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# The Work of Survival: Physical, Social, and Emotional Roles of Elite Women in Muscovite Society

Emily Ray

When it comes to gender segregated societies, few have gone so far as elite Russian Muscovite society during the mid-sixteenth century. The Boyars were an aristocratic class within the Russian hierarchy that originated during the founding of Russia. During this era, elite Boyar women were cut off from the public, male-centric sphere of Muscovite society, as such, female voices do not often appear in political and legal histories. Despite the apparent absence of elite women in this society, they served incredibly important roles within the household, especially in regards to the production of clothing and food, the arrangement of marriages, and the formation of social and emotional networks among other women.

Despite the fact that women were sequestered from the male-dominated outside world, they played a vital role in the running of the household, especially in the production of food and clothing. The lady of the house would have had her own hierarchy of servants who followed her every order. As the introduction to *The Domostroi* explains, the text “portrays a self-contained village - a mini-corporation, almost - running under the iron rule of its master and mistress.” In fact, most households in elite Muscovite society during this time had at least fifty but sometimes more than two hundred people dependent on the production of the “stand-

alone kitchens, bakeries, breweries, smokehouses, icehouses, drying rooms, granaries, barns, and stables.”<sup>1</sup> When the term “household” is mentioned, the scale is not remotely similar to the households of the modern day. While they were urban dwellings, the homes of the Boyars were only dependent on the outside world for exotic foods and fabrics, as well as meat and agricultural products from their lands outside the city. In most regards, the household was responsible for making the goods that sustained them. The nature of the house makes the women’s role in the overall society much more important.

The women of the house were responsible for making sure hundreds of people from different social standings were fed and clothed. According to *The Domostroi*, the mistress of the house played a direct role in the management of the house. She should have been able to complete all the tasks she set to her servants so that she could ensure they did them well; “The wife should know how to cook every dish, meat and fish, for feast and fast, and should teach these techniques to her servants. Similarly, she should know how they make beer, mead, vodka, weak beer, kvass, vinegar, and sour cabbage, every liquid normally used in cooking and breadmaking. She should know which crops grow in which fields and how much of a harvest can be expected.” Whether

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<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Johnston Pouncy, introduction to *The Domostroi: Rules for Russian Households in the*

*Time of Ivan the Terrible*, (Cornell NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 23-24.

or not elite women actually knew all of this, the ideals set forth in this instruction manual show how well educated in craft and cooking the mistress should have been. Not only were the mistresses of houses supposed to know the theoretical workings of the household, they were expected to “oversee her servants, those who bake, cook, and engage in any kind of craft.” She had responsibility for making sure the daily production of all the household necessities turned out well and even had direct control over access to locked storerooms.<sup>2</sup> While the master was supposed to patrol the grounds as well as manage the purchase of food stocks, it was not the master’s responsibility to dispense the daily allotment of ingredients for cooking. The happiness and success of the household was theoretically in the husband’s hands, but the day-to-day production of food was carried out by the wife. Also, due to the climate of Russia’s winters, “preserving food to last a household of several hundred people for eight months or so constituted a major undertaking, but failure to perform it adequately carried great costs-literally as well as figuratively.”<sup>3</sup> The mistress not only needed to provide food when the household was producing it, she also had to think ahead to manage the survival of large numbers of people over long winters.

The second largely female responsibility was clothing. To ensure that people didn’t contract diseases or freeze to death in the winter, all aspects of clothing production were vital. The entire supply chain including raising sheep or flax for fiber,

spinning, weaving, and dyeing cloth, hand sewing the garments, and laundering the clothes once they were worn involved women’s labor. *The Domostroi* makes it clear that the mistress should have overseen the household production of clothing just as she did the household production of food. In fact, she should have known the processes used to embroider and sew the garments and dispensed the exact amount of fabric for the work that she wanted servants to do. *The Domostroi* even recommends that “Fine shirts, shifts, and robes should be cut when the mistress is present,” in order to minimize waste. The wife should have also been involved in cleaning the clothes. While she didn’t actually participate in the laundry, “the mistress should know the count of everything herself; she should give everything out to the servants and take all back in full measure, making sure it is bleached and clean.” *The Domostroi* shows the value of seamstresses and embroiderers, instructing the mistress of the house to honor them “as the master does merchants: she feeds them at her own table and sends them food from her own dish.”<sup>4</sup> The highest non-royalty, aristocracy, or military on the social scale were merchants and seamstresses, the two groups of people that provided food and clothing. The process of producing and maintaining clothing was unbelievably time intensive. Modern readers and historians do not often realize the amount of labor that went into clothing. In Muscovite society, the labor of clothing fell primarily to women of all social classes.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Domostroi: Rules for Russian Households in the Time of Ivan the Terrible* (Cornell NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 126-132.

