Confederate leaders and justifying African American segregation. It will look at how these aspects shaped racial policies and larger social and political processes in the years post-war. It

will also examine the role of key Confederate primary sources in creating historical interpretations, emphasising why studying military history is critical for comprehending the complex political and societal concerns that emerged after the American Civil War. Therefore, by placing this essay in the broader historiographical debate emphasising the importance of studying conflicts and the myths that are perpetuated around them.

## II. Understanding the Lost Cause Mythology

The true ‘victor’ of the war was not Ulysses S Grant and his two million-strong Union army, but the ‘undefeated spirit’ of Robert E. Lee and his brave rebel leaders alike.<sup>1</sup> This is a primary idea of the Lost Cause mythos, which merged throughout the South during the end of the Civil War and during the Reconstruction era, becoming intertwined with the academic discipline of history as the twentieth century advanced. The foremost notable writing on the Lost Cause would be the 1868 edition of “The Lost Cause”, by Edward Alfred Pollard, a deep Confederate sympathiser who had written for the *Richmond Examiner*, a newspaper hostile to Jefferson Davis but supportive of the Confederate States of America. This rewriting of history was more than just to commemorate military figures; it had a significant impact on racial and social policies and focused on the white supremacist beliefs, which downplayed slavery's role in the conflict.<sup>2</sup> Through this viewpoint, studying military history becomes critical to understanding how such myths continue to impact political and societal institutions, marking the danger of misinformation surrounding the past.

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<sup>1</sup> Gary W. Gallagher, and Alan T. Nolan. eds, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Indiana University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Edward Alfred Pollard, *The Lost Cause Regained*, (GW Carleton & Company, 1868)

Undoubtedly, the primary reason for the Confederacy's existence was to preserve and expand the institution of slavery and to protect the southern political and economic system, which had thrived on the cotton, sugar and tobacco trades. This fundamental issue is apparent in historical sources such as Alexander Stephens' Cornerstone Speech and secession declarations from Mississippi, Texas, South Carolina, and Georgia.<sup>3</sup> However, these key statements are often overlooked or downplayed by supporters of the Lost Cause myth. To understand this movement, it's important to examine how mythology functions. At its core, the Lost Cause narrative seeks to rewrite the history of the Confederacy; firstly, by stating that the Confederacy's war aims were not to preserve the institution of slavery (nor do they condemn it), but rather to preserve the states' rights of freedom to keep the racial status quo; secondly, and the focus of this piece, the Confederate armies acted gallantly and fought bravely against the overwhelming numbers of inferior northern troops; and thirdly, to encourage gender roles by enforcing the place of Confederate women during wartime.<sup>4</sup>

To gain a better understanding of the myth's influence on the southern academics who either advocate for or depict the myth in a way that lends it credence should be acknowledged in the semi-legitimation of the myth. Shelby Foote, a well-known Southern historian, provides a clear example of this. In his three-part history of the Civil War and his novel *Shiloh*, Foote adopts a clouded perspective, focusing primarily on the military aspects of the war and offering accounts of both Union and Confederate soldiers, but with a clear, noticeable bias toward the South.<sup>5</sup> He presents the Confederate cause as a war for 'constitutional liberty' and

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<sup>3</sup> Timothy B. Smith, *The Mississippi Secession Convention: Delegates and Deliberations in Politics and War, 1861-1865* (University of Mississippi, 2014), pp. 12-13.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher A. Graham, 'Lost Cause Myth', *Parks Stewardship Forum*, 36.3 (2020), pp. 458 - 464.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy S. Huebner and Madeleine McGrady, 'Shelby Foote, Memphis, and the Civil War in American Memory', *Southern Cultures*, 21. 4 (2015), pp. 13-27.

continuously minimises the role of slavery, highlighting the courageous efforts of Southern armies.<sup>6</sup> This romanticised portrayal made his books far more popular with white Americans in both the North and south.

The use of romanticisation in this context is especially useful, as post-war, the South held a deep generational humiliation. In order to counteract the feeling of hopelessness, a justification for the war's losses emerged, as seen in other nations such as the German Reich (1933-1945). This ultimately manipulates beliefs, traumas and broader emotions of the intended audience, allowing for a greater ability to influence a certain opinion, to some extent, propaganda.

Another academic who committed to a similar narrative was Douglas Southall Freeman, an influential historian active in the 1930s to 1960s who focused exclusively on the military aspects of the Civil War rather than the political or social challenges confronting both sides. Writing in a period marked by racial violence, white supremacy, and the academic policy shaped through the lens of polarised available historical sources. His works, in particular, show a clear bias for the Southern states. Freeman frequently takes first-person stories from surviving Confederate veterans as unquestionable fact, without seeking additional confirmation from secondary sources.<sup>7</sup> Primary sources are not without their own issues regarding accuracy and bias. Furthermore, Freeman's publications include several romanticised accounts, many of which were obtained from the Southern Historical Society. During this time, the Society published papers, primary source materials, and other academic works that examined the Confederate experience through the prism of Southern patriotism, valour, and sacrifice.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Huebner and McGrady, 'Shelby Foote, Memphis, Civil War', pp. 13-27.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Dickson, 'Douglas Southall Freeman, the Civil War, and the Idea of the South', *Civil War History*, 60 (2014), pp. 66-77.

<sup>8</sup> Dickson, 'Douglas Southall Freeman', pp. 66-77.

In the context of investigating military history, it is critical to evaluate historians who interpret history through a specific lens or political goal, as this can expose inaccurate narratives widely accepted by the public or fellow scholars. Furthermore, the use of primary sources such as first-hand accounts and diary entries and secondary sources, including papers, theses, and other academic works by these once-acclaimed historians, ultimately helps to unravel a belief system that kept the Southern states under Jim Crow and violent racial relations and, most importantly, dismantles a white supremacist ideology. For at least a century, this ideological system has impacted both military historians and the public.

### **III. Military History and Leadership in the Lost Cause**

*'Surrender means that the history of this heroic struggle will be written by the enemy... to regard our gallant dead as traitors and our maimed veterans as subjects fit for derision'.<sup>9</sup>* Confederate General Cleburne remarked this before his death in November of 1864; however, history did not follow suit. As previously mentioned, military documents, battle plans, diaries, memoirs, and letters all provide valuable insight into the minds and personal ideas of individuals on both sides of the struggle, and as essential as they are, they are equally easy to misinterpret or apply one's own narrative to. This brought many figures, such as General Robert E. Lee, Lieutenant General Thomas 'Stonewall' Jackson, Lieutenant General Early, General and President Davis and other leaders, into an almost saintly position within the minds of Southern people.<sup>10</sup> Many of those individuals embodied the concept of the Southern gentleman, which arose from 'Southern Chivalry', a belief system that portrayed slave-owning upper-class

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<sup>9</sup> Edward H. Bonekemper, *The Myth of the Lost Cause: Why the South Fought the Civil War and Why the North Won* (Simon and Schuster, 2015), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Edward H. Bonekemper, *The Myth of the Lost Cause: Why the South Fought the Civil War and Why the North Won* (Simon and Schuster, 2015), p. 1.

southerners as honourable, obedient gentlemen who would defend their homes and firesides against Northern aggression.

The Southern churches were abundant in vivid imagery, and they were instrumental in putting major Confederate figures in a holy light.<sup>11</sup> Thomas ‘Stonewall’ Jackson, being a particular example, was a deeply religious man who was seen to pray commonly in camp for Confederate victory; thus, he was illustrated through artwork to suggest his abilities were ordained or praised by the powers above, especially since his martyrdom at Chancellorsville.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, schools throughout the Dixie states were required to display photographs of Lee and Davis, and Lee's birthday, January 19th, became a public holiday in the South.<sup>13</sup> Thus providing a contrasting approach by both education and church to provide a moral teaching on one hand, and a Christian righteousness on the other.

This deification was crucial in consolidating the reverence of the Confederate army in Lost Cause mythology and Southern people's thoughts, especially as the Confederacy's largest slave owners are celebrated as Christian heroes. D.S. Freeman was particularly well-known for his writings on General Lee, describing him as a 'noble' commander and a brilliant morale booster with phrases like ‘without quivering of an eyelash’, which was instrumental to the romanticisation of the Confederacy, raising important political and social factors concerning the post-war Confederate ideology in the South.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Charles R. Wilson, ‘The Religion of the Lost Cause: Ritual and Organization of the Southern Civil Religion, 1865-1920’, *The Journal of Southern History*, 46. 2 (1980), p. 223.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth E. Hall, *Stonewall Jackson and Religious Faith in Military Command*, (McFarland, 2005), p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> Wilson, ‘The Religion of the Lost Cause’, p. 224.

<sup>14</sup> Douglas S. Freeman and Stuart W. Smith, ‘Robert E. Lee: Maker of Morale. Lee Birthday Address 19 January 1926’, *Naval War College Review*, 44. 3 (1991), pp. 79.

The myth of African American soldiers in the Army of the Confederate States has become increasingly prevalent since the formation of the Sons of Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy. This component of the myth attempted to cast the Confederacy in a more favourable light with respect to race relations in the South. The concept of a Black soldier in the South was not novel during the Civil War; they had served in smaller battalions during the Revolutionary War and under Jackson at New Orleans in the War of 1812. Though any idea for arming African American units within the Confederacy was met with the response from the Secretary of War that ‘...*the supply of white men was already in excess of arms on hand*’.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, it was remarked by General Howell Cobb that ‘*The moment you resort to Negro soldiers, your white soldiers will be lost to you... You cannot keep the Black and Whites together, and you cannot trust the Negroes by themselves*’.<sup>16</sup> This myth was thoroughly eliminated by publications such as Kevin M. Levin's ‘Searching for Black Confederates’, which emphasises that any Black ‘Confederate’ in an army camp would have been enslaved, not free.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Levin is a historian who focuses on how opinions of the Civil War have altered in America over the previous few decades. In terms of the myth, there is little substantial proof to back up the assertions made by pro-Southern historians or groups; there are no pay stubs or service records; instead, there are images that, without context, could be misinterpreted to illustrate misinformation.

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<sup>15</sup> Hargrove, *Black Union Soldiers in the Civil War* (McFarland, 2003), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Hargrove, *Black Union Soldiers in the Civil War* (McFarland, 2003), p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> James G. Mendez, review of ‘Searching for Black Confederates: The Civil War's Most Persistent Myth’ by Kevin M. Levin, *Civil War history*, 66 (2020).

#### IV. Interpretation of Evidence and Re-evaluation of History in the Post War South



(Figure One: Sergeant AM Chandler of the 44th Mississippi Infantry Regiment and his family slave Silas Chandler.)<sup>18</sup>

On the discussion of Black soldiers in the Confederate Army, the photo above (figure one) is perhaps one of the most famous pieces of ‘evidence’ that pro-southern groups praise. However, this argument lacks the basic context that Silas Chandler (right) was a family slave of the Chandler family in Mississippi. Post-war Confederate factions purposefully brought Black men who had been slaves during the war to their meetings, decorated them with medals and flags, and utilised their presence to counter the ‘emancipation narrative’.<sup>19</sup> This interpretation of evidence has had a direct impact on the role of African Americans in Southern society, and it aims to defend the Confederate cause while downplaying the role of slavery and racial relations during and before the Civil War. Furthermore, there was a systematic effort to erase any

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<sup>18</sup> ‘Sergeant AM Chandler and his family slave Silas Chandler’, Library of Congress, 1861 – 1863, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.40072/>.

<sup>19</sup> Mendez, ‘Searching for Black Confederates’ by Kevin M. Levin, p. 422.

memory of African American military engagement on either side of the Civil War, as evidenced by the erasure of any citations of courage after the war, including the 16 medals of honour awarded.<sup>20</sup>

*Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and normal condition.*<sup>21</sup>

This quotation was given in a speech by Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens in Savannah, Georgia, in 1861. This is a common piece of evidence overlooked by neo-Confederate authors and narrators, as it directly unravels the mythology of the Lost Cause by arguing that the Confederacy seceded for reasons other than slavery, such as tariffs, civil liberties, and freedom from tyranny. While it is not direct military history, it is an important piece of evidence that explains why the Civil War occurred and the broader political considerations that drove it. Demonstrating that slavery was the fundamental cause of the secession problem.

The Reconstruction period (1865-1877) marks the beginning of a major effort to rewrite Civil War history in support of the southern cause or to demonstrate some empathy. As ex-Confederate General Stephen D. Lee commented, ‘...[then] the record of history will contain

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<sup>20</sup> Adam H. Domby, *The False Cause*, p. 124.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander H. Stephen, Savannah, Georgia, March 21, 1861, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/primary-sources/cornerstone-speech>.

*many errors and false indictments against the South which have originated with the north*' when discussing the future portrayal of the conflict, and the issue of southern reputation.<sup>22</sup> This speech convinced the southern people that if they were to overcome the humiliation of defeat, they would need to continue to push back against the narrative of pro-Northern academics and politicians, rewriting it to their advantage. Only a few decades later (1890s), the Sons of Confederate Veterans and other organisations developed a list of approved and unapproved books for use in schools to teach the younger generations about the Confederacy's courageous and honourable cause.<sup>23</sup> This is one of the most important acts since it solidified pro-Confederate ideals in the minds of the youth, which continue to have an impact on southern society today in the form of statues, flags, and other such memorabilia.

Lee further states in a reunion in 1899, *'We do strongly recommend that the influence of this Association be exerted in banishing from the schools any books which teach false lessons, either of fact or sentiment'*.<sup>24</sup> These novels not only praised Confederate commanders like Lee, Jackson, and Davis but also highlighted the impact of Jim Crow segregation laws on society in the 1870s. These writings taught that no amalgamation should take place to improve one's race. Furthermore, there was a widespread belief among the white Southern people that the economy and labour industries would be significantly more lucrative if freemen, who had formerly been slaves, returned to their pre-Civil War status.<sup>25</sup> This narrative was frequently replicated by politicians, veterans, and historians, until younger generations, born decades after

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<sup>22</sup> Fred A. Bailey, 'The Textbooks of the "Lost Cause": Censorship and the Creation of Southern State Histories', *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 75. 3 (Fall 1991), pp. 507-533.

<sup>23</sup> Bailey, 'The Textbooks of the "Lost Cause"', p. 508.

<sup>24</sup> Bailey, 'The Textbooks of the "Lost Cause"', p. 508.

<sup>25</sup> Dan S. Bailey, *When the War Was Over: The Failure of Self-Reconstruction in the South, 1865—1867* (Louisiana State University, 1985), p. 12.

the Civil War, continued to believe and recite the continuous political concern of equality in the South.

The last thirty years have seen a monumental pushback from the academic community to unravel the Lost Cause mythology and educate individuals on the fallacies proposed by the Neo-Confederate communities. The removal of Confederate statues of Lee, Beauregard, Jackson, and other leaders is perhaps one of the greatest steps forward, primarily occurring in the peak of the BLM movements across the United States (2017-2020) as they remain a symbol of a deeply outdated system of belief, which sought to whitewash history by covering over distasteful facts and fanciful memories of both leaders and the Confederate cause.<sup>26</sup> A particular example is the removal of the Jefferson Davis statue in New Orleans, Louisiana, on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, these markers, erected by white Southern Democrats in the late 1800s and early 1900s, sought to disenfranchise African American citizens with appeals to white supremacist voters, with race riots, campaigns of terror and other such terrorist activities, as seen by the 1898 Wilmington Massacre of African Americans.<sup>28</sup>

Concerning Confederate military history, Julian S. Carr, an American philanthropist and prominent white supremacist, gave a speech at the University of North Carolina hailing the Confederate Army as an army of brave heroes, whilst comparing Confederate victories to European battles such as Austerlitz and Waterloo, post-facing it with a claim that any academic

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<sup>26</sup> Adam H. Domby, *The False Cause: Fraud, Fabrication, and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory* (University of Virginia Press, 2020)

<sup>27</sup> Associated Press, 'New Orleans Removes Confederate President Jefferson Davis Statue', *NBC News*, 11 May 2017, <<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/new-orleans-removes-confederate-president-jefferson-davis-statue-n757741>> [accessed 5 March 2026].