<sup>3</sup> Pouncy, introduction to *The Domostroi*, 24.

<sup>4</sup> *The Domostroi*, 125-127, 162.

Women's role in running the house and supervising the production of food, clothing, and female labor was vitally important for the physical survival of the household. However, elite Russian women also played a very important social role in Muscovite society. The entire political and social system was based on family. The honor and reputation of the family depended on conduct in marriage, and the political relationships with the Tsar depended entirely on familial connections. Patronage of the Tsar meant high status and the "the tsar's in-laws had the greatest access to the ruler and consequently benefited the most from royal patronage. The royal connection made members of their family desirable political and marriage partners and assured them high status among the elite."<sup>5</sup> All of the social mobility among the upper classes was determined through advantageous marriages.

While men were involved in making matches, the upper-class women had a very important role. The daughters of noble families would be protected and promoted by the women of that family and the mothers of sons would be in contact with the mothers of eligible young girls. Men had the final say in which matches would be carried out, but it was the women who made the connections and determined suitability. In fact, one contemporary source describes the process by which the match is inspected, saying, "on the appointed day, the groom sends his mother or sister to inspect the bride."<sup>6</sup> This woman is treated with great respect and

seated next to the bride so she can quiz her and get to know her. Since young men and women did not meet with each other until their marriage, it was up to the older women of the family to determine if the bride was properly educated and honorable. Family honor was technically the overall responsibility of the male Boyars, but once again, the actual practice fell to the "seclusion of elite women to prevent personal attachments between men and women and maximize the clan's freedom to arrange politically and economically appropriate marriages."<sup>7</sup> Female virginity was monumentally important for the honor of the family and overall, the woman's suitability depended on her health, character and family connections rather than personal compatibility between the bride and groom. Also, while older women were very involved in arranging marriages, young women have had little say in this process. Fathers of young girls consulted their wives and families and "having decided to give him [the groom] the girl [in marriage], he makes a detailed list of her dowry... Nothing is told of the matter to the prospective bride, who remains in ignorance thereof."<sup>8</sup> So, while marriage was a place where the gender division was slightly altered, the age hierarchy was still firmly upheld.

Elite women cared for the physical needs of very large households and arranged marriages, the most important political and social institution, but they also contributed to the society in a more emotional nature.

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<sup>5</sup> Pouncy, introduction to *The Domostroi*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Grigorii K. Kotoshikhin, "Kotoshikhin's Description of the Private Lives of the Boyars and Other Ranks of Muscovite Society," in *Medieval*

*Russia: A Source Book*, ed. Basil Dmytryshyn (Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1991) 453.

<sup>7</sup> Pouncy, introduction to *The Domostroi*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> Kotoshikhin "Description of the Private Lives," 453.

Because this society was so gender segregated, with the women living almost entirely away from men, the bonds between elite Russian women were very powerful, especially among family members and across generations. Although different from the radical feminist theories that argue for gender separatism, the primary relationships of elite Muscovite women were with other women, and can therefore be examined using a feminist lens. The system cannot be defined as feminist separatism because it was obviously patriarchal. It was not maintained or initiated by women, their work still benefitted men, and they still were a part of the larger society.<sup>9</sup> However, the extreme gender segregation among elite Muscovites, was not entirely detrimental to women. It even allowed them a measure of power and independence from men. While elite women did not perform any public role, they “played a vital role in the private sphere, not only by running the household (no mean accomplishment) but in defining and maintaining the emotional links between clans that allowed Muscovite politics to function.” Women were responsible for the future of the family through the bearing and raising of children. Regardless of gender, children were cared for by their mothers until they were old enough to learn trades. As the gender separation kept husbands from seeing their wives except under limited circumstances, the relational bonds with their mothers were the most important for young children. Brides, usually still in their teens, left home and were immersed in an entirely

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<sup>9</sup> Marilyn Frye, "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power," *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*, Diana Tietjens Meyers (ed.) (1997) New York: Routledge, pp. 406–414.

new family where “young wives and mothers in-law... interacted daily in restricted surroundings.”<sup>10</sup> It fell to the older women of the family to teach the bride to manage her new home and interact in new places. Even among different households, women had a strong social network. Women did not leave the house aside for two exceptions: to attend church (where they would still be segregated), and to visit other women. *The Domostroi* has advice on how they should behave as guests and encourages women to have those relationships as “such good women make suitable friends, not because of the food they offer, but because of the benefits of their conversation and their knowledge.”<sup>11</sup> Just as the household had a completely separate women’s hierarchy with the mistress in charge of all the female members of the family, servants, and craftspeople, women had their own social sphere. Elite women in muscovite Russia undoubtedly lived in a patriarchal society where they were seen as second-class citizens and sequestered away from the male public. However, they had intimate bonds with other women, both inside and outside of their households and wielded their own power over a separate, female centric world.

Although they lived cloistered lives, elite women in medieval Russian society did not have a negligible role. They played active parts in the physical, social, and emotional wellbeing of their households and female networks. Given the structure of the self-sufficient households, the importance of marriage in politics, and gender segregated

<sup>10</sup> Pouncy, introduction to *The Domostroi*, 29.

<sup>11</sup> *The Domostroi*, 133.

relational networks, this work was especially important. In a society so reliant on human labor, all people must have contributed to the overall production of physical and social goods. In studies of political and legal history, Muscovite women rarely appear

because of the segregation of society, but that does not mean that half the population were simply shut away in rooms and forgotten. Women of all classes were vital to the survival of this society and culture.



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## The Russell Tribunal: An Early Look into U.S. War Crimes in Vietnam

Glynn Bass

The Vietnam War is known for the anti-war movements that escalated, step by step, with the progression of the conflict. As a protector of the weak and the bringer of democracy, the U.S. entered the Cold War as a significant force to stop the spread of Communism at all costs. The Vietnam War was one such cost. As President Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) moved to further escalate the War in 1966, a British philosopher, Bertrand Russell, sought to hold the U.S. accountable for war crimes by drawing a parallel between the Nuremberg trials in Germany and U.S. actions in Vietnam. The Russell Tribunal was a media campaign of sorts, best known as one of the first major anti-war protests of the Vietnam War and one of the only anti-war protests to include an international perspective.

The Russell Tribunal did not prevent the U.S. from further escalating the conflict in Vietnam, but it set the War up as immoral from the start. Before the War began, the international world saw the conflict and America's involvement as problematic. Russell believed that the U.S. was overstepping a boundary. He hoped that if Americans understood what was happening the U.S. would be forced to justify their questionable practices. However, most Americans remained unaware of the international discourse on the issue until the

infamous My Lai Massacre was reported and made headlines across the nation. It was the international world that gave Russell's ideas merit. Challenging U.S. policy at every turn, the Tribunal met with a variety of reactions.<sup>1</sup> International newspapers heavily featured problems with the Tribunal, but to some extent did address the war crime angle and the Tribunal's willingness to confront the United States as a nation. However, the majority of the responses by the press were negative and did not give the war crime angle real merit. Instead, the responses of the press focused on the political reasons for holding the Tribunal and on the man behind the Tribunal. The Tribunal clearly illustrated why the U.S. was guilty of war crimes in Vietnam by providing clear evidence.<sup>2</sup> This helped to further define legal concepts created at the Nuremberg trials, and forced the international world to acknowledge the disaster that was the Vietnam War. The Russell Tribunal failed to halt U.S. actions in Vietnam but was successful in demonstrating that fears over war crimes were a concern throughout the War and that these fears were not simply an anti-war reaction.

Bertrand Russell was a British philosopher, mathematician, and Nobel Laureate in literature as well as a staunch pacifist and harsh critic of U.S. foreign policy. He sought to stage an intervention to

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<sup>1</sup> Luke J Stewart. "Too Loud to Rise above the Silence: the United States vs. the International War Crimes Tribunal, 1966–1967." *The Sixties* 11, no. 1 (2017): 17–45.

<sup>2</sup> Krever, Tor. "Remembering the Russell Tribunal." *London Review of International Law* 5, no. 3 (2017): 1.

prevent further escalation of the Vietnam War, believing that the majority of Americans were unaware of U.S. tactics and policies being used there. Russell saw the War as deeply problematic due to the nature of the conflict and confronted the idea that the U.S. was committing war crimes in Vietnam.<sup>3</sup> He used the new definition of war crime from the Nuremberg Trials and the America's failure to follow the Geneva accords as proof that the U.S. had crossed a moral boundary. Hoping to prove this to Americans and to the international world, in 1966 Russell proposed that a tribunal be held in which the U.S. as a nation and the current president, Lyndon B. Johnson, be tried for war crimes.