<sup>28</sup> Adam H. Domby, *The False Cause*.

source which does not narrate this is ‘unmitigated fraud’.<sup>29</sup> His works and lectures suggest that the war should be recounted from a standpoint of heroism against all odds rather than one of loss, anger, and collapse. However, since his publications and speeches in the late 1800s and early 1900s, his words have long been discredited, and his name has been removed from several memorial institutions. It is well documented that the Confederate War's goal was to preserve and expand the institution of slavery, while its own defeat was caused by zealous and overconfident Napoleonic tactics, a lack of modernised infrastructure suitable for grand tactician warfare, and a general incompetence in self-government. Additionally, the rewriting of Confederate military history was a deliberate attempt to establish its leaders as heroes in the eyes of future generations, further imprinting the legacy of the southern chivalric gentlemanly values of the antebellum period.

## V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the research into the military aspects of the Lost Cause is pivotal for understanding the broader social and political issues within the post-war United States, as its system of belief held a firm grasp on the Southern states and defined the nation’s racial policies and attitudes. It also demonstrates the dangers of the wilful misinterpretation of evidence to justify a particular political agenda, as seen in post-war writings or statements. This mythology is primarily responsible for the establishment of the Jim Crow Laws, the reign of white supremacy throughout the southern states and the current issues surrounding Confederate flags, institutional racism throughout the South and the Confederate statues debate, despite the complete dismantling of the myth by academic historians.

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<sup>29</sup> Adam H. Domby, *The False Cause*, p. 47.

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# **Damnation of the Masses for the Pleasure of the Few: The Class Divide and Working-Class Corpse in Victorian England**

Ty Robins

*Ty Robins is a third-year History student, with a love of medical and death history. Their particular academic interests lie in the Gothic genre; 19<sup>th</sup> century death, burial, and mourning culture; and the intersections between Early Modern folklore and medicine, with a particular focus on folkloric vampirism. They hope to further their research into these areas as they progress into their dissertation and postgraduate study. This paper was written for HI306G: History of the Body.*

## **Introduction**

The Victorian period is well known for both its extreme class divide, and its fixation with death. While the upper classes are often depicted as perfect members of the ‘Cult of Mourning’, parading their dead in extravagant processions, the poor are often portrayed as the opposite: having the ‘ultimate degradation’ of a lonely pauper burial.<sup>1</sup> While this representation is not entirely true of the period (the working class certainly did celebrate their dead), the class divide between the treatment of the corpse in these examples is incredibly telling of Victorian society’s view of the poor. This morbid fascination and emphasis on what made a ‘good funeral’ by the upper classes created a growing funeral industry that commodified and capitalised on the corpse. 19<sup>th</sup> century laws around the corpse and burial also only seemed to negatively affect the poor, sending their bodies to dissection tables and cramped, debt-inducing burial grounds. As well as this, the upper classes almost fetishised the working-class corpse, using horrific illness as a romanticised beauty standard, and reports of gruesome murder as a form of entertainment.

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<sup>1</sup> Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914*, (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 7.

## **The Anatomy Act, 1832, and Institutions of Death**

As a lust for medical advancement and knowledge grew in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, so did the need for corpses for dissection. From 1540, the law only allowed for six bodies to be donated for dissection a year, sourced from hanged criminals deemed the most unworthy of a respectable burial.<sup>2</sup> Because of the lack of availability of bodies, many turned to committing ‘great and grievous Crimes’ such as stealing bodies from their graves, ‘and lately Murder, for the single Object of selling for such Purposes the Bodies of the Persons so murdered’.<sup>3</sup> There were many debates about how to counter this epidemic of resurrectionists, as these grave robbers were known, and ‘burkers’,<sup>4</sup> in the 1820s. Some suggested that all prisoners’ bodies should be used, rather than dissection being a punishment for the ‘worst’ crimes, and others suggested the use of corpses from institutions such as workhouses and hospitals.<sup>5</sup> Changing attitudes towards the poor eventually led to An Act for regulating Schools of Anatomy (the Anatomy Act) being passed in 1832. This act aimed to quell the numbers of bodies being illegally exhumed and sold by allowing a legal supply of bodies to be donated from the dying, or from institutions where the corpse had not been claimed within 48 hours of death. In theory, this Act was perfect. Supposedly, it aimed to protect the poor, who were more likely to be exhumed by resurrectionists, as the rich could afford ways to protect their dead. However, in reality, it made the poor more vulnerable to having their bodies sent for dissection. Under the

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<sup>2</sup> Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, (London: Phoenix Press, 2001), p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> British Parliament, *An Act for regulating Schools of Anatomy* (London: British Parliament, 1832), section I.

<sup>4</sup> Named after Burke and Hare, prolific Edinburgh resurrectionists who resorted to murder to sell bodies.

<sup>5</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, p. 163.

Act, bodies for dissection would no longer be sourced from criminals, but largely from hospitals and workhouses.

In the Victorian era, hospitals were well-known to be death traps, where sick or injured patients were highly likely to emerge sicker than when they had entered.<sup>6</sup> The upper classes had the luxury of staying in their homes to be treated by expensive private physicians. The working class however, had only the local apothecary or medical superstition (such as gallows superstitions, wherein body parts of a hanged criminal were believed to have curative powers) as affordable alternatives to the hospital.<sup>7</sup> When they did go to hospital, medical practitioners saw the poor in charitable institutions as ‘experimental material’ for training medics, and cared little about whether poor patients lived or died, though they did well to hide this from the public.<sup>8</sup> Arguably, the deaths of these patients benefitted the surgeons more than it tarnished their reputations. Once the Anatomy Act was passed, the poor who died in hospitals were likely to have their bodies used for dissection, once again being objectified as experimental material. As many poor families would have had to travel to the hospital to claim the bodies of their loved ones, requiring time to be taken away from work, the 48-hour time limit on claiming bodies was particularly hard on them. Many working-class people worked six days a week, having only Sunday away from their workplace. This meant that collecting loved ones who died during the work week was near impossible for some. With no one there to claim the body or argue against the corpse’s dissection, the hospital was free to send the corpse to anatomists.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Roberta M. Harding, ‘Rubbing the Rabbit’s Foot: Gallows Superstitions and Public Healthcare in England During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’, (Law Faculty Publication, University of Kentucky, 2016), p. 361.

<sup>8</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121-128.

Additionally, even if family members were able to collect the body in person, they may still have been labelled as unclaimed if the family were unable to pay for their funeral expenses.

In the workhouse, this was even worse. While they had existed before this period, the New Poor Law of 1834 transformed the workhouse into even more of an undesirable environment. The New Poor Law was based around the idea of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor: those who wished to work hard, and those who did not.<sup>10</sup> The new workhouses were designed to be actively unpleasant environments to repel those who were undeserving of financial aid. Those who accepted relief from the workhouses were deemed as ‘lacking the moral determination to survive outside it.’<sup>11</sup> Those in workhouses had very little freedom, particularly over their bodies, and, upon death, had very little protection from being sent to the dissection table. There was no legal obligation for overseers to inform the deceased’s loved ones of their death, and therefore the 48-hour allowance for claiming bodies could be nullified through lack of communication.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, as many of the working poor were unable to write, there was no way for many of them to formally convey their lack of consent to dissection.<sup>13</sup> This meant that it was ultimately the overseers of the workhouse who determined whether a corpse would be sent to anatomists. This was always beneficial for them to do, as they could sell the body to medical schools to pay for the pauper’s funeral, and likely still make a profit. This commodification of the working-class corpse through these institutions reflects the lack of respect Victorian society had for the poor, particularly those in the workhouse who were deemed to be undeserving of basic liberties.

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<sup>10</sup> M.A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929: the history of an English social institution*, (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, p. 207.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

## The Common Grave

The Victorian era also saw the rise of commercial cemeteries, also known as joint-stock cemeteries. The first of these were established in the 1820s, though it was not until Victoria's reign that they became more widespread.<sup>14</sup> The aim of these cemeteries was to provide more sanitary graves than those of churchyards, with a main aspect of this being that only one body would be buried in each grave. This was not what happened in practice, however. As commercial cemeteries were a business, and often confined to a set amount of space, they aimed to capitalise on having as many bodies as possible within their walls. While the rich could afford to buy large private plots, many of the poor had no option but a 'common' or 'public' grave, often shared with strangers rather than family.<sup>15</sup> These common graves held both paupers and the working class, and required coffins to be flimsy and cheap so they would degrade faster, freeing up space for a new cycle of burials.<sup>16</sup> These graves, while the cheapest option, were by no means affordable to the poor. While the average labourers' wage was around £1 a week, a burial in a common grave in London could cost between £15s and £210s.<sup>17</sup> This means that after paying for rent and food, working class people would have to save their wages for months to simply afford a grave, without any of the other funeral expenses. This system was incredibly exploitative of the poor and punished them for lacking the funds for private burials.

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<sup>14</sup> Julie Rugg, 'Constructing the Grave: competing burial ideals in nineteenth-century England', *Social History*, 38.3 (2013), p. 336.

<sup>15</sup> Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914*, p. 134.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>17</sup> Molly G. Decker, 'The Anatomy of Inequality: Medicine, Mourning, and Socioeconomic Status in Victorian England' (unpublished master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 2024), p. 27.

In the highly likely case of a working-class family being unable to pay for their funeral and burial expenses, the cost would fall on the parish they resided in. By law, these parishes could appropriate the money or property of the deceased to cover funeral expenses, potentially leaving their families in even worse financial positions.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the treatment of the corpses by the parish would not be kind. Those in workhouses could often witness the overcrowding of graves, as it was common practice for multiple paupers to be stuffed into cramped plots at one time, and their service read over them as one rather than individually.<sup>19</sup> Parish burials had strict sets of rules for what could and could not be performed and used. Families were not only denied agency in choosing coffins, but their ability to inscribe coffins with any sense of the deceased's identity was also denied, and some burial authorities even exchanged coffins and tin name plates provided by families for flimsy wood boxes and paper name plates.<sup>20</sup> This removal of identity from the pauper is incredibly dehumanising, and reflects upper-class beliefs about the poor: that they were subhuman and that their lives, and deaths, were of no importance.

Those who had to resort to pauper burials also faced a great deal of disgust and judgement from their working-class peers. The idea of working-class 'respectability', by which the poor were deemed more moral or respectable by their ability to save money for expenses such as funerals, did cause some working-class people to look down upon those who were incapable of such spending.<sup>21</sup> However, the poor approached this in a very different way to many of the upper classes: through the use of charity. Some working-class communities would

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<sup>18</sup> James Brooke Little, *Law of Burial: including All the Burial Acts as Modified or Affected by Local Government (England & Wales) Act, 1894; All the Church Building New Parish and Poor Law Acts Relating to the Subject*, (Shaw & Sons., 1894), p. 361.

<sup>19</sup> Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929*, p. 220.

<sup>20</sup> Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914*, p. 148.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

get together when a death took place, pooling their wealth to pay for funeral costs. This was often known as a burial club or burial society, and was used particularly when a child died.<sup>22</sup> In some of these societies, members would contribute money to buy a set of mourning clothes, which could be borrowed when one of them suffered a loss.<sup>23</sup> Decorations were also loaned out to the poor. In the 1890s, funerary flowers came back into fashion, and in areas such as the Midlands, florists would create mock-flowers, which could be loaned, for a period, to the poor for 10% of their price.<sup>24</sup> This sense of community and camaraderie is what set the working-class funeral and treatment of the deceased apart from that of the upper classes. While there was a judgement passed over those who could not fit the idea of respectability, there were also many efforts to avoid this shame through community.

Beyond the commercial cemetery, there was another who aimed to exploit the working-class corpse: the undertaker. Undertakers were very well known to be exploitative in this period, even being likened to vampires by some.<sup>25</sup> They were the pinnacle of the burgeoning Victorian funerary industry, adding another expense to the process of caring for the deceased where there previously had been none. Undertakers were well-known to exaggerate what was needed for funerals to exploit more money from those overwhelmed in their grief and the burial process, who put their trust in the undertaker knowing what was best.<sup>26</sup> *Cassell's Household Guide*, a popular household manual in the 1870s, even warns about certain 'men who are mere agents, and only call themselves undertakers, and who, when they chance to obtain an order

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<sup>22</sup> Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929*, p. 220.

<sup>23</sup> Decker, 'The Anatomy of Inequality', p. 32.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth T. Hurren, 'Transforming Sorrow into a Thousand Flowers': Refashioning a Midlands' Celebration of Death from the 1890s', *Midland History*, 47.3 (2022), p. 334.

<sup>25</sup> Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Britain, 1870-1914*, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Jemma M. Kloss, 'Memento Mori: Victorian Death Culture Through Murder, Morbidity, and Mourning' (unpublished honours project, Macalester College, 2019), p. 73.

for a funeral, transmit it to a regular undertaker for execution.’<sup>27</sup> Undertakers were also in the prime position to take on the role of resurrectionists: unlawfully supplying bodies in their care to anatomy schools even after the Anatomy Act, ignoring the provisions it put in place.<sup>28</sup> While this impacted all classes, the economically exploitative nature of many Victorian undertakers impacted the poor the most. In 1883, undertaker William Camden was discovered to have been keeping the bodies of eleven stillborn infants, packed tightly into three coffins, in his business for several months.<sup>29</sup> The corpses had been kept there, according to Camden, so he could save money on costs by burying them collectively.<sup>30</sup> This shows a further commodification of corpses caused by financial incentives. In doing such an act to save money, the personhood of the deceased was stripped in a way that did not happen to those who could pay extra fees. This capitalisation of the funeral industry by the wealthy only served to further exploit the working-class dead. Even in death, the working class and their families were unable to escape this exploitation, being plunged into debt for wanting more than an anonymous burial pit for their loved ones.

### **The Criminal Class**

Throughout history, criminals have been treated as a separate social class to ‘respectable’ society; this was very evident in the Victorian era. While the Anatomy Act greatly impacted the working class, it actually benefitted criminals, to an extent. The Act put a stop to the practice of sending the hanged bodies of murderers to the dissection table, so, for the first time in

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<sup>27</sup> Petter and Galpin Cassell, *Cassell’s Household Guide: Being a Complete Encyclopaedia of Domestic and Social Economy*, vol.iii-iv (London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1869-1871), p. 292.

<sup>28</sup> Helen MacDonald, ‘Procuring Corpses: The English Anatomy Inspectorate, 1842 to 1858’, *Medical History*, 53.3 (2009), p. 392.

<sup>29</sup> Decker, ‘The Anatomy of Inequality’, pp. 20-21.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

centuries, those sentenced to hang no longer had to fear the mutilation of their bodies as further punishment. This is very in-keeping with the prison reform at the time, as punishments for criminals became less about bodily torture, and more about spiritual and mental punishment and reform.<sup>31</sup> This shift from dissection being a punishment for the most heinous crimes, to being performed on the bodies of the working class is also interesting. As Victorian society began to favour more ideas of reform, both for criminals and the poor, criminals began to be represented in more sympathetic and favourable lights. This can be seen in newspaper reports of crimes in the Victorian period. In the 1880s, there was a considerable increase in the reporting of crime in British newspapers, despite the fact that homicide rates were half of what they had been decades before.<sup>32</sup> Crimes were not only reported more frequently, but in greater detail. The crime scenes and bodies of – usually working class – victims were described in gruesome detail, greatly disrespecting the victims and their families by turning them into an object to be gawked at. These same reports, and the rising genre of crime and detective fiction, would often humanise the murderer while doing this. This can be seen in reports of the Jack the Ripper serial killer, where his victims – who were all working-class prostitutes – were all described by the state of their bodies, rather than as individuals.<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, the public obsessed over the Ripper, some even making light of his crimes by playing pranks on the police investigating the case.<sup>34</sup> This dehumanisation of the corpses of working-class victims of crime shows how little they were respected, even in cases that were so widely covered.

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<sup>31</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison System*, trans. By Alan Sheridan (Vintage Books, 1979), p.17.

<sup>32</sup> Kloss, 'Memento Mori', p. 38.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Of course, the rich were not the only audience of sensationalised crime. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, the serial literature known as ‘penny bloods’ were incredibly popular among the literate poor.<sup>35</sup> This genre was largely focused on themes of crime, violence, and other gothic themes, and was incredibly looked down on by the middle class as a result. However, a key aspect of these stories was that they were fictionalised accounts of working-class fears, intended to alleviate anxieties around these topics. Gasperini discusses texts such as *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, and *Varney the Vampyre* as examples of portrayals of the post-Anatomy Act surgeon and the corpse in this sense. While the working class did participate in this fictionalisation of contemporary issues, such as the Anatomy Act and high crime rates, they were likely doing so as a coping mechanism in the face of the very real possibility of becoming victims to these events. Meanwhile, the upper-class consumption of sensationalised crime media happened from the comfort of their homes, at a considerable distance and safety from these cases.

### **The Beautiful Dead**

The romanticisation of the working-class corpse did not stop at crime stories. As diseases such as tuberculosis were rife among the poor – largely due to overcrowding and poor air quality, particularly in cities – the upper classes idealised their sickness. The dying body of the tuberculosis patient was seen as a romantic ideal by the upper classes, as the retention of one’s mind as the body wasted away was seen as the ideal Christian ‘good death’.<sup>36</sup> The disease was even perceived as a blessing from God by some, as it left time for ‘spiritual reflection and

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<sup>35</sup> Anna Gasperini, *Nineteenth Century Popular Fiction, Medicine and Anatomy: The Victorian Penny Blood and the 1832 Anatomy Act*, (Palgrave Macmillan: 2019), p. ix.

<sup>36</sup> Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, (Oxford Academic, 2011), p. 40.

improvement'.<sup>37</sup> Many artists and poets of this era, including Lord Byron and Edgar Allen Poe, even went as far as to glorify death by tuberculosis and wish they would experience it themselves.<sup>38</sup> This also led to the appearance of a tuberculosis patient becoming a beauty standard among wealthy Victorians, further exploiting working-class deaths for social gain. In reality, these diseases that the upper classes idolised were horrific, causing slow, painful deaths that many working-class sufferers were forced to work through. While the poor died of these diseases at an incredibly high rate, the upper classes dressed up as them for notoriety and beauty.

### Conclusion

Throughout the Victorian period, working-class corpses were exploited for money, ease, and entertainment by the fast-growing funeral industry, many acts of parliament, and the upper classes. Under the Anatomy Act, the poor were, without their consent, sentenced to the dissection table at a high rate, something that had been reserved in previous centuries for only the worst criminals. Under the New Poor Laws and Burial Acts, the poor had the choice of going into debt with the cost of 'respectable' burials and funerals, or having their loved ones' bodies stuffed carelessly into cramped burial plots with strangers. Furthermore, the upper classes treated their deaths as beauty trends and entertaining stories. This treatment of the working-class corpse by the upper classes is very telling of the Victorian class divide. In these practices, it is shown how the upper classes seemed to think of the poor: that they were, in some ways, worse than criminals, and their lack of money meant that they deserved no respect or humanity even in death.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

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## **To what extent were children in the Carlisle Indian School able to express agency?**

Sophie Walker

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“Kill the Indian, save the man” was the genocidal rhetoric behind Richard Pratt’s Carlisle Indian School. In hopes of achieving this, the school sought to strip the children enrolled of any agency. Running from 1879 to 1918, Carlisle was the first federally funded off-reservation boarding school for Native American children. Pratt, the founder, aimed to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-American culture by removing any cultural ties from the children’s lives. Despite differentiation between schools, Carlisle was the model that inspired hundreds of others. Although manifested differently in each community, ‘agency’ can broadly be defined as the ability to make decisions and act of one’s own accord.<sup>1</sup> Historians disagree about how much agency was available to students. Adams emphasizes the institutional power of Carlisle, while Enoch and Fear-Segal highlight the power of small-scale resistance. In order to examine the extent to which the children of the Carlisle Indian School were able to express this agency, first, the restrictions on said agency must be discussed. Children were, however, able to express agency both within the rules of the school and by resisting them. This resistance manifested in three main categories; passive resistance and physical resistance were acts expressed externally, while ideological resistance encompassed thoughts and decisions made.

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<sup>1</sup> Sherry B. Ortner, ‘Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal’, *American Anthropologist*, 97.1 (1995), 173–93, p. 186.

Although each type of resistance is unique, when used in conjunction the children of the Carlisle Indian School were able to express agency to some degree.

Boarding schools for Native American children were the government's method of 'completely restructure[ing] Indigenous minds and bodies'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly to a 'total institution', which Erving Goffman defines as a closed social system cut off from wider society, this endeavour required stripping children of all agency by implementing rules and restrictions on almost every aspect of their life.<sup>3</sup> A primary way of enforcing this was through punishment. Whether through corporal punishment, or psychological punishment, such as cutting grass with scissors or wearing a sign saying 'I ran away', children were conditioned to not show any agency.<sup>4</sup> A less discussed but arguably more impactful method of restricting agency was surveillance. Although some girls' dormitories had curtains around the beds, the majority of schools offered no privacy for the children. They were constantly watched. Even as a teacher, Zitkala-Ša notes in her memoir how she was watched when moving around the school, showing how ingrained the surveillance of Native Americans was at Carlisle, however this recollection may be slightly impacted by hindsight.<sup>5</sup> Fear-Segal describes this surveillance as 'intrinsic' to Carlisle's genocidal mission.<sup>6</sup> Despite this culture, it was impossible for the children to be watched all of the time. Here, the idea of the 'Panopticon' becomes especially useful. A prison where each inmate may be watched at any time but is unaware when, results in the subject always acting as if they are being watched. The surveillance is therefore 'permanent in its

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<sup>2</sup> David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928* (University Press of Kansas, 1995), p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Anchor Books, 1961).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 131; 133-4.

<sup>5</sup> Zitkala-Ša, *American Indian Stories* (Hayworth Publishing House, 1921).

<sup>6</sup> Jacqueline Fear-Segal, 'Man on the Bandstand: Surveillance, Concealment, and Resistance', *American Indian Quarterly*, 28.1/2 (2004), pp. 159–82 (p. 208).

effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action'.<sup>7</sup> This idea was especially effective when implemented in the Carlisle Indian School.

Surveillance at Carlisle was deliberately implemented through Pratt's 'system of propaganda'. One of his student newspapers, the *Indian Helper*, housed his manifestation of the 'Panopticon'. The 'big brother' like 'Man-on-the-bandstand' was the all-seeing figure responsible for editing the *Indian Helper*. For this system to be effective, Jeremy Bentham notes that the power should be both visible and unverifiable.<sup>8</sup> Both of which are true of the 'Man-on-the-bandstand'.<sup>9</sup> Having both a literary presence and a physical presence, with the bandstand at the centre of the school, Pratt ensures 'permanent visibility' and therefore an unforgettable presence.<sup>10</sup> The 'Man-on-the-bandstand' is also uncertifiable as his identity was a secret to the students, 'automating and deindividualizing the power'.<sup>11</sup> Although likely not a single person, the hidden identity made it unverifiable whether he was watching.

Screening children's letters further shows Carlisle's surveillance as a method of limiting agency. In 1876 Pratt wrote that reading children's letters would be 'at war with all [his] convictions' about maintaining a good relationship with the children's parents.<sup>12</sup> However, much later by 1914 it is widely understood that all children who were underage had their incoming and outgoing letters screened by staff.<sup>13</sup> This is likely where the 'Man-on-the-

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<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (Vintage Books, 1995; first publ. 1975), p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *Panopticon; or, The Inspection-House* (T. Payne, 1791).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Jessica Enoch, 'Resisting the Script of Indian Education: Zitkala-Ša and the Carlisle Indian School', *College English*, 65.2 (2002), pp. 117–41 (p. 121).

<sup>11</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Henry Pratt, 'Pratt Won't Screen Students' Letters Home' (19 December 1876), Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>13</sup> *Complaint of Mamie Vilcan* (2 November 1913–2 January 1914), Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, PA.

bandstand’ got his information. If children were aware that all their communications were monitored it would remove a significant expression of agency by increasing their awareness of the surveillance. In 1897 Robert Hamilton, a former Carlisle student, wrote asking if letters coming into the school were screened.<sup>14</sup> If students were unaware of the surveillance it is dramatically less effective at restricting agency as ‘visibility’ was a key aspect. Letter surveying restricted children's agency by limiting their access to information and ability to communicate. However, as the surveillance was not visible to the children it reduced the strategy’s effectiveness, restricting children’s expression of agency to a lesser effect. Despite this, the secrecy of letter screening likely added a layer of mystery to how the ‘Man-on-the-Bandstand’ got his information, and therefore made him more effective at surveillance, and in turn stripping the children of agency. Overall, letter screening did restrict children's expression of agency, but in a slightly different way from the ‘Man-on-the-bandstand’.

Carlisle’s financial system further restricted agency. Economic power is one of the most tangible ways to express agency. Upon first glance, children’s ability to hold savings accounts with the school in their own names would allow them to make and act upon decisions, and therefore express agency. However, in reality it functioned as another method of surveillance. According to Pratt, ‘every cent expended by the students should be under the direction and approval of the school authorities’.<sup>15</sup> Runaway children were also stripped of any money in their account.<sup>16</sup> Even letters opened in staff offices which include funds are taken straight to

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<sup>14</sup> *Robert Hamilton Student File* (1889), Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, PA, available at Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center; *Inquiry into the Authority of Pratt to Intercept Letters* (28 July 1897), Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, PA.

<sup>15</sup> *Rules Governing the Management of Students’ Money* (9 April–24 May 1913), Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, PA, available at Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center.

<sup>16</sup> *Joseph Schanandore Requests Pratt to Remit Son’s Bank Account to Him* (6 April–10 June 1891), Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, PA; *Pratt Responds to Request for William Archiquette’s Money* (20 December 1895–20 January 1896), Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, PA.

the school banker by a member of staff to prevent any money being ‘pocketed’ by students.<sup>17</sup> This strict control and monitoring removed any agency given by the money the children had earned, primarily through farm or housekeeping work. Although functioning as a method of surveillance, this was not the only motivation for the formation of this scheme. Pratt states that although paying children for their labour seems expensive, they are only permitted to spend such money on things that the school would have had to provide for them anyway.<sup>18</sup> Although the school’s intention was economic, restriction of student finances worked to restrict the agency of children.

Despite all of these restrictions, there were some avenues for children to show agency which were permitted by the school. One example of this is when students took an interest in white girls’ fashion and were then permitted to customize their uniforms with lace and ruffles. This reportedly made them more ‘willing and cheerful’.<sup>19</sup> Here the children were granted a small amount of freedom to show agency over their appearance. This was allowed only because it was a mutually beneficial agreement. The girls got some freedom while the school got them to be ‘willing’ to act more Western. This was not the case when Lakota girls plucked their eyebrows and braided their hair in a traditional style which was expressly forbidden.<sup>20</sup> There is also evidence of children writing to school authorities to ask for name changes, however these were likely unsuccessful.<sup>21</sup> These examples show that although there was a small amount of freedom given to children as they were able to ask for change, it was often ignored if it did not align with the school's mission, which shows that agency was barely permitted.

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<sup>17</sup> *Complaint of Mamie Vilcan* (1913–14).

<sup>18</sup> *Rules Governing the Management of Students’ Money* (1913).

<sup>19</sup> Cernelita S. Ryan, *The Carlisle Indian Industrial School* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Georgetown University, 1962).

<sup>20</sup> Adams, *Education for Extinction*, p. 258.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Henry Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom: An Autobiography* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), p. 293.

For children to express any real agency, they would need to resist the laws of the school. Scott defines ‘resistance’ clearly as acts from a subordinate class that are intended to mitigate or deny claims made by the more powerful class,<sup>22</sup> whereas Sherry defines resistance as more ambiguous.<sup>23</sup> For our purposes, ‘resistance’ will span physical acts, passive acts, and internal intentions. Physical resistance occurred regardless of the punishments and surveillance of the institution. One example of this happened shortly after Carlisle welcomed its first students. Despite attempts to keep the process a secret, when the students learnt their hair would be cut, a Sioux boy cut his own hair in the centre of the school. This prompted chaos and ‘eerie wailing’ from the rest of the children.<sup>24</sup> Such a dramatic act demonstrated his agency for the whole school to see. Although his hair would have been cut anyway, cutting it of his own accord changed the event from a cultural loss to an act of defiance. Although it was a single act from an individual, it shows how children were able to express a large extent of agency in some instances.

Running away was the most distinct and impactful method of expressing agency. This was prevalent at almost all boarding schools including Carlisle, showing that attempts to limit Indigenous agency were widespread. In their records, runaways were noted as simply ‘missing’. Some of these children had been ‘missing’ for almost two years. A quarterly report from 1886 shows us how common this was, with seventeen percent of children marked as ‘missing’.<sup>25</sup> Running away was attractive as it completely freed children from all the restrictions placed upon them at Carlisle. Only by running away from Carlisle could children

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<sup>22</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (Yale University Press, 1985), p. 290.

<sup>23</sup> Ortner, ‘Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal’, p. 175.

<sup>24</sup> Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom*, p. 232.

<sup>25</sup> *Discharged Register of Pupils, 1890–1900*, Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, PA.

fully access agency. This is further evidence of the very small extent of agency available at Carlisle. The act of running away is an expression of agency in itself, but it is also the gateway to expressing agency freely. Therefore, the extent of agency expressed and gained by running away is very large. There is also much to be seen about the importance of agency to the children through this act. With little to no access to money, no adult supervision, and likely no directions home, running away was extremely dangerous. Although this lack of support limited the children's agency outside of Carlisle, they were able to express significantly more agency than inside Carlisle. For children to risk this they must have valued agency extremely highly. Although motivation such as homesickness or cultural ties may have been the prominent motivations, running away was ultimately indicative of how highly children valued the ability to express agency within an institution designed to suppress it. Overall, running away was the most prevalent and effective expression of agency available to the children of the Carlisle Indian School.

Passive resistance subtly disrupted and destabilised Carlisle's routines. Adams regards passive resistance as the 'most pervasive' kind but also acknowledges how difficult it is to document.<sup>26</sup> This includes any attempts to undermine the school authority without taking explicit actions. Some examples include not engaging in competitive sports, non-responsiveness, and completing school work slowly.<sup>27</sup> Although small, these actions were effective as it is usually the students who dictate classroom pace.<sup>28</sup> There are also cases of children being discharged from the school for being 'not bright' and 'not strong enough'.<sup>29</sup> It is possible that these dismissals were a result of intentional passive resistance and therefore are

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<sup>26</sup> Adams, *Education for Extinction*, p. 257.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>29</sup> *Quarterly School Report* (31 March 1886), Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, PA.

evidence of expressions of agency. However, without an understanding of the children's intentions it is difficult to differentiate between resistance or apathy as the reasons behind these actions. When discussing resistance, Sherry notes that actions cannot always be clearly labelled. Meanings change for both actors and analysts.<sup>30</sup> Even the children at the time may not have been completely aware of their intentions. Adams writes about how the stress from 'cultural discontinuity' can unconsciously make children act to remove this discontinuity, which often results in passive or even physical resistance.<sup>31</sup> Whether intentional, unintentional, or unconsciously intentional, these acts of passive resistance had the effect of preventing authority from limiting their agency. On the whole passive resistance was more common than any other type. It implemented small amounts of autonomy rather than challenging policy directly and therefore its impact is less visible than physical resistance. Despite this, its cumulative effect undermined Carlisle's restrictions.