The idea of the U.S. committing war crimes against Vietnamese civilians was, to many people, ludicrous. The Tribunal was immediately labeled a mock trial for its complete lack of legal authority and its questionable ties to the Nuremberg Trials. Russell was labeled an anti-American and pro-Communist.<sup>4</sup> Russell, known for his anti-imperialist ideas, may have been biased. However, the points he raised were based on evidence that he believed that if presented to the world, would stand alone in proving guilt. Russell's standing in the world provided his ideas some credibility. Unfortunately, Russell was in his 90s at this time and in poor health. He passed away shortly after the Tribunal was held. The bulk of the work that went into getting the Tribunal put together was done by his secretary. By organizing the

first people's court since the Nuremberg trials, and by drawing direct parallels between Germany and Vietnam, Russell challenged Cold War ideologies and the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Writing in strong protest against the war early on. Despite growing discontentment with the war and a barrage of anti-war protests, it seemed nothing could halt the war machine. The Pentagon Papers, released in 1971, demonstrated just how unwilling America was to confront the war. Despite overwhelming evidence that the war was not what had been sold to the American public splashed across the morning papers. The Tribunal sought to prevent escalation early in the war, but many Americans were blissfully unaware that escalation was the harsh reality. Built on a tangled web of deceit and questionable practices the Tribunal, driven by Russell's advanced age and his desire to prevent further escalation, may have been ill timed because it occurred too early, when the war in Vietnam was more justifiable.

Furthermore, the connection to the Nuremberg Trials was shaky because the Nuremberg Trials were unlawful in many ways. The template of the Nuremberg Trials is complex and legally problematic.<sup>5</sup> With aspects of the Nuremberg Trials done in kangaroo court fashion. In the case of the Nuremberg Trials there was plenty of evidence and political support. This was a questionable but effective model for the Tribunal to use, with a focus on how the Nuremberg Trials changed international law

<sup>3</sup> Bertrand Russell, *War Crimes in Vietnam*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967).

<sup>4</sup> Luke. "Too Loud to Rise above the Silence: the United States vs. the International War Crimes Tribunal, 1966–1967."4.

<sup>5</sup> Tessa Mckeown, "The Nuremberg Trial: Procedural Due Process at the International Military Tribunal," *Victoria University of Wellington Law Review* 45, no. 1 (January 2014):109.

and put terms like genocide and acts of aggression into play.<sup>6</sup> The Nuremberg Trials created a new legal definition of crimes against humanity brought on by the Holocaust and Nazi Germany's treatment of prisoners of war and civilians and the dehumanization of millions of people. The idea that the U.S could be committing war crimes on the scale the Tribunal implied was, to many Americans, unbelievable at this time. After all, the U.S was in Vietnam to protect the Vietnamese and to bring democracy and peace.

It is clear that the claims of civilians being bombed, tortured, and killed as part of a need for high kill ratios and body counts were present early in the war.<sup>7</sup> Top officials knew that there were high numbers of civilian deaths. As McNamara wrote, "We would have killed the North Vietnamese army twice".<sup>8</sup> Officials understood that the war was carried out in operations that did not discriminate against civilians. In his book, *Working-Class War*, Christian Appy discusses the U.S. policy regarding confirmed kills and civilian deaths. The dehumanization of the Vietnamese combined with pressure to have a good kill ratio led to civilians' deaths, which were classified as enemies, to be the norm.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. government was keenly aware that a good number of dead Vietnamese were civilians.

<sup>6</sup> Henry C. Theriault, "Genocidal Mutation and The Challenge of Definition," *Metaphilosophy* 41, no. 4 (2010): pp. 481-524.

<sup>7</sup> John Tirman, *The Deaths of Others: The Fate of Civilians in America's Wars*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Deborah Nelson. *The War Behind Me: Vietnam Veterans Confront the Truth about U.S. War Crimes*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 165.