If physical resistance challenged Carlisle's rules and passive resistance challenged its routines, ideological resistance challenged its core mission. 'Kill the Indian, save the man' referred to restructuring the mental aspects and therefore 'saving' the physical body. 'An inordinate amount of time was spent on moral training'.<sup>32</sup> This placed emphasis on internal ideologies which was another main aspect of resistance. Although there is difficulty finding sources reflecting these internal thoughts, Scott notes how it is possible to learn how much communities accept the social order through their proverbs, legends, and rituals.<sup>33</sup> When applying this to Carlisle, looking at examples of stories, language, and play helps us understand their internal ideologies. Although surveillance was perpetually prevalent, many children recall

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<sup>30</sup> Ortner, 'Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal', p. 175.

<sup>31</sup> Adams, *Education for Extinction*, p. 525.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>33</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, p. 290.

speaking native languages, sharing legends and stories, and playing imaginative games set in native communities.<sup>34</sup> The older students were aware of Carlisle's mission and did these acts intentionally to keep them alive.<sup>35</sup> These children intentionally resisted the ideologies pushed by the school. A Navajo student once admitted in a poem 'maybe you think I believe you, that thing you say, but always my thoughts stay with me, my own way'.<sup>36</sup> This intention behind the resistance is what makes it an expression of agency as acts of resistance live in a state of 'constant dialogue' with internal consciousness.<sup>37</sup> Although less visible than physical or passive resistance, ideological resistance opposed the school's core. Carlisle could restrain their bodies but not their minds. By resisting 'civilisation' and keeping a sense of identity, the children were able to exercise a meaningful form of agency, even if it was not outwardly expressed.

Ultimately, although the Carlisle Indian School aimed to eliminate agency through punishment, surveillance, and economic control, children were still able to express agency to some extent. A small amount of agency was permitted by the school, however only when it served the school's mission. More significantly, children expressed agency through resistance. Physical resistance was the most direct way of opposing Carlisle's rules, passive resistance was most common and opposed its routines, and most fundamental was ideological resistance opposing Carlisle's core mission. These types of resistance varied in visibility and risk, but when implemented together showed that Carlisle was not able to completely strip its children of agency. The extent of agency expressed was limited greatly by the institution but definitely

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>37</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, p. 238.

not negligible. This struggle for agency reveals much about both methods of control and the significance and variety of resistance in the fight for agency.

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## **Picturing the Great War: How effective was Russian visual propaganda as a mobilising tool between 1914-1917?**

Kaitlyn O' Donnell

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The First World War, due to its unprecedented scale and nature, required the mobilisation of entire populations, not just those recruited to the armed forces.<sup>1</sup> Propaganda played an important role in aiding mass mobilisation across all warring nations. However, Russian visual propaganda and its effectiveness between 1914-1917 has been obscured from much of the existing historiographical research. Hubertus Jahn suggests that visual propaganda cannot be viewed as representative of 'popular patriotism' and that the Russian population quickly lost interest in the war.<sup>2</sup> Yet, Melissa Stockdale has argued that the Russian population was largely mobilised in support of the war effort, as evidenced by the patriotism felt among Russian people in response to various mobilising techniques, including propaganda.<sup>3</sup> By assessing Russian cultural mobilisation, press photography, art, and press censorship enforcement between 1914-1917 this essay will argue that Russian visual propaganda was inconsistent and an increasingly ineffective mobilising tool as the war went on. Additional analysis of the

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<sup>1</sup> 'Voices of the First World War: A Total War', Imperial War Museums, n.d. The First World War - A Total War | Imperial War Museums [accessed: 18 November 2025].

<sup>2</sup> Hubertus F. Jahn, *Patriotic Culture in Russia During World War One* (Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 3; 171.

<sup>3</sup> Melissa K. Stockdale, *Mobilizing the Russian Nation: Patriotism and Citizenship in the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 14.

magazine *Letopis' voiny* will aim to support this view by highlighting the visual changes which can be identified within the December 1914 and December 1916 issues.<sup>4</sup>

Visual propaganda was particularly popular during the First World War due to the rise of print culture towards the end of the previous century.<sup>5</sup> Art became more accessible across Russia in the periodical press and through posters and postcards, rather than exclusively in exhibitions.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, magazines rose in popularity due to the photographs they contained.<sup>7</sup> *Letopis' voiny* was one of many illustrated periodicals in circulation during the war years. Its content was devoted entirely to the war effort and Major General Dmitrii Dubenskii was the editor.<sup>8</sup> Christopher Stolarski has described *Letopis' voiny 1914 goda* as being 'exquisitely produced' and presenting 'an official, government-approved chronical of the war'.<sup>9</sup> Though its high price point indicates a middle- and upper-class readership, there is no record of its reception among the public.<sup>10</sup>

## Wartime Culture

Due to the lack of existing research specific to Russian visual propaganda, broader cultural studies must be utilised when assessing its effectiveness. By analysing 'patriotic culture',

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<sup>4</sup> *Letopis' voiny*, Issue 16 (December 6, 1914), pp. 249-264; Issue 17 (December 13, 1914), pp. 266-280; Issue 18 (December 20, 1914), pp. 281-296; Issue 19 (December 27, 1914), pp. 298-312; Issue 120 (December 3, 1916), pp. 1913-1928; Issue 121 (December 10, 1916), pp. 1929-1943; Issue 122 (December 17, 1916), pp. 1945-1959; Issue 123 (December 24, 1916) pp. 1961-1976.

<sup>5</sup> Allison Rudnick, 'Humor and Horror: Printed Propaganda during World War I', The Met Museum, 28 December 2017 Humor and Horror: Printed Propaganda during World War I - The Metropolitan Museum of Art [accessed: 20 November 2025].

<sup>6</sup> Jahn, *Patriotic Culture*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Stolarski, 'Press Photography in Russia's Great War and Revolution', in *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914-22, Book 1: Popular Culture, the Arts, and Institutions*, ed. by Murray Frame, Boris Kolonitskii, Steven G. Marks, and Melissa K. Stockdale (Slavica Publishers, 2014), pp. 139-164 (p. 139).

<sup>8</sup> Irina Zhdanova, 'Press/Journalism (Russian Empire)', 1914-1918 Online: International Encyclopaedia of the First World War, 12 July 2017 Press/Journalism (Russian Empire) [accessed: 20 November 2025].

<sup>9</sup> Stolarski, 'Press Photography', p. 142.

<sup>10</sup> For price see: Stolarski, 'Press Photography', p. 143.

particularly within the Russian visual arts during the First World War, Hubertus F. Jahn concludes that a lack of government control over cultural output allowed visual culture to satisfy public desire for escapism as early as Spring 1915.<sup>11</sup> This exposes a clear failure on the part of the Russian government to recognise the importance of cultural mobilisation and take greater control of cultural expression in order to maintain public support for the war effort. Evidently without relevant government enforcement, independent profits prevailed over production of propagandist content and as a result, cultural mobilisation inevitably went into decline.

Richard Stites goes further, exposing the issue of differing access to, engagement with, and interpretation of the arts among social class groups as impacting the effectiveness of cultural mobilisation. Moreover, he suggests that support for the war ‘though varying among the classes - sharply declined after the defeats of 1915’.<sup>12</sup> By tailoring war themed content to specific audiences, it is easy to see how mobilisation could become inconsistent across Russian society. Stites rightly acknowledges the fact that Russians from the lower classes suffered far more emotionally and economically as a result of the war than the intelligentsia.<sup>13</sup> With this in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that broader enthusiasm for the war was difficult to sustain or indeed project through cultural means.

In contrast, Aaron J. Cohen argues Russian cultural mobilisation during the Great War lasted far longer than most historiographical assessments imply. He believes the public and artists alike continued to support the war effort ‘until political and economic events began to

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<sup>11</sup> Jahn, *Patriotic Culture*, pp. 4; 29; 171; 175.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Stites, ‘Days and Nights in Wartime Russia: Cultural Life, 1914-1917’, in *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918*, ed. by Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites (Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 8-31 (pp. 9; 29-31).

<sup>13</sup> Stites, ‘Days and Nights in Wartime Russia’, p. 29.

undermine it late in the war'.<sup>14</sup> However, this view ignores Stites' class assessment which is supported by Vladimir P. Buldakov who also identifies the 'socially stratified' nature of Russian culture as having impacted the overall success of cultural mobilisation.<sup>15</sup> Certainly, the majority of the Russian upper classes remained supportive of the war effort for its duration but the same cannot be said of the broader public.

Similarly, Melissa Stockdale argues in her *Mobilizing the Russian Nation* that a 'sacred union', which cut across class, ethnic, and religious lines, existed in Russia for much of the war before declining in line with other belligerent nations in 1917.<sup>16</sup> She identifies the visual media as playing an important role in spreading patriotic images of support for the war effort and enemy ridicule.<sup>17</sup> Undeniably there was an initial wave of enthusiasm following the outbreak of war: however, the suggestion that Russian people were mobilised for the same duration as other allied nations is unconvincing, not least because the outcome of Russia's Great War was so drastically different. Moreover, her analysis risks interpreting propagandist material as representative of complete cultural mobilisation, without considering issues of interpretation, which Jahn believes to be misleading.<sup>18</sup>

Most recently, Ruslan Kutsyk has convincingly argued in line with Stites and Buldakov that engagement with Russian wartime culture differed across society making cultural

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<sup>14</sup> Aaron J. Cohen, *Imagining the Unimaginable: World War, Modern Art, and the Politics of Public Culture in Russia, 1914-1917* (University of Nebraska Press, 2008), p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Vladimir P. Buldakov, 'Mass Culture and the Culture of the Masses in Russia, 1914-22', in *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914-22, Book 1: Popular Culture, the Arts and Institutions*, ed. by Murray Frame, Boris Kolonitskii, Steven G. Marks, and Melissa K. Stockdale (Slavica Publishers, 2014) pp. 25-52 (pp. 26-28).

<sup>16</sup> Stockdale, *Mobilizing the Russian Nation*, pp. 15; 247-248; 251.

<sup>17</sup> Stockdale, *Mobilizing the Russian Nation*, pp. 19-21.

<sup>18</sup> Jahn, *Patriotic Culture*, p. 3.

mobilisation inconsistent.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Kutsyk offers a useful timeline which follows a gradual decline in societal ‘reception and understanding’ of the war from summer 1915.<sup>20</sup> He attributes failures of cultural mobilisation to a lack of ‘ideological justification’ following the first months of war.<sup>21</sup> Undoubtedly, cultural mobilisation attempts were made: Stockdale notes, for example, the relative success of *Sel’skii Vestnik*, a patriotic newspaper created and financially supported by the Committee for Popular Publications for targeted distribution among rural communities.<sup>22</sup> But, examples such as these only serve to emphasise the pre-existing class divisions within Russian society, raised by Stites and Buldakov, which targeted cultural propaganda ultimately failed to unify.

### **Press Photography**

Christopher Stolarski argues that demand for press photographs became so high among the Russian public during the Great War that magazine editors began increasingly to replace written articles with photographs of the front lines, the imperial family, and war heroes.<sup>23</sup> However, closer inspection of the *Letopis’ voiny* issues from December 1914 and 1916 do not show any increase in photographs. Using the example of war heroes, whilst there are 61 photographs commemorating heroism throughout the December 1914 issues, there are only 11 throughout December 1916.<sup>24</sup> This is particularly curious given John Bushnell’s suggestion that over the course of Russia’s Great war, the home and front lines could be seen ‘interacting

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<sup>19</sup> Ruslan Kutsyk, ‘Patriots & Critics: The Story of How Public Perceptions of World War I in the Russian Empire Changed’, *Skhidnoievropeskyi Istorychnyi Visnyk*, 22 (2022), pp. 64-81 (p.78).

<sup>20</sup> Kutsyk, ‘Patriots & Critics’, p. 79.

<sup>21</sup> Kutsyk, ‘Patriots & Critics’, p. 68.

<sup>22</sup> Stockdale, *Mobilizing the Russian Nation*, pp. 56-58.

<sup>23</sup> Stolarski, ‘Press Photography’, pp. 139-142.

<sup>24</sup> *LV*, Issue 16 (December 6, 1914), pp. 250-251; 258; Issue 17 (December 13, 1914), pp.266; 274; Issue 18 (December 20, 1914), pp.282; 296; Issue 19 (December 27, 1914), p. 306; Issue 121 (December 10, 1916), p. 1943; Issue 122 (December 17, 1916), p. 1959.

with each other in a downward spiral'.<sup>25</sup> It seems illogical to reduce heroic photographs in line with reduced morale. Thus, Stolarski's argument omits inconsistencies in the publication of photographs intended as propaganda which require further analysis.

In her study of French press photography during the First World War, Beatriz Pichel shines a spotlight on the domestic nature of photographs featuring life on the front line which she believes aimed to reassure those at home that their loved ones were 'alive and well'.<sup>26</sup> This certainly correlates with the subject of some photographs in the December 1914 issues of *Letopis' voiny* which show Russian soldiers gathered around a fire or taking part in a religious burial service, for example.<sup>27</sup> Each give a visual indication of troops on the front as maintaining a degree of normality in abnormal circumstances. Yet throughout December 1916 there are no domestic undertones to the photographs. Instead, viewers can see the aftermath of battle and although this includes soldiers having their wounds treated, the realities of warfare are plain to see, indicating a change in propagandic approach which would have been unlikely to mobilise those at home worrying about loved ones fighting at the front.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, Claire M. Tylee makes a pertinent point about the issue of interpretation when putting war photographs into the public domain. She highlights the ability of photographs to 'conjure up something which was never present' thus making them an inconsistent propaganda tool.<sup>29</sup> Certainly, the issue of perception is one that Stolarski raises as potentially problematic. He states that photographs allowed viewers to understand events 'according to

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<sup>25</sup> Hew Strachan cited in; John Bushnell, 'Russian Peasants and Soldiers during World War I: Home and Front Interacting', *Russian Studies in History*, 56.2 (2017), pp. 65-72 (p. 69).

<sup>26</sup> Beatriz Pichel, *Picturing the Western Front: Photography, Practices and Experiences in First World War France* (Manchester University Press, 2021), pp. 77-83.

<sup>27</sup> *LV*, Issue 19 (December 27, 1914), p. 303.

<sup>28</sup> *LV*, Issue 122 (December 17, 1916), p. 1953.

<sup>29</sup> Claire M. Tylee, 'The Spectacle of War: Photographs of the Russian Front by Florence Farmborough', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 8.1 (1997), pp. 65-80 (p. 69).

their own politics, social perspectives, and life experiences'.<sup>30</sup> Given the variety of magazines containing war photographs produced both privately and by the government, it is easy to see how the risk of contradicting official narratives became greater with increased circulation of images.

Similarly, Justin Court stresses that 'photographs are often less realistic than they seem' and as a result, when analysing photographs intended for propaganda purposes, historians must approach the contents with reservation.<sup>31</sup> Within the last 1914 issue of *Letopis' voiny* there is a small collection of photographs claiming to feature Austrian prisoners of war.<sup>32</sup> Not only is it uncertain whether the subjects are indeed Austrian POWs, it also appears likely that the friendly themes of sharing a cigarette or writing letters home were intentionally fabricated. Given the distinct hatred of the enemy felt across Russia it is possible that images displaying lenient treatment of prisoners were inconsistently received by the public. On the one hand, they indicate Russian civility but on the other, they imply captives are treated with a respect not shown to civilians by enemy armies. Interestingly, pictures of POWs in December 1916 are less benevolent in nature which demonstrates a lack of consistency when compared to 1914, doubtless making long-term mobilisation more challenging.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, Photography was also embraced by monarchies across Europe during the war to aid mobilisation.<sup>34</sup> However, Boris Kolonitskii argues that images of the imperial family, despite being intended as a unifying propaganda technique only increased discontent

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<sup>30</sup> Stolarski, 'Press Photography', p. 140.

<sup>31</sup> Justin Court, 'Picturing History, Remembering Soldiers: World War I Photography between the Public and the Private', *History and Memory*, 29.1 (Indiana University Press, 2017), pp. 72-103 (p. 83).

<sup>32</sup> *LV*, Issue 19 (December 27, 1914), pp. 310-311.

<sup>33</sup> *LV*, Issue 120 (December 3, 1916), p. 1916.

<sup>34</sup> Boris Kolonitskii, 'Russian Leaders of the Great War and Revolutionary Era in Representation and Rumors', trans. by Diana Statham, in *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914-22, Book 2: Popular Culture, Identities, Mentalities, and Memory*, ed. by Murray Frame, Boris Kolonitskii, Steven G. Marks and Melissa K. Stockdale (Slavica Publishers, 2014), pp. 27-54 (p. 29).

among the Russian public.<sup>35</sup> Across all *Letopis' voiny* issues from December 1914 and 1916, only one photograph of the Emperor is featured which is surprising for a government approved magazine.<sup>36</sup>

### Artistic Propaganda

Like photography, artistic propaganda had huge potential during the Great War and the consistency of its distribution was vital to its effectiveness. Cohen argues that Russian artists made an important contribution to mobilisation during the Great War through their use of new artistic styles and continued participation in art exhibitions and auctions in aid of war charities.<sup>37</sup> Whilst events such as these undoubtedly allowed the artistic intelligentsia an opportunity to display their patriotism, the public outreach possibilities of art displayed in exhibitions must be taken into consideration. Indeed, 'more than 80 percent of Russia's population lived in non-urban areas in 1917' making it unlikely that these new styles were widely accessible between 1914-1917.<sup>38</sup>

Andrew M. Nedd argues that artists producing work for *Segodniashnii Lubok* turned 'backwards' to the style of traditional *lubki* in order to aid mobilisation.<sup>39</sup> *Segodniashnii Lubok's* images and accompanying text was intended to be 'easily comprehended' and had a 'crudeness' which appealed to a broader audience than merely artistic circles.<sup>40</sup> Kazimir Malevich's 'An Austrian was going to Radziwill...' for example, makes a clear mockery of

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<sup>35</sup> Kolonitskii, 'Russian Leaders', pp. 30-32.

<sup>36</sup> *LV*, Issue 16 (December 6, 1914), p. 249.

<sup>37</sup> Cohen, *Imagining the Unimaginable*, pp. 92-95.

<sup>38</sup> Sarah Badcock, 'The 1917 Peasant Revolutions', *Jacobin*, 23 August 2017 The 1917 Peasant Revolutions [accessed: 5 December 2025].

<sup>39</sup> Andrew M. Nedd, 'The Russian Avant-Garde in 1914: Primitivism, Apocalypticism and Abstraction', in *Guerre et avant-gardes: War and the Avant-Gardes*, ed. by Marine Branland (Presses Universitaires de Paris Nanterre, 2016), pp. 135-144.

<sup>40</sup> Nedd, 'The Russian Avant-Garde in 1914'.

the enemy.<sup>41</sup> Its depiction of a joyful Russian woman holding an Austrian soldier on a pitchfork sends a message of Russian strength and enemy weakness. That a graphic like this would easily cut across class lines is plain to see. However, Jahn draws attention to the fact that despite an initial boom in demand, *Segodniashnii Lubok* ‘closed in November 1914’ making it ineffective as a mobilising tool going forward.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, Margaret Bridget Betz and Andrew M Nedd identify a transition from the production of caricature and *lubok* style propaganda in 1915 towards more obscure artistic works in the latter half of the war. They attribute the decline in the production of *lubki* to censorship on the basis that ‘truth was always a value conveyed within folk art’.<sup>43</sup> With hindsight, propaganda in the style of *lubok* held so much potential because it was traditional and easy to understand. That production stopped in line with declining public mood only exposes the government’s inability to realise the unifying capabilities of the *lubok* style.

Alison Rowley, in her assessment of Russian picture postcards during the Great War, suggests they intended to create the impression of patriotism as having ‘over-ridden class-consciousness’.<sup>44</sup> However, to reinforce that this was a mere impression, she notes a vital contradiction between the mobilising intentions of postcards featuring images of factory workers producing goods for the war effort and political unrest such as the workers strikes of

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<sup>41</sup>‘Poster “An Austrian was going to Radziwill...”’, Google Arts and Culture, n.d. <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/igFxtU5b3RkSMQ?hl=en> [accessed: 7 December 2025].

<sup>42</sup> Jahn, *Patriotic Culture*, p. 29.

<sup>43</sup> Margaret Bridget Betz and Andrew M. Nedd, ‘Irony, Derision, and Magical Wit: Censors as a Spur to Russian Abstract Art’, in *Political Censorship of the Visual Arts in Nineteenth Century Europe: Arresting Images*, ed. by Robert Justin Goldstein and Andrew M. Nedd (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 9-60 (pp. 44-46).

<sup>44</sup> Alison Rowley, *Open Letters: Russian Popular Culture and the Picture Postcard, 1880-1922* (University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 171-174.

1916, for example.<sup>45</sup> Put simply, artistic propaganda (and indeed visual propaganda generally) despite aiming to influence public opinion, is not guaranteed to do so.

Oleg V. Riabov explores the relationship between ‘gender discourse’ and Russian propagandist art.<sup>46</sup> She identifies the depiction of allied strength through ‘masculine’ imagery and enemy weakness as being underpinned by visual ‘emasculatation’ with the intention of reinforcing an ‘us and them’ narrative.<sup>47</sup> Within Issue 17 of *Letopis’ voiny*, a full page drawing depicts an enemy soldier in visible distress on the front line accompanied by the phrase: ‘It’s better to be a prisoner than to die of starvation’.<sup>48</sup> Clearly this was intended to display the weakness of enemy soldiers. Though it is interesting that in a more expensive magazine the depiction of enemy weakness is far more realistic than in the colourful, light-hearted *lubki*.

### Censorship

One significant means of circulating visual propaganda was within the periodical press, as such, the organisation and overall effectiveness of Russian censorship must be considered. John T. Smith suggests the enforcement of military censorship in Russia was relaxed, particularly among the periodical press, when compared to Britain which required items for publication to undergo military censorship and approval by the Official Press Bureau before going to print.<sup>49</sup> In a time of war, the British censorship model implies the thoroughness one would expect from a government trying to control public narrative. Yet, Smith also highlights that the Russian

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<sup>45</sup> Rowley, *Open Letters*, p. 174.

<sup>46</sup> Oleg V. Riabov, ‘The Symbol of “Mother Russia” Across Two Epochs: From the First World War to the Civil War’, trans. by Kirsty McCluskey, in *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914-22, Book 2: Political Culture, Identities, Mentalities, and Memory*, ed. by Murray Frame, Boris Kolonitskii, Steven G. Marks, and Melissa K. Stockdale (Slavica Publishers, 2014), pp. 73-98 (pp. 73-74).

<sup>47</sup> Riabov, ‘The Symbol of “Mother Russia”’, pp. 74; 78.

<sup>48</sup> *LV*, Issue 17 (December 13, 1914), p. 276.

<sup>49</sup> John T. Smith, ‘Russian Military Censorship during the First World War’, *Revolutionary Russia*, 14.1 (2001), pp. 71-95 (pp.79; 87-88).

military lacked experienced censors and despite lack of experience, censors were advised to ‘use their initiative’.<sup>50</sup> Clearly, this is a chaotic approach to controlling public narrative in conditions of total war.

In addition, William G. Rosenberg’s view that Russia was the only country to focus its military censorship efforts on ‘the emotional and mental states of military units’ indicates that the Russian government may have over-prioritised the mobilisation of soldiers, allowing them to lose sight of the home front.<sup>51</sup> Of course, the loyalty of soldiers was vital during the Great War, however it has been well recorded that morale consistently declined between 1914-1917.<sup>52</sup> Not only does this suggest that censorship failed to meet its main goal of keeping spirits up on the front line, it also reinforces the weakness of Russian censorship overall which failed to grasp complete control of the war narrative on the front lines and at home.

Blokhin, Alferova, Ustinova and Fisher argue that military censorship was inconsistent from the very beginning of the war. They give the example of articles containing studies of enemy and allied weaponry as well as articles dedicated to enemy weaknesses which inevitably handed the central powers opportunities to ‘correct their own shortcomings’.<sup>53</sup> These examples expose a clear failure of initiative. Granted, the Great War was fought on a scale previously unseen. However, as Smith has pointed out, Russia had a long history of press censorship

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<sup>50</sup> Smith, ‘Russian Military Censorship’, pp. 83-87.

<sup>51</sup> William G. Rosenberg, ‘Reading Soldiers’ Moods: Russian Military Censorship and the Configuration of Feeling in World War I’, *The American Historical Review*, 119.3 (2014), pp. 714-740 (p. 718).

<sup>52</sup> Aleksandr Borisovich Astashov, ‘Between Acceptance and Refusal – Soldiers Attitudes Towards War (Russian Empire)’, 1914-1918 Online: International Encyclopaedia of the First World War, 22 April 2021 Between Acceptance and Refusal - Soldiers' Attitudes Towards War (Russian Empire) [accessed: 8 December 2025].

<sup>53</sup> Valery Fedorovich Blokhin, Irina Viktorovna Alferova, Julia Nikolaevna Ustinova, Ekaterina Sergeevna Fisher, ‘Periodicals and Military Censorship During the First World War: Military Secrets and the Freedom of Information Problem’, *Astra Salvensis*, 6.13 (2019), pp. 93-100 (pp. 93-95).

enforcement which one might assume could have been drawn on to aid mobilisation and prevent seemingly obvious errors of judgment.<sup>54</sup>

In contrast, I.A. Zhdanova takes an optimistic view of Russian censorship efforts, arguing that the patriotism of journalists and editors meant censorship occurred naturally within major periodicals up until summer 1917.<sup>55</sup> Certainly, there were many patriots working within the media who supported the government and the war effort but first and foremost they intended to engage their readers/viewers. As recent studies demonstrate, even during the initial wave of patriotism in July 1914 periodicals made seemingly unintentional but incredibly irresponsible decisions, allowing analysis of weaponry, for example, to be put to print. Not only does this suggest that if self-censorship was taking place, it was ineffective as a mobilising tool, it also exposes the careless nature of censorship from the offset.

Jonathan W. Daly argues that failure to censor the ‘popular press’ between 1914-1917 resulted in ‘sensational representations of the “enemy within”’, which triggered widespread xenophobia and later undermined ‘the legitimacy of the government and the ruling dynasty’.<sup>56</sup> He also accuses the Russian government of over-suspicion of the periodical press in the months following the initial outbreak of war, a response which Daly feels only further weakened the ability of the government to assert authority over editors.<sup>57</sup> Certainly, given the aforementioned inconsistencies within visual propaganda and lack of press censorship enforcement, one has to consider the possibility of propaganda as having worked against existing Russian power structures in the long run. Regardless, at a time of total war, for full scale mobilisation to be

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<sup>54</sup> Smith, ‘Russian Military Censorship’, p. 72.

<sup>55</sup> I.A. Zhdanova, ‘The “Propaganda Age”: Information Management in Conditions of War and Revolution in Russia in March-October 1917’, *Russian Studies in History*, 57.1 (2018), pp. 54-84 (pp. 63; 77).

<sup>56</sup> Jonathan W. Daly, ‘Government, Press, and Subversion in Russia, 1906-1917’, *Journal of the Historical Society*, 9.1 (2009), pp. 23-65 (p. 65).

<sup>57</sup> Daly, ‘Government, Press, and Subversion’, pp. 55-56.

maintained, the government must be able to assert authority over the media and work alongside editors rather than against them as appears to have been the case in Russia.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, it is evident that Russian visual propaganda became increasingly ineffective as a mobilising tool from as early as Spring 1915. In the case of press photographs and artistic propaganda, interpretation and distribution was inconsistent across society. In addition, censorship failed to ensure the media (largely responsible for circulating visual propaganda) maintained a patriotic narrative. A comparison of *Letopis' voiny* issues from December 1914 and 1916 highlights a clear shift from optimism to reality. Similarly, art in the style of *lubok*, though initially mobilising, stopped being produced in 1915. Thus, Jahn's view of mobilisation as having been relatively unsuccessful remains most convincing. However, a broader study of visual propaganda, with a focus on distribution and interpretation along class lines, would be useful to further understand what went wrong between 1914-1917.

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## How did hunger shape Allied-German post-war reconciliation?

Conrad Funk

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When wanting to answer the question it is first necessary to precisely define the scope and intention of the essay. Regarding the former, this essay covers the occupation period of 1945-1949, with a focus on West-Germans and the US and the UK, referred to as the Allies throughout. Here, both governmental and individual examples have been chosen to paint a fuller picture. The essay will not cover Soviet reconciliation though given word count limits nor the French Zone given historiographical gaps as noted by Champion.<sup>1</sup> The essay's ambition then, shall be to examine how hunger shaped processes of reconciliation but also to evaluate successfulness of that reconciliation. Said evaluation, shall be based on Jeremie Bracka's definition of reconciliation as 'overcoming alienation, division and enmity'<sup>2</sup> understanding durable reconciliation as requiring collective narratives and identities between both parties.<sup>3</sup> Concerning the latter, key arbiters for these collective identities shall be post-war justice, ideally perceived as such by both parties, and mutual acknowledgement of war time crimes, or truth. These, being chosen as both are vital in the creation of authentic and therefore enduring new common identities and reconciliation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Corey Champion, 'Remembering the 'Forgotten Zone': Recasting the Image of Post-1945 French Occupation in Germany', *French Politics, Culture, and Society*, 37 (2019).

<sup>2</sup> Jeremie Bracka, 'Transitional Justice: 'Truth', 'Justice', and 'Reconciliation' in Conflict Resolution', in *Transitional Justice for Israel / Palestine: Truth-Telling and Empathy in Ongoing Conflict*, ed. by Olivera Simic, (Springer, 2021), pp.105-125 (pp. 119-20).

<sup>3</sup> Champion, p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> Champion, pp. 109-10.

Structurally, the essay will first cover the importance of hunger to hostility between both parties immediately after the war. Secondly, the role of hunger in Allied justice shall be examined given its importance in shaping German victimhood narratives. Thereafter, we will cover the emergence of German victimhood narratives, and how these proved critical for acknowledgement of Nazi crimes and the crafting of a new communal identity between West-Germans and the Western Allies. Lastly, we shall discuss the authenticity of this new communal identity and evaluate the success and durability of reconciliation.

Beginning with context, we shall briefly examine hunger's importance as a barrier to reconciliation for both sides. This will be done by examining how hunger was understood by West-Germans and the Western Allies respectively. For West-Germans then, hunger was a product of the lost eastern agricultural land,<sup>5</sup> arrival of up to 12 million displaced persons (D.P.) as consequence of the war,<sup>6</sup> and a strongly damaged agricultural industry.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, the experience of hunger became tied to the humiliation and defeat during the war, in addition to resentment for the new occupying powers.<sup>8</sup> The western Allies in turn were strongly concerned with the wide grain shortages spanning Europe after the war's conclusion.<sup>9</sup> For these, the Nazis and Germans, who had been well fed through the war in comparison, were held accountable.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Christine Fojtik, 'The Productive Heimat: Territorial Loss and Rurality in German Identity at the *Stunde Null*', in *Food, Culture and Identity in Germany's Century of War*, ed. by Heather Benbow, Heather Perry (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 153-75 (p. 154).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Schlemmer, 'Zwischen Ernährung und Hoffnung: Ernährung und Alltag in (West-) Deutschland von 'Rationsgesellschaft' zum 'Wirtschaftswunder'', in *Deutsche und Sowjetische Gesellschaften im Ersten Nachkriegsjahrzehnt*, (De Gruyter, 2020), pp. 58-75 (p. 63).