As indicated by the lack of recovered weapons. To make matters worse, civilian deaths often occurred as a result of torture administered in interrogations or as a result of prolonged detainment.<sup>10</sup> The Tribunal was concerned with such interrogations, claiming that such torture was illegal. The bombing of North Vietnam, which was meant to hit industry and points of military operation, was often dropped on civilian targets such as churches and schools. The Tribunal provided a barrage of evidence early on in the War of the damage done to civilians with bombing and the use of napalm.<sup>11</sup> It was these claims that spurred the need for a Tribunal from Russell's perspective. Ultimately, it was up to the international world to respond, but first the Tribunal needed to make its position clear.

Press coverage was the factor that made or broke the Tribunal, and which illustrates the complexities of Cold War politics. With no legal standing, the Tribunal's legitimacy was based on the target audience's reactions. Russell hoped that the Tribunal would force Americans to recognize what was happening and to spur discontent over the war.<sup>12</sup> Without press coverage, the Tribunal faltered and struggled to gain momentum. The North Vietnamese government in particular hoped that the Tribunal would gain traction but recognized

<sup>9</sup> Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (United States: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 164.

<sup>10</sup> Nelson, *The War Behind Me*, 49.

<sup>11</sup> "Russell Tribunal Shocked by Boy's 'Napalm' Burns." *Boston Globe* (1960-1988), May 07, 1967. <https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/docview/366656753?accountid=1453>.

<sup>12</sup> Russell, *War Crimes in Vietnam*, 10.

that this was unlikely.<sup>13</sup> By standing up for and associating with the North Vietnamese government, the Tribunal cast a pro-Communist light on the proceedings, providing the press with good reason to ignore or slander the Tribunal. The existing press coverage surrounding the Tribunal was overwhelmingly negative, especially in American newspapers and in newspapers from the United States allies along with other countries who considered themselves to be anti-Communist. This negative press coverage portrayed the Tribunal as a mock trial headed by Russell deemed to be a paranoid anti-American. The age-old slogan ‘any press is good press’ holds true here to some extent because the negative press coverage put the Tribunal in the world news. However, overall, it greatly harmed the Tribunal’s message and credibility in the world.

While the Tribunal and its leaders fretted over the negative press, the LBJ administration and the CIA gloated over the lack of positive press coverage.<sup>14</sup> While the Tribunal was considered by many people (including those involved with the CIA) to be a farce, it was a dangerous one. The events of

1966 and early 1967 were the beginning of further American escalation of the Vietnam War. The LBJ administration was keenly aware that the escalation of the War led to anti-war sentiments and protests. The Tribunal, with its anti-imperialist agenda and goal to de-escalate the War, threatened citizen complacency about America’s involvement and provided real ammunition to those who spoke out against the War. Early on the Western world worked to keep U.S. aggression off front pages.<sup>15</sup> Press coverage featuring the Tribunal’s messages threatened to destroy such efforts.

Any coverage that favored the Tribunal was deemed by the CIA to be negative press coverage for the United States.<sup>16</sup> Coverage that harmed the Tribunal was seen by the CIA to be encouraging and an indicator that the Tribunal’s damage could be minimized. The U.S government relied on the press coverage to gauge how the domestic and international world saw the Tribunal and how its later findings were received.<sup>17</sup> This indicated that the LBJ administration was deeply concerned with the Tribunal and the press attention it received due to its potential effects on foreign relations and policies.

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<sup>13</sup> “North Vietnam’s reservations concerning the planning for the Bertrand Russell war crimes tribunal and its intention to coordinate with the JCP on collection of evidence,” Intelligence Information Cable, February 23, 1967. Central Intelligence Agency, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, document 0005429136.

<sup>14</sup> “The Bertrand Russell Trial” 1967 telegram describing media attention. Folder: 016044-005-0019 Found in: Lyndon B. Johnson National Security Files, 1963-1969, Vietnam, Third Supplement. Proquest History Vault.6.; “Anti-War Protests and Movements”. Folder: 002793-020-0901. Jan 01, 1967 - Dec 31, 1967.: Lyndon B. Johnson National Security Files, 1963-1969, Vietnam, Second Supplement. Proquest History Vault. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Krever, “Remembering the Russell Tribunal.”

<sup>16</sup> “Plans of Bertrand Russell to establish branches of the international war crimes tribunal in Cuba and North Korea” Intelligence Information Cable, February 24, 1967. Central Intelligence Agency, Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, document 0005425077

<sup>17</sup> “The Bertrand Russell Trail” 1967 telegram describing media attention. Folder: 016044-005-0019 Found in: Lyndon B. Johnson National Security Files, 1963-1969, Vietnam, Third Supplement. Proquest History Vault.6.

The Tribunal and the evidence it presented to the international world was a real threat. The international world recognized that the Vietnam War was deeply problematic and the U.S rationale for its actions in Vietnam was lacking. The U.S., a peacekeeper in the world, was engaging in a questionable war with no end in sight. As the War escalated the problematic aspects appeared front and center. The main problems were the bombings and the use of napalm indiscriminately dropped in heavily populated areas consisting of mostly civilians. This was deeply concerning to the Tribunal and an aspect of the War that the coverage of the Tribunal did shed light on. The press coverage of the Tribunal somewhat focused on claims that the U.S was engaged in a genocide of sorts and highlighted the bombing of civilians, as well as the sheer number of bombs dropped. The LBJ administration recognized the need to keep this reality out of the press and to keep coverage positive. The bad press aided the LBJ administration in dismissing the Tribunal.<sup>18</sup> Skeptics of the Tribunal slowly began to recognize that the evidence presented in regard to the U.S bombing tactics was indeed correct, and that the Tribunal was right in finding U.S. tactics questionable.

Press coverage from the time illustrates the complexities of the Tribunal

and the international world's relationships with the United States. The press coverage of the Tribunal is best thought of in two categories. Most newspapers were anti-Tribunal and fears over harming relations with the U.S. kept the reporting by newspapers around the world to a minimum during the time that the Tribunal was attempting to become established. This greatly hindered the Tribunal. Initially, the world was more concerned with where the Tribunal was to be held than what it had to say. Despite hopes that the news coverage would be about the Tribunal's merit, the news coverage instead acknowledged the Tribunal's standing as a potential destroyer of long-standing political relationships and highlighted the desire of much of the world to wash its hands of the whole thing before it began. An article in *The New York Times* clearly illustrates this; the article reported "that a Dutch-owned hotel in France booked for the Tribunal had canceled, not realizing what the booking was for."<sup>19</sup> The reason given was that the hotel's director was pro-American. The Tribunal's second session was met with equal resistance. One newspaper article illustrated the problem, stating that "Clearly few western countries would want to irritate the U.S. by playing

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<sup>18</sup> Stewart, "Too Loud to Rise above the Silence: the United States vs. the International War Crimes Tribunal, 1966–1967."

<sup>19</sup> "Russell 'Tribunal' Loses Paris Hotel 'Courtroom'." *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Apr 12, 1967. [https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/docview/117450968?accoun-  
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host to the Tribunal".<sup>20</sup> While the Tribunal was disliked, the evidence presented at the sessions was of interest and some merit was given to it in the coverage by the press. However, the press attention given to the Tribunal's struggles made it clear that the Tribunal was not well recognized and that it was an ill-organized endeavor.

Coverage that fully portrayed the Tribunal and its findings in a positive light was rare. A determining factor was the location of the newspaper. Early reporting was clearly divided and influenced by political affiliation with pro-Communist papers. One hurdle that the Tribunal often faced was the accusation by the press that the verdict was predetermined. This was an effective strategy for casting doubt on the legitimacy of the Tribunal, to some extent this was a valid fear. One newspaper wrote, "there is no doubt as to its verdict; its members include numerous pro-

Communists".<sup>21</sup> While such coverage attacked the Tribunal,<sup>22</sup> it rarely attacked Bertrand Russell outright, recognizing his international status.

The second category of the coverage did what Russell hoped for by including specifics of the war crimes, evidence, and the real reasons behind the Tribunal. Despite the initial trouble over finding a location and the negative press coverage that capitalized on this reality in an attempt to spurn the Tribunal's efforts, the first session led to an increase in positive press coverage. One London paper painted this turn of events stating that the impressive evidence had drawn non-Communist support for the Tribunal. This evidence included the statements of civilians, such a young boy who had napalm dropped on him in his village.<sup>23</sup> This was one of the main points that the Tribunal stood for, claiming that the U.S. was bombing civilians and using illegal

<sup>20</sup> Huntford Roland, "Russell 'Tribunal' to Reconvene in Denmark." *The Jerusalem Post (1950-1988)*, Sep 27,

1967. <https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/docview/929718866?accountid=14503>.

<sup>21</sup> "The Russell 'Tribunal'." *The Sun (1837-1994)*, Apr 25, 1967.