<sup>7</sup> Schlemmer, pp. 61-62.

<sup>8</sup> Fojtik, p. 161.

<sup>9</sup> Laura Hilton, 'Postwar Food Rumours: Security, Victimhood and Fear', in *Food, Culture and Identity in Germany's Century of War*, ed. by Heather Benbow, Heather Perry (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 177-200 (p. 186).

<sup>10</sup> Alice Weinreb, 'Hunger and the Remaking of History: Rationing, Suffering, and Human Rights in Occupied Germany', in *Modern Hungers: Food and Power in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. by Susan Ferber (Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 88-121 (p. 94).

Most importantly though, hunger was tied strongly to the Holocaust given pictures of Nazi victims.<sup>11</sup> Given this, perceived German ‘fatness’ was strongly tied to their guilt for the war but also the Holocaust.<sup>12</sup> Consequently we can clearly see how hunger played a key role as a barrier to reconciliation given German feelings of humiliation and defeat but also Allied understandings of German guilt through the hunger of Nazism’s victims.

German guilt then, resulted in Allied retributive and restorative justice which we shall examine through the prism of hunger and particularly rations on both a governmental and individual level. Governmentally, rations provided an everyday reminder of guilt for Germans by Allied governments as from 1945 to 46 these tied a direct link between guilt and available food.<sup>13</sup> An example of this being a public display of different levels of rations in Bremen in 1946 showcasing different piles of food corresponding to 29,288 calories a week for US soldiers, 12,950 for D.P. and 7,098 calories a week for Germans.<sup>14</sup> Here, retributive intent is apparent amongst Allied military government as exemplified by Deputy Military Governor of Germany Lucius Clay, who in relation to hunger during the winter of 1945 to 1946 stated ‘conditions are going to be extremely difficult in Germany this winter ... Some cold and hunger will be necessary to make the German people realize the consequences of the war which they caused’.<sup>15</sup> Individually, we have examples such as the 1945 letter sent by US soldier Emanuel Lamb to his parents concerning the rapid advance of his division. Here, he quells any potential parental fears of him lacking food by stating, ‘we took the food we wanted, slept in the rooms

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<sup>11</sup> Kaete O’Connell, ‘The Taste of Defeat: Food, Peace and Power in US-Occupied Germany’, in *Food, Culture and Identity in Germany’s Century of War*, ed. by Heather Benbow, Heather Perry (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 201-225 (p. 204).

<sup>12</sup> O’Connell, p. 205.

<sup>13</sup> Hilton, p. 178.

<sup>14</sup> Hilton, p. 177.

<sup>15</sup> Hilton, p. 184.

and beds we wanted and did what we wanted ... on Germany we have no pity'.<sup>16</sup> Here, the usage of 'we' in addition to him writing to his parents, suggests his actions would have and did find support amongst his comrades but also people back home. For reconciliation, we can then clearly see how grievances continued to find expression through food but equally how Allied individuals and governments sought to properly address German crimes through imposed hunger.

Said addressing of German crimes then also involved restorative justice, particularly for Jewish D.P. within Germany. These consisted of either Holocaust survivors or refugees from Eastern Europe given resurgent antisemitism in Poland and Romania, accounting for up to 250.000 people.<sup>17</sup> Allied governmental compensation for their suffering took shape in food aid by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration as well as increased rations, given their status as victims of Fascism.<sup>18</sup> Individually, restorative policy can be seen through Jewish aid organisations which provided Jews in D.P. camps with canned food as well as old clothing donated by people within the US. These measures though, were understandably seen as totally insufficient compensation for their suffering by Jewish D.P. leaving major grievances.<sup>19</sup> Concerning reconciliation, it is then important to bear in mind that Allied reconciliation partially involved Jewish-German reconciliation, which proved particularly challenging given the Holocaust and lacklustre restorative justice measures.

Yet despite being very meagre, restorative justice did play an outsized role within the emerging narrative of German victimhood that saw Allied retributive and restorative food

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<sup>16</sup> O'Connell, p. 206.

<sup>17</sup>Atima Grossmann, 'Grams, Calories, and Food: Victimization, Entitlement, and Human Rights in Occupied Germany, 1945-1949', *Central European History*, 44 (2011), pp. 118-48 (p. 121).

<sup>18</sup> Grossmann, p. 129.

<sup>19</sup> Grossmann, p. 134.

policy as inhumane and unjust. When quantifying this narrative though, we shall focus on individualised action given there was no German government. Concretely, common German narratives through governmental surveys as well as rumours will be examined, which were a vital source of non-Allied control information for Germans.<sup>20</sup> Firstly though, one must recall that Nazi wartime propaganda doubtlessly played a role in shaping initial German dialogue. Here, the Morgenthau Plan in particular was highly instrumentalised by the Nazis and spread fear of punitive eradication at the hands of the Allies. Accordingly, there were rumours of systematic starvation taking place with American occupation authorities supposedly purposely cutting German food rations to a bare subsistence level.<sup>21</sup> This centrality of food being reinforced by the comparative analysis done by Laura Hilton which found that food and hunger made up 20% of rumours within a sample size of more than 3.000.<sup>22</sup> There was also much outrage concerning Allied restorative policy especially towards Jews and D.P. Here, Jewish extra rations as Victims of Fascism played into a wider narrative of Jewish privilege within the occupation system fuelling ideas of comparative German victimhood stemming from the Nazi period.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, D.P. and foreigners were cited as the primary cause for hunger by 46% of Germans surveyed as part of an Allied poll in November 1946.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, we can once again see the centrality of hunger in generating grievances within both parties, in this case manifesting in German victim narratives as a response to Allied justice and in continuity with Nazi Morgenthau propaganda and antisemitism.

What shall prove essential is how the above victim narrative was reframed as one of human rights. This reframing brought with it key acknowledgments of past crimes

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<sup>20</sup> Hilton, p.180.

<sup>21</sup> Hilton, p. 183.

<sup>22</sup> Hillton, p. 185.

<sup>23</sup> Grossmann, p. 137.

<sup>24</sup> Hilton, p. 187.

accompanied by a wider denunciation of the Nazi past which we shall examine below. Thereafter, shall follow a critical perspective on the authenticity of these conciliatory gestures. Beginning with German human rights appeals, these were initially especially centered around the 1941 Atlantic Charter and its promises that all states shall live free of fear and want. This later shifted towards assertions that Allied treatment of Germans amounted to another Holocaust. Exemplary of this being a 1948 article from Düsseldorf describing the hunger of Germany as a crime against humanity.<sup>25</sup> Importantly for reconciliation then, this appeal did involve a clear acknowledgement of Nazi concentration camps and a clear denunciation of their wrongness given the comparison to German hunger.<sup>26</sup>

Yet even these relativising acknowledgement and denunciations, must not be overstated as grand overtures of reconciliation, given the clear structural incentives provided by the Allies for this human rights reframing and distancing of the Nazi past. Said incentives took the shape of funding for German Human Rights Organisations, promoting rights discourse as part of denazification,<sup>27</sup> as well as surveys linked to employment. The latter then, were necessary for employment in managerial or civil service positions and were meant to ascertain complicity during the Nazi period. These provided great incentive to the up to 20 million Germans that filled out these surveys to adopt a ‘victim’- or ‘resistor’-narrative to gain access to employment.<sup>28</sup> This then proved key in promoting wide scale denunciation of the Nazi past, and a wider narrative of innocent people victimised by the Nazi dictatorial minority. Consequently, it is clear that Allied incentives in addition to German hunger were the driving

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<sup>25</sup> Weinreb, p. 105.

<sup>26</sup> Weinreb, p. 106.

<sup>27</sup> Lora Wildenthal, ‘Human Rights Activism in Occupied and Early West Germany: The Case of the German League for Human Rights’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 80 (2008), pp. 515-56 (pp. 515-16).

<sup>28</sup> Mikkel Dack, ‘Tailoring Truth: Memory Construction and Whitewashing the Nazi Past from Below’, *German Politics and Society*, 39 (2021), pp. 15-36 (p. 17).

factors, in denunciation of Nazism and partial acknowledgement of past crimes. Given this, the authenticity and therefore durability of these reconciliatory measures must be regarded with considerable doubt.

Despite said ulterior motivations and lacking authenticity, the narrative of German victimhood did get widely adopted by both the UK and the US, leading to a key shift away from retributive food policy towards large scale food aid. We shall examine manifestations thereof on a governmental and individual level, and their culmination into a communal narrative of victimhood between Germans and Allies as exemplified with the Berlin Airlift. Governmental change in policy then, manifested most visibly in the 1946 shift towards egalitarian rationing, departing from the previous retributive approach,<sup>29</sup> in addition to the mass scale influx of food aid via the Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe (CARE) worth \$516.412.500 in 1947.<sup>30</sup> Said change in policy was then justified on the basis of a differentiation between Nazi dictatorship and the German people, in addition to calls to prevent another Holocaust, playing into ideas of German victimhood. An example of the aforementioned differentiation, can be seen in the speech of 1946 Secretary of State James Byrnes, in which he distinguishes strongly between ‘Hitler and his minions’ and Germans depicting these as victims of Nazism.<sup>31</sup> Examples of Holocaust comparisons in turn, are Labor politician John Hynd’s statement that German rations were lesser than those at Buchenwald concentration camp, or Herbert Hoover’s expressing ‘we do not want the American flag flying over a nation-wide Buchenwald’.<sup>32</sup> On an individual basis there was equally an outpouring of

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<sup>29</sup> Weinreb, p. 102.

<sup>30</sup> Hilton, p. 191.

<sup>31</sup> Department of State Archive, Washington, Publication 9446, Address given by James F. Byrnes (Stuttgart, 6 September 1946), pp. 91-99 (p.8),

<[https://www.cvce.eu/obj/address\\_given\\_by\\_james\\_f\\_byrnes\\_stuttgart\\_6\\_september\\_1946-en-17a77af6-adcd-41b7-a724-5c7d98a08f76.html](https://www.cvce.eu/obj/address_given_by_james_f_byrnes_stuttgart_6_september_1946-en-17a77af6-adcd-41b7-a724-5c7d98a08f76.html)> [accessed 24 November 2025].

<sup>32</sup> Weinreb, p. 109.

sympathy for Germany in the west with British Jewish publisher Victor Gollancz calling for food aid to German children in his 1946 booklet making comparisons with the Holocaust<sup>33</sup> or British and American families sending food aid packages to Germany.<sup>34</sup> These examples then, indicate the transformative power of narratives as well as the importance of justice, given it is no coincidence that wider Allied sympathy with Germans occurred after their grievances had been addressed through retributive justice rather than before.

Most indicative of this change of heart though, is the 1948-1949 Berlin Airlift, which began as a response to the Soviet blockade of Allied supplies into West-Berlin. This notably was not intended to starve Berliners but to drive them to register for Soviet ration programs. West-Berliners, though, largely refused to do so, instead choosing temporary hunger and eventually flown-in Western supplies. Said deliberate hungering, was then spun, especially by West-Berlin media, as a true sign of allegiance to the West by Berliners and a manifestation of their ‘will for freedom, for social justice, and for peace’ in light of Soviet oppression. It was consequently rewarded by continued CARE supplies via Anglo-American Airlift.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, we might be tempted to regard German-Allied reconciliation as a total success given the emergence of a communal narrative as victims of fascism now standing for Western ideals of freedom, social justice, and peace against the Soviet Union.

This then leads to our final section in which we shall discuss the political utility of German victimhood narratives to the Allies, its implications for authenticity, and a conclusion on how hunger shaped the course of Allied-German post-war reconciliation as well as its result. Exemplary of the political utility of German victimhood is the Berlin Airlift, which allowed

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<sup>33</sup> Weinreb, p. 107.

<sup>34</sup> Grossmann, p. 144.

<sup>35</sup> Grossmann, pp. 115-116.

the West to tie itself to material abundance and the defence of human rights whilst tying the Soviet Union and Communism to hunger and oppression.<sup>36</sup> This, proving of clear value given the emerging cold war. A further example is the considerable food aid granted by the West to Western Germany, which was strongly motivated by fears of communist spread rather than solely based in solidarity with German hunger.<sup>37</sup> Given these clear utilities, it is then fair to conclude to that the creation of this new communal narrative of victimhood was in many ways highly pragmatic for both Germans, who sought food aid or employment, and particularly the US, which gained much in prestige as the defender of human rights and opposer to Soviet hunger. Consequently, it seems fair to say the emerging common narrative of victimhood, produced through the prism of hunger, does not sufficiently fulfil our criteria for durable reconciliation. This being the case, as identification by Germans and inclusion by Allies were strongly tied to outside incentives, and the fact that considerable grievances remained only partially addressed or acknowledged, such as the Holocaust.

What the German victim narrative and its adoption by the West did facilitate though, is the large-scale fulfilment of our first criteria of reconciliation, ‘overcoming alienation, division and enmity’. Here, hunger and resulting food aid proved instrumental in fostering goodwill and humanising the previous enemy. A key example for goodwill was Herbert Hoover, who was widely popular with Germans and described in letters as one of the ‘greatest Samaritans of human history’ and a ‘German American’.<sup>38</sup> Such goodwill could flow both ways, exemplified by Germans gifting local food or beer to American soldiers<sup>39</sup> who in turn often gave chocolates to German children.<sup>40</sup> Beyond the bounds of Germany, food supplies and later letters sent by

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<sup>36</sup> Grossmann, p. 114.

<sup>37</sup> Schlemmer, pp. 68-69.

<sup>38</sup> Weinreb, p. 114.

<sup>39</sup> Grossmann, p. 206.

<sup>40</sup> Grossmann, p. 209.

families from both the US and UK could similarly foster new positive relations. These exchanges then often served to humanise the other, subverting previous categorisations as enemies, and potentially laying the groundwork for deeper reaching reconciliation in the long term.<sup>41</sup>

To conclude, hunger shaped the process as well as the success of reconciliation in many keyways. Initially, hunger served as a major hindrance, given the grievances of war and particularly the Holocaust were largely understood through hunger. Furthermore, Allied pursuit of justice, manifesting through the infliction as well as stilling of hunger, further propagated German narratives of victimhood, fostered during Nazism. Equally though, hunger played a key role in what this essay would argue was the partial success of reconciliation. The key turning point being found in the reframing of German victimhood in the language of human rights and as victims of fascism. This brought with it, the partial acknowledgement of past crimes but most importantly also held great utility for both Germans and the Allies. Through this narrative, Germans could now gain access to employment as well as significant food aid, whilst the West could depict itself as defender of human rights and prevent a feared spread of Communism. Given these clear utilities, adoption of this common narrative should not be taken as an indicator for successful long-term reconciliation given key grievances, such as the Holocaust, remained only partially addressed. What the narrative was able to achieve though, was the significant fostering of goodwill and mutual humanisation through the stilling of hunger via food aid, thus showcasing how hunger played a major role in the partial success of German-Allied reconciliation during the occupation period.

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<sup>41</sup> K. Felicia Campbell, 'Enemy Cuisine: Claiming Agency, Seeking Humanity and Renegotiating Identity through Consumption', in *Food in Zones of Conflict*, ed. by Helen Macbeth, 8<sup>th</sup> edition (Oxford Brookes University, 2014), pp. 145-54 (p. 145).

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## The Rise of 'Lesbian Chic' in the US Popular Culture of the 1990s: (In)visibilisation, (De)sexualisation and Restructuration of the Symbolic Meanings of Lesbian Bodies

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Lesbian presence in the media surged in 1993, when *New York Magazine* featured the androgynous lesbian artist k.d. lang<sup>1</sup> on its cover, titled ‘Lesbian Chic: The Bold, Brave New World of Gay Women’.<sup>2</sup> It triggered a decade-long craze about ‘lesbian chic’ that resulted in the lesbian representation entering the mainstream of popular culture and the media. Soon after, other articles followed in *Newsweek*, succeeded by *Vanity Fair* presenting a cover also portraying k.d. lang being shaved by a very straight and sexualised Cindy Crawford.<sup>3</sup> The frenzy spread to the *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Mademoiselle*, the *Time*, *Vogue* and even a small, local and very conservative magazine: the *Boulder Daily Camera*.