<https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/docview/539458835?accountid=14503>.

<sup>22</sup> "Russell Tribunal Hits Trouble." *The Observer (1901-2003)*, Apr 30, 1967.

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; Ali, Tariq. "Russell Tribunal: First Session." *New Statesman*, 1967, 641,

<https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/docview/1306929470?accountid=14503>

<sup>23</sup> "Russell Tribunal Shocked by Boy's 'Napalm' Burns." *Boston Globe (1960-1988)*, May 07, 1967.

<https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/docview/366656753?accountid=14503>.

": "U.S. Guilty, Russell Tribunal Finds." *The Globe and Mail (1936-2016)*, May 11, 1967.

<https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/docview/1270042366?accountid=14503>.



weapons (i.e., napalm) on civilians.<sup>24</sup> These actions, to the Tribunal, were acts of aggression deemed illegal in the Geneva Accords. This contradicted the Pentagon's denial that such bombings were taking place.<sup>25</sup> U.S bombing led to the deaths of civilians and the administration understood that this could be reported on negatively. Johnson and his administration understood how delicate the situation was. LBJ, worried about potential press coverage regarding civilian deaths due to bombing, instructed that "special measures to explain our bombing policy" be put in place.<sup>26</sup> The newspapers that were receptive to reporting on the war crimes focused on the Tribunal's accusations of acts of aggression and claims of genocide in Vietnam.<sup>27</sup> These claims were backed with solid evidence and these were terms that the media was comfortable using.<sup>28</sup>

Had the Tribunal received better press coverage initially, would it have helped to prevent further escalation of the nature of the War that led to events such as My Lai?

Would the accusations against the U.S. have held more weight if the trial had not been classified by a majority of the press as a mock trial? Most likely not. The Tribunal was problematic from the start, because it was seen as disorganized and deeply biased with a clear anti-imperialist agenda. The press coverage in many ways simply reflected this reality, rightly questioning whether the Tribunal's findings were predetermined. Certainly, the lack of coverage put the Tribunal at a disadvantage and proved that the world was not willing to confront a major world power over a proxy war. The negative press emphasized the problems that the Tribunal faced and minimized its findings. This put the valid idea of war crimes in Vietnam to the side of a much larger debate.

The Vietnam Tribunal, as it has come to be called, was not successful in halting U.S. aggression in Vietnam as intended, nor did its verdict land with much weight in America. However, the Tribunal had far reaching impacts.<sup>29</sup> The Tribunal further

<sup>24</sup> "Russell Tribunal Told Civilians Bomber Targets." *The Globe and Mail* (1936-2016), May 04, 1967.

<https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/docview/1270067559?accountid=14503>.

<sup>25</sup> Tariq Ali, "Russell Tribunal: First Session." *New Statesman*, 1967, 641, <https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/docview/1306929470?accountid=14503>

<sup>26</sup> Johnson Library, National Security File, Files of Walt Rostow, Bombing. Top Secret. "Debate Over Expansion of the War", Feb-May. Vietnam 1967 documents. Foreign Relations of the United States. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>

<sup>27</sup> "Cambodia Complains to Russell Tribunal." *The Irish Times* (1921-Current File), May 08, 1967. <https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/docview/524846377?accountid=14503> ; "Cambodian C.o.S. Testifies before Vietnam Tribunal." *The Jerusalem Post* (1950-1988), May 08, 1967. <https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/docview/928297401?accountid=14503>.

<sup>28</sup> "Russell 'Tribunal' Hears a U.S. Negro." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Nov 26, 1967. <https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/docview/117309125?accountid=1453>.

Note the word genocide is explicitly used as well as brief mention that Russell's secretary American passport was taken away to restrict movement.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Boyle and Audrey Kobayashi, "In the Face of Epistemic Injustices: on the Meaning of People-Led War Crimes Tribunals."