The role of popular culture in the shaping of such narratives is to be interrogated. Indeed, the sudden emergence of the lesbian as an object is framed by the media,<sup>4</sup> which can be approached as a ‘site where broader social meaning is constituted through representation’; in this dimension, it also appears ‘as a space where the knowledge and meaning of lesbian identity (e.g. how they look and act) is constructed, circulated, and contested’.<sup>5</sup> The body then, being the somatic interface by which someone is represented, is discursively constructed. Boyd argues ‘[the body is] a highly politicized, unstable, and symbolic structure, intimately connected to the state and as a result, it reflects both nationalism and resistant social movements’.<sup>6</sup> Regarding the complexity of these definitions, analysing the rise of the ‘lesbian

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<sup>1</sup> k.d lang’s name is written in lowercase according to the branding and preference of the artist.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Magazine*, 10th of May, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> See the previous page.

<sup>4</sup> Ann M. Ciasullo, ‘Making Her (In)Visible: Cultural Representations of Lesbianism and the Lesbian Body in the 1990s’, *Feminist Studies*, 27-3 (2001), pp. 577-608 (p. 578), doi:10.2307/3178806.

<sup>5</sup> Kelly L. Reddy-Best and Katie Baker Jones, ‘Is this what a Lesbian looks like? Lesbian Fashion and the Fashionable Lesbian in the United States Press, 1960s to 2010s’, *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 24.2 (2019), pp. 159–171 (p. 160) doi:10.1080/10894160.2019.1685816.

<sup>6</sup> Nan Alamilla Boyd, ‘Bodies in Motion, Lesbian and Transsexual Histories’, in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, 1st edn (Routledge, 2006), pp. 420-433 (p. 421), doi:10.4324/9780203955055.

chic’ as a trendy aesthetic depicting lesbians as fashionable, implies questioning what kind of bodies are represented. Which ones are not allowed to appear? What kind of narrative does it materialise?

A focal point is the notion of (in)visibility, that is directly linked to the physicality of the body. Lisa Walker describes being invisible as ‘to be seen but not heard, or to be erased entirely—to be absent from cultural consciousness’.<sup>7</sup> With the rise of sexology during the 19th century, queer bodies fall under the analytical prism of medicalisation, which locates their identities on corporeal, visible differences. The ‘economy of the gaze’<sup>8</sup> is thus central to comprehend the construction of the ‘visibly other’.<sup>9</sup> This is especially relevant to understand the non-monolithic category of lesbian. Jack Halberstam claims: ‘In Hollywood film made during the Production Code era, for example, a butch character was a window onto the sexual variance that the camera could not reveal’.<sup>10</sup> Lesbianism is therefore suggested by the recognisable otherness of female masculinity that subverts gender roles and is embodied by butches with a very recognisable fashion identity: Buzzcut, Dr Martens, leather jacket and a ‘crotch bulge (from packing a dildo)’.<sup>11</sup> Butchness corresponds to a determined social role within lesbian spheres, existing in tension with femmes, especially in working class

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<sup>7</sup> Lisa Walker, *Looking Like What You Are : Sexual Style, Race, and Lesbian Identity* (New York University Press, 2001), p. 1, <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/abdn/detail.action?docID=866154>> [accessed 29 November 2025].

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> B. J. Wray, ‘Performing Clits and Other Lesbian Tricks, Speculations on an Aesthetic of Lack’, in *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*, ed. by Amelia Jones, Andrew Stephenson Nfa and Andrew Stephenson (Taylor & Francis Group, 1999), pp. 273–292 (p. 273), <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/abdn/detail.action?docID=242010>> [accessed 27 October 2025].

<sup>10</sup> Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Duke University Press, 1998), p. 187, doi:10.1515/9780822378112.

<sup>11</sup> Robin Maltz, ‘Real Butch: The Performance/Performativity of Male Impersonation, Drag Kings, Passing as Male, and Stone Butch Realness’, *Journal of Gender Studies*, 7.3 (1998), pp. 273–286 (p. 276), doi:10.1080/09589236.1998.9960721.

communities from the 1940s to the 1960s.<sup>12</sup> The butch-femme dynamic is positioned outside the heteronormative system: ‘Butches occupy, reverse, resignify gender norms, femmes signify another kind of gender trouble as a betrayer of legibility itself. Seemingly "normal", she responds to "normal" expectations with a sucker punch—she occupies normality abnormally’.<sup>13</sup> Following this transgressive portrayal, lesbianism, more than being an attraction/desire towards non-men people, can be understood in its subversive and political dimension as an autonomous identity.

Nevertheless, considering the relatively homogeneous depiction of chic lesbians as fashionable and feminine, a new hegemonic ideal-type of the representable lesbian seems to rise. It leads Alexis Jester to wonder: ‘is this the new visibility, or the old voyeurism?’: in other words, is it really a time of emancipation for the lesbian imagery, or are feminine women sexualised once again to appeal to straight audiences?<sup>14</sup> Hence, how did the rise of ‘lesbian chic’ in the 1990s/early 2000s US popular culture challenge the representation and (in)visibilisation of lesbian bodies? The media frenzy can be observed through the prism of trendiness, which enables brands and media to capitalise on lesbian bodies, with the notable example of fashion, depoliticising their identity entirely. The commodified lesbian is simultaneously constructed through their sexualisation via the body according to situated beauty standards. This process actively invisibilises butches. Their absence operates as a mechanism of desexualisation for feminine lesbians’ bodies that can pass as straight, thus desirable for a (male) heterosexual audience.

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<sup>12</sup> See for more historical context on the pre-1990s butch-femme communities in the US: Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: the History of a Lesbian Community*, ed. by Madeline D. Davis, Twentieth Anniversary Edition (Routledge, 2014), doi:10.4324/9781315767611.

<sup>13</sup> Duggan and McHugh, p. 155, cited in Maltz, ‘Real Butch’, p. 279.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in Ciasullo, ‘Making Her (In)Visible’, p. 582.

Explicitly using the methodology and academic background of the History of the Body field, this essay aims at further broadening the understanding of the socio-cultural significance of the rise of ‘lesbian chic’, by analysing the role of somatic imagery as conveyor and creator of symbolic meanings within popular culture. Some of the researchers of the academic corpus mobilized here serve both as primary and secondary sources, given that the authors were also witnesses of the phenomena at the same time it happened. It grounds their work in a sociological approach, which is not the only angle prioritised in this essay. Embedding the discussion in modern historical theory as well as queer, decolonial and gender studies offers a potent conceptual structure to reflect on grey areas of the topic. This research then puts the emphasis on the tension between so-called positive or negative stereotypes and how it mirrors behaviours and beliefs within the society it erupts in. It also reflects on the position and meanings of butch and non-men masculine identities during this time period as well as the feminine body as (counter-)normative. It parallelly proposes to examine other intersectional aspects at play such as class, race, fatness and politicization, which were rarely analysed together. This essay intends to link these different analytical frameworks together to draw a nuanced panorama of the sociocultural weight of the new chic lesbian ideal-type and its legacy.

In the early 1990s, butchness is associated with outdated patriarchal roles by some feminists and at the same time with caricaturally excessive manifestations of feminism.<sup>15</sup> Their ‘mannish’ self-expression is perceived as distasteful and ugly. It can be argued that the call for positive representation against this stereotype has as a direct consequence the emergence of ‘lesbian chic’.<sup>16</sup> The multiplication of lesbian depictions in the media could represent an

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<sup>15</sup> For more context, see Joan Nestle, *A Restricted Country* (1987).

<sup>16</sup> Halberstam points out that: ‘The stereotype basically constitutes a set of traits within an individual as representative of the behavior and appearance of a particular (often minority) group. [...]

attempt to ‘use [the] feminine to sanitize the popular conception of the lesbian’.<sup>17</sup> It can be analysed as a way to reintegrate their transgressive image into the heteronormative system: the 1993 *Newsweek* cover features white, skinny, conventionally attractive and feminine lesbians to claim they are ‘Coming Out Strong’, highlighting the idea that they were simply ‘all-American girls’.<sup>18</sup>

The very manichean pretty vs. ugly dichotomy here revealed corresponds to Tressie McMillan Cottom’s definition of beauty: ‘[it] isn’t actually what you look like; beauty is the preferences that reproduce the existing social order’.<sup>19</sup> What can be inferred is that the creation of the pretty feminine lesbian through (non-lesbian) fashion codes embedded in contemporary, legitimate and intelligible trends, allows their reappropriation by the media and brands because their glamourized body becomes an empty identifier –or rather it becomes an identifier full in meanings because of its duplication of dominant social norms. Mark Fincher stresses that the ‘most recuperable part of the gay movement’s message is that gay people are individuals’.<sup>20</sup> It results in a liberal discourse on queer people that negates their political and collective activism. Clark remarks: ‘[style] as resistance becomes commodifiable as chic when it leaves the political realm and enters the fashion world’.<sup>21</sup> Brands (Ralph Lauren, Gucci, Calvin Klein, Prada) can dive into this breach to ride the wave of lesbian image of subversion to position themselves at

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stereotyping does not always and only work on behalf of a conservative representational agenda: the stereotype does often represent a "true" type, a type, in other words, that does exist within the subculture’ (*Female Masculinities*, p. 180). Positive cinema also means invisibilising butches stereotypically associated with lesbianism in the public mind.

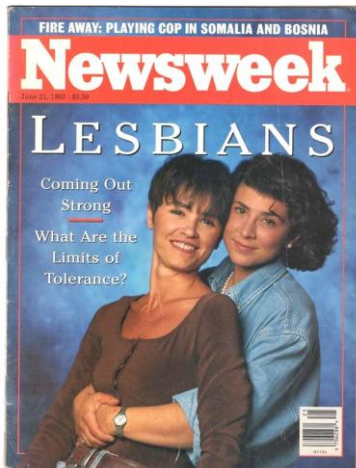
<sup>17</sup> Ciasullo, ‘Making Her (In)Visible’, p. 585.

<sup>18</sup> Ciasullo, ‘Making Her (In)Visible’, p. 585.

<sup>19</sup> Tressie McMillan Cottom, ‘In the Name of Beauty’, *Thick* (The New Press, 2019), p.16, <<https://www.vlebooks.com/Product/Index/2210941?page=0&startBookmarkId=-1>> [accessed 29 November /2025].

<sup>20</sup> Mark Fisher, cited in Danae Clark, ‘Commodity Lesbianism’, in *Out in Culture: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Essays on Popular Culture*, ed. by Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty (Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 186–201 (p. 195), doi:10.2307/j.ctv1220htt.35.

<sup>21</sup> Clark, ‘Commodity Lesbianism’, p. 196.



the artistic avant-garde, while it is much more about performing subversion than being subversive.

The term ‘(lesbian) chic’ simultaneously stands as elitist because the media spotlight is on wealthy, famous lesbians, invisibilising and silencing working/middle-class butch-femme dynamics.<sup>22</sup> In this context, rises the newly coined term ‘lipstick lesbians’.

[It] is a derogatory term that conjures up an apolitical creature, a “lifestyle lesbian”, [...] a lesbian who doesn’t want to be a dyke and doesn’t want to be associated with dykes. [...] [She] stands, as the lesbian who is interested in fashion, for the fashionability of lesbianism taken out of historical and social context and divested of political relevance.<sup>23</sup>

This phenomenon is particularly reinforced when having a look at the plethora of lesbian celebrity profiles (Guinevere Turner, Amanda Bearse, Chastity Bono) whose lifestyle, career and fashion sense are meticulously scrutinised and glamorized.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, all of them are portrayed as gorgeous, feminine and fashionable. This is also to be remarked in the fashion-oriented show *The L-Word* in the early 2000s,<sup>25</sup> or Ellen DeGeneres clothes brand advocating for comfy and classy items.<sup>26</sup> There is then a relative sameness in the representation of lesbians.

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<sup>22</sup> Marguerite Moritz, ‘Lesbian Chic: Our Fifteen Minutes of Celebrity?’ in *Feminism, Multiculturalism, and the Media*, ed. by Angharad N. Valdivia (SAGE Publications, Incorporated, 1995), pp. 127–44 (p.128), doi:10.4135/9781483345383.n6.

<sup>23</sup> Walker, *Looking Like What You Are*, p. 211.

<sup>24</sup> Ciasullo, ‘Making Her (In)Visible’, p. 603.

<sup>25</sup> Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas, ‘Lesbian Style: From Mannish Women to Lipstick Dykes’, *Fashion Theory*, ed. by Malcolm Barnard, 2nd edition (Routledge, 2020) pp. 430-456 (p. 443), doi:10.4324/9781315099620-33.

<sup>26</sup> Reddy-Best and Baker Jones, ‘Is this what a lesbian looks like?’, p. 167.

A paroxysmal example may be the lesbian wedding occurring in the TV series *Friends*.<sup>27</sup> Lea Delaria stated that it does not look like a lesbian wedding since there are no ‘fat dykes in tuxedos’, but only ‘thin, perfectly coiffed girls in Laura Ashley prints’.<sup>28</sup> This illustrates that



being a lesbian on TV in the 1990s means being reintegrated into heteronormative tropes: a traditional wedding, straight-looking, with skinny and fashionable models playing the part. To complexify the previous idea of positive

representation, it is relevant to analyse that positivity supposes a certain positionality. Positivity is reintegrating a marginalised community into the norm so that they appear as not so different.<sup>29</sup> The *Friends*’ wedding thus operates as a way to naturalise the liberal/nuclear family and job-house-kids pattern—what Lee Edelman calls Reproductive Politics.<sup>30</sup> Fashion in this dimension, as a site of discursively constructed meanings, appears as an essential part of this dynamic of system-reproduction. Lesbian bodies are rendered intelligible in the register of a white-hetero normalcy by both adorning them with chic garments and erasing those who are deemed unfashionable: hypermasculine butches.

Moritz highlights that during the 1993 Pride March, thousands of lesbians bare-breasted or on motorcycles were present. Nevertheless, the media coverage only emphasised gay men, while at the exact same time multiplying articles on ‘lesbian chic’.<sup>31</sup> As Deb Schwartz underlines, ‘the recent hetero media googlyness over lesbians isn’t about documentation [...] it’s about creation: building a better lesbian, one palatable enough for mainstream audience’.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The One With the Lesbian Wedding, *Friends* (NBC: January 18, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> Ciasullo, ‘Making Her (In)Visible’, p. 588.

<sup>29</sup> Halberstam, *Female Masculinities*, p. 185.

<sup>30</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Moritz, ‘Lesbian Chic’, p. 134.

<sup>32</sup> Moritz, ‘Lesbian Chic’, p. 142.

Lesbians are sanitised in a way that makes them hollow and consumable for the audience. bell hooks [sic]<sup>33</sup> states: ‘The real world of image-making is political-that politics of domination inform the way the vast majority of images we consume are constructed and marketed’.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, where ‘Punk fashion was especially good at injecting a kind of violent aura into femme chic that made it trashy and threatening instead of submissive and vulnerable to wear a skirt’,<sup>35</sup> the new chic lesbian actively eliminates all hints of anti-establishment to reenact normative perceptions of beauty and fashion.

Interestingly, the *New York Magazine* article of May 1993 also features a long description of a lesbian bar in New York City.

Outside the front stands the bouncer, a short young woman with a shaved head and a broad, square body. [...] [She] looks like an out-of-shape kung fu instructor [...] [Inside] sits a young woman straight from a Brooks Brothers catalogue-wearing a conservative plaid jacket and matching knee-length pleated skirt, a white blouse with a Peter Pan collar and a strand of pearls [...] [she is replaced by] two 26-year-old women with the same scrubbed, girl-next-door good looks. The two are celebrating their engagement and show off matching diamond rings [...] In the other alcove is a sexy young tawny-skinned woman in her early twenties. She has thick, dark, curly hair flowing into her eyes and down her back; she wears a skintight top over tight jeans. She is talking to her

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<sup>33</sup> bell hooks, born Gloria Jean Watkins (1952-2021) chose not to capitalize her pen name whenever she used it in its written form. She explained that it intended for her readers to focus on her work and not her identity.

<sup>34</sup> bell hooks, ‘Introduction: Revolutionary Attitude’, in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-8, <<https://aboutabicycle.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/bell-hooks-black-looks-race-and-representation.pdf>> [accessed 29 November 2025].

<sup>35</sup> Anon., cited in Inge Blackman and Kathryn Perry, ‘Skirting the Issue: Lesbian Fashion for the 1990s’, *Feminist Review*, 34 (1990), pp. 67–78 (p. 71), doi:10.2307/1395306.

pretty blond lover, also in tight jeans, with a black leather jacket [...] These are the faces of a new generation of women-women who have transformed the lesbian image.<sup>36</sup>

This passage captures the naturalisation of the ‘lesbian chic’ as a movement emerging directly from lesbians themselves, negating the mediatic constructedness of the ‘lesbian chic’. What appears striking is the abundant description of sexy, fashionable feminine-looking lesbians, portrayed as real-life models. Given the previously detailed commodification process of lesbian identities, these descriptions could be written in order to appeal to mainstream audiences. Lesbians are depicted in a way that makes them relatable both for straight women who can see them as fashion models, and for straight men who may find them desirable because they look like conventionally sexy women. Jackson and Gilbertson suggest that it participates in the construction of the ‘hot lesbian’ narrative.<sup>37</sup> The feminisation of girls kissing other girls both resonates with pornographic male fantasies and ‘works to affirm discourses of heterosexuality, in which males are attracted to femininity and females are attracted to masculinity’.<sup>38</sup> It contributes to the hyper-visibility of feminine lesbians and erasure of butches. Indeed, later in the same article, another lesbian bar is described in an entirely different language register:

The first lesbian bar I ever walked into, in Houston, was owned by a woman called Papa Bear. She was mildly obese, with short-cropped, masculine, stone-butche hair. She smoked cigars and wore T-shirts and blue-jeans—she had a key chain on her belt loop and a knife in her boot. Her girlfriend was a stripper. There was a certain sleaziness

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<sup>36</sup> Cited in Ciasullo, ‘Making Her (Inv)Visible’, pp. 592-593.

<sup>37</sup> Sue Jackson and Tamsyn Gilbertson, ‘“Hot Lesbians”: Young People’s Talk About Representations of Lesbianism’, *Sexualities*, 12.2 (2009), pp. 199-224 (p. 211), doi:10.1177/1363460708100919.

<sup>38</sup> Jackson and Gilbertson, ‘“Hot Lesbians”’, p. 211.

associated with it that I somehow could never accept. It gave you a feeling of being less than a real person.<sup>39</sup>

Butches or ‘bulldykes’ here, are described almost humorously. The portrait of Papa Bear is pejorative and unappealing, her masculinity is constructed in terms of ugliness and even disgust. In a patriarchal model that reserves masculinity to men and femininity as the only acceptable gender expression for women, butches jeopardise white hegemonic masculinity and rigid gender roles.<sup>40</sup> In the movie *Bound*, Corky is supposedly a working-class butch falling in love with the gangster’s wife living next door.<sup>41</sup> Following the release of the movie, the cover for *Girlfriends* magazine titled: ‘Is this the butchest Woman in Hollywood?’, referring to Corky’s actress Gina Gershon.<sup>42</sup> As Halberstam states: ‘these films have to represent the allure of the cross-dressed woman but also the limited nature of her transgression [...], ultimately order must be restored in terms of full heterosexual womanhood’.<sup>43</sup> Following this logic, it is striking that only Gershon’s body is entirely denuded during the movie, representing her in a desirable way for male audiences used to seeing her in sexy roles: Corky’s butchness is feminised through the eruption of her body, which therefore functions as a vector of heterosexualisation. Ciasullo argues that this ‘heterosexualization is enabled by the alignment of her femininity with specific racial and socioeconomic attributes: on mainstream cultural landscapes, the femme body is nearly always a white, upper-middle class body’.<sup>44</sup> In this dimension, not only the butch is not representable because they are not feminine, but because

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<sup>39</sup> Cited in Ciasullo, ‘Making Her (Inv)Visible’, p. 601.

<sup>40</sup> Helen Fenwick, ‘Butch Lesbians: Televising Female Masculinity’, in *Women On Screen, Feminism and Femininity In Visual Culture*, ed. by Melanie Waters (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 90-102 (p. 99), doi:10.1057/9780230301979\_7.

<sup>41</sup> *Bound*, dir. by the Wachowski Sisters (USA, 1996).

<sup>42</sup> Cited in Ciasullo, ‘Making Her (Inv)Visible’, p. 591.

<sup>43</sup> Halberstam, *Female Masculinities*, p. 207.

<sup>44</sup> Ciasullo, ‘Making Her (Inv)Visible’, p. 578.

femininity has been coded sexually, racially and in terms of fashion and body-type. Corky being white and conventionally attractive reintegrates her into femininity.

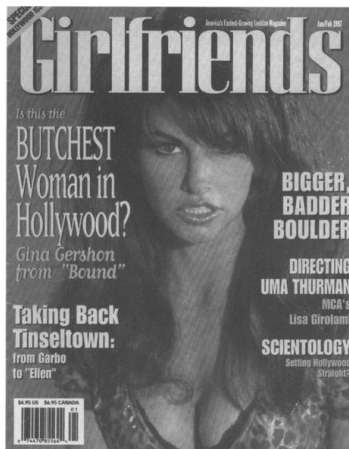


Fig. 4. *Girlfriends* cover, 'Is This the Butchest Woman in Hollywood?' © 1993 H.A.F. Enterprises. Reprinted by permission.

The few examples of actual butches through the media in the 1990s are accordingly almost always black or latinas: Queen Latifah in *Set it Off*,<sup>45</sup> Vasquez in *Aliens*,<sup>46</sup> Tasha in *The L-Word*.<sup>47</sup> To quote bell hooks, it is a marker of the internalization of 'white supremacist values and aesthetics'.<sup>48</sup> Female beauty is encoded with white (skinny) femininity. Diverging from this triptych means butches can only be black, and black women can

only be butch.<sup>49</sup> The lesbian ideal-type that emerges in the wake of the 'lesbian chic' is then excluding elements that do not conform to situated beauty and fashion standards, while reinforcing femininity as the sole gender expression for women. Their sexualisation is parallelly a reminder of the coding of lesbian's representation for a specifically straight audience.

Unlike the feminine chic lesbian, the stereotype associated with lesbianism in popular imagination is the butch.<sup>50</sup> However, their absence from the cultural landscape is remarkable. As underlined earlier, sexuality is believed to manifest visibly on one person. Butches are therefore immediately identified as lesbians because of their styles and behaviours. To refer to k.d. lang cover, Cindy Crawford is hinted at being a lesbian because her masculine co-star is one. Butch is then an identifying identity. In other words: '[Without] the signifier of the butch, the femme's lesbianism disappears, or, more accurately, never appears in the first place'.<sup>51</sup> It

<sup>45</sup> *Set it Off*, dir. by F. Gary Gray (USA, 1996).

<sup>46</sup> *Aliens*, dir. by James Cameron (USA, 1986).

<sup>47</sup> *The L-Word*, dir. by Ilene Chaiken (USA, 2004-2009).

<sup>48</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks*, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Fenwick, 'Butch Lesbians', p. 99.

<sup>50</sup> Ciasullo, 'Making Her (Inv)Visible', p. 579.

<sup>51</sup> Ciasullo, 'Making Her (Inv)Visible', p. 599.

could be argued that the chic lesbian being feminine-looking is then ‘desexualised’, meaning her sexuality is negated.<sup>52</sup> Using the concept of passing is a relevant illustration of this invisibilising mechanism. Robin Maltz explains: ‘Passing’, as used in the context of both race and gender, describes a situation of intelligibility in which the perception of the race or gender of the passing subject is actually a misreading. To pass effectively, a subject is (mis)read as ‘real’.<sup>53</sup> Passing for femmes is then being perceived as straight. Indeed, depicted as conventionally attractive women, nothing gives away their lesbianism. For Richard Dyer however, there are ‘signs of gayness, a repertoire of gestures, expressions, stances, clothing, and even environments that bespeak gayness’.<sup>54</sup> Culturally constructed, these signs are embodied by butches’ masculinity. Erasing them is then desexualising the relationship between the characters that would otherwise have been read as lesbians. It happens in the movie *Fried Green Tomatoes*. In the book,<sup>55</sup> Idgie, the protagonist, is explicitly butch; yet the movie<sup>56</sup> feminises her, which enables straight audiences to read her relationship with Ruth as intense friendship.

Portraying only heterosexualised femme for femme lesbians in the media in addition to the over-representation of straight women playing lesbians, may also reinforce the idea that their lesbianism is not real, a performance. Girls-girls scenes are in this dimension coded as feminine, not lesbian. It serves a “universalizing” function that glosses or erases lesbianism both as an identity and as desire for another woman’.<sup>57</sup> Girl kissing becomes a ‘rather asexual activity’ that straight women can perform.<sup>58</sup> Wilkinson calls this ‘bisexuality à la mode’;<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ciasullo, ‘Making Her (Inv)Visible’, p. 578.

<sup>53</sup> Maltz, ‘Real Butch’, p. 277.

<sup>54</sup> Cited in Walker, *Looking Like What You Are*, p. 9.

<sup>55</sup> Fannie Flagg, *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1987).

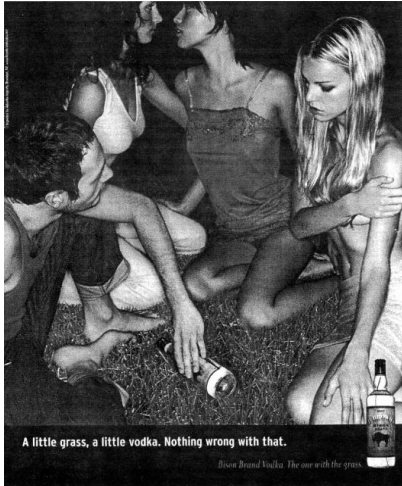
<sup>56</sup> *Fried Green Tomatoes*, dir. by Jon Avnet (USA, 1991).

<sup>57</sup> Jackson and Gilbertson, “‘Hot Lesbians’”, p. 201.

<sup>58</sup> Jackson and Gilbertson, “‘Hot Lesbians’”, p. 211.

<sup>59</sup> Jackson and Gilbertson, “‘Hot Lesbians’”, p. 201.

accordingly, ‘images of lesbianism in mainstream magazines are viewed as accidental, as sexual adventure, or the result of simple horniness’.<sup>60</sup> Femme lesbians sexuality is easily overlooked when coded this way: the scenes are connoted with homoeroticism but operate as



an imagery of desirability for straight audiences. The Bison Vodka advertisement highlights this idea.<sup>61</sup> It uses the appeal of the lesbian image, but redefines it in terms of a temporary role for a Spin the Bottle session during a party. The same happens in the mainstream movie *Chasing Amy*,<sup>62</sup> in which a straight boy chases a lesbian and eventually turns her straight, reinforcing the idea that lesbianism is but a practice, a

temporary phase because lesbians have just not met the right man.

Hence the emergence of an interesting dichotomy: lesbianism is perceived as a performance for femmes and as an identity for butches. Femmes, because they pass as straight are easily ingestible by the heteronormative system, while butches’ sexuality is highly visible in everyday life: they cannot pass as heterosexual. Citing Judith Butler: ‘Performing one’s gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect’.<sup>63</sup> Here, it consists in invisibility in culture and the media. If butches may be marginally seen, their voices however remain unheard. In this sense, Farr and Degroult underlines: ‘to appease a larger market, these butches, who often remain unnamed, have been placed in peripheral roles. They serve as points

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<sup>60</sup> Tom Reichert, ‘“Lesbian Chic” Imagery in Advertising: Interpretations and Insights of Female Same-Sex Eroticism’, *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, 23.2 (2001), pp. 9–22 (p. 21), doi:10.1080/10641734.2001.10505117.

<sup>61</sup> Reichert, ‘“Lesbian Chic” Imagery in Advertising’, p. 16.

<sup>62</sup> *Chasing Amy*, dir. by Kevin Smith (USA, 1997).

<sup>63</sup> Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, *Theatre Journal*, 40.4 (1988), pp. 519–531 (p. 528), doi:10.2307/3207893.

of reference to emphasize the “appropriate” femininity of the primary characters’.<sup>64</sup> By displacing butches from the stereotypical center to the margins of the mainstream narrative, their radicality is both denounced and neutralised. Their appearance confirms people’s preconceptions and reinforces the respectability and heterosexualisation of feminine characters. In the L-Word, Bette, a lightskin black woman, executive in a transgressive contemporary Art Museum, embodies the masculine role in her relationship with Tina, a white, blond and conventionally attractive woman. However, her affair with Candace, a black working-class butch/stud<sup>65</sup> reintegrates Bette in a narrative of respectability: she looks and behaves like an average American woman from the cultural elite.<sup>66</sup> Eventually, straight-passing lesbian imagery suggests that they are not lesbians in essence but in act, blending into heteronormativity which negates the distinctiveness of lesbian subculture.

The rise of ‘lesbian chic’ in the 1990s US popular culture is to be understood through its relative homogeneity. Lesbians are depicted as stylish, feminine women who interact with and reinforce traditional beauty standards. The focus on their glamour, especially among celebrities, allows the sedimentation of an ideal-type that is radically different from the stereotypes associated with lesbians in earlier periods: the butch is slowly replaced. Chic lesbians’ femininity and straight-passing enable them to be reintegrated into liberal and heteronormative tropes. The resulting depoliticisation of their identity, especially through fashion, participates in the idea that lesbians are like everyone; they thus become a category empty enough to be appropriated and commodified. While femmes abundant imagery is

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<sup>64</sup> Daniel Farr and Nathalie Degroult, ‘Understand the Queer World of the L-lesbian Body: Using Queer as Folk and The L Word to Address the Construction of the Lesbian Body’, *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 12.4 (2008), pp. 423–34 (p. 428), doi:10.1080/10894160802278580.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Stud’ is an identity used by some black masculine lesbians to define themselves. Usually seen as the black counterpart to butch, it however corresponds to an autonomous community, culturally and socially situated. For more context, see *The Aggressives*, dir. by Daniel Peddle (USA, 2005).

<sup>66</sup> Farr and Degroult, ‘Understand the Queer World of the L-lesbian Body’, p. 428.

remarkable for the lack of voices given to non-celebrities and the overportrayal of their sexualised bodies, butches remain confined to the margins of the cultural landscape. Their invisibilisation operates as a marker of desexualisation for femmes, whose heterosexualisation and coding in terms of femininity place them in the realm of mainstream reappropriation. What would be equally interesting then, is visibilising the very imagery produced by lesbians in the meantime. Leslie Feinberg's book, *Stone Butch Blues*,<sup>67</sup> serves as a reference to investigate the complex gender identity of butches and their political roots in the US society. Indeed, as Walker underlines: 'lesbian and gay rights movement centered on remaking identity, both public and private, by challenging socially constructed images—or the lack of cultural images—that create oppressive models of identity. This focus on cultural representation puts issues of in/visibility at the structural foundation of identity politics'.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues* (1993).

<sup>68</sup> Walker, *Looking Like What You Are*, p. 7.

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