cemented the definitions terms such as acts of aggression and genocide. The Tribunal also put in place a method for challenging a state on the premises of wrongdoing. Lastly, the Tribunal provided a way for groups such as Vietnamese civilians to have a voice backed by the international community.<sup>30</sup> However, the Tribunal was not without its failings and drawbacks. The Tribunal had no legal standing, and its findings were largely ignored by the United States. The Tribunal did not prevent the United States from further escalating the War. Instead, the Tribunal challenged a major world power, one which was winning, on the bases of relatively new international laws derived from the Nuremberg Trials. The Tribunal specified how and why the United States' actions in Vietnam could be considered war crimes which set a precedent that has informed similar tribunals which have taken place after the War in Vietnam. Composed of an international panel, the Tribunal leveled the field by providing North Vietnam with a voice. The Tribunal left a record of U.S. actions which challenged the American anti-Communist agenda, labeling it for what it was; an imperialist policy that gave the U.S. immense power on the world stage and allowed the U.S. to engage in acts that under normal circumstances would have shocked the world. The U.S. used the threat of Communism to justify the war. The most important justification was that of the tactics

the U.S. used which proved ineffective against the enemy and resulted in extreme numbers of civilian casualties.

The war in Vietnam was controversial from the beginning and raised concerns in the international community. The Russell Tribunal gave voice to these concerns. The U.S. was challenged at the height of the conflict when they were moving to seal the fate of the nature of the war, and most importantly, when they appeared to be winning. The Tribunal came to fruition at a key moment when the LBJ administration was deliberating further escalation and student protests in American colleges gained attention around the world. When the My Lai Massacre was reported, the American Public and skeptics abroad were besieged with accusations about U.S. tactics and actions in Vietnam. The war was controversial from the start, but the traction needed to validate claims of wrongdoing by five U.S presidents stagnated for the duration of the war. My Lai demonstrated the unwillingness of the nation to confront war crimes, with William Calley Jr. having been tied as a war criminal was ultimately released and the top officials involved in the infamous massacre protected. The Russell Tribunal was one of the many failed attempts to bring the war to a halt. Yet as a protest the Tribunal was effective in forcing the world to acknowledge the reality of the kind of war the war in Vietnam was from the beginning.

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<sup>30</sup> Marcos Zunino, "Subversive Justice: The Russell Vietnam War Crimes Tribunal and Transitional

Justice," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 10, no. 2 (January 2016): pp. 211-229.

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## A Soundtrack to Genocide: How Popular Radio was Used to Incite Mass Murder in Rwanda

Nathan Sledgister

Rwanda, the land of a thousand hills, saw numerous tragedies during the 20th century. By 1994, Rwanda had survived Belgian colonialism, post-colonial dictatorship, and an ongoing civil war. By the beginning of that year, things appeared to be improving for Rwanda, with negotiations to end the conflict underway. However, almost overnight this hope turned to terror. The assassination of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana would see the peace talks fail almost overnight, plunging Rwanda into a wave of spontaneous mass murder that claimed the lives of over 800,000 people in just four months. At the epicenter of this violence was Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM), a pop music radio station. RTLM built an audience by playing contemporary popular music, using Rwandan celebrities to build mass appeal.<sup>1</sup> RTLM was not merely an institution of Rwandan popular culture. Rather, the station used that popular culture as a vector for ethnonationalist propaganda, broadcasting messages dehumanizing Tutsi people, disparaging peace talks, and ultimately inciting and abetting genocide, activities proven by transcripts taken from the studio's own official recordings.

Rwanda has a particularly difficult history of ethnic tension. The nation is divided between two distinct ethnic groups,

the Hutu and Tutsi. The Hutu represent the majority of the nation, accounting for roughly 85% of the Rwandan population in 1994, while the Tutsi accounted for only 14%. Tensions between these groups originate under Belgian colonial law. Belgium took control of Rwanda in 1921, establishing a colonial administration in the region. Under this new regime, Rwandan society was almost completely stratified by ethnicity. Rwandan citizens were issued ethnic identification cards, which marked them as either Hutu or Tutsi. These identification cards, which were a legal requirement to live in Rwanda, were used to systematically discriminate against Hutus.<sup>2</sup> A Tutsi identification card guaranteed whoever possessed it favorable treatment under colonial law. Tutsis were given preferential treatment in employment and education, while Hutus were excluded from universities and relegated to low-paying, menial labor. This mistreatment engendered a sense of unity among the Hutu as well as a deep resentment of the Tutsi. Rwanda gained independence in 1961 under the pretense that the nation would build a democratic state. However, due to the colonial mindset regarding ethnic groups, "the ethnic majority was necessarily the same as the democratic majority".<sup>3</sup> Rather than build a democracy, independence allowed Hutu radicals to

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<sup>1</sup> Donald McNeil, *Killer Songs*, New York Times, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/17/magazine/killer-songs.html?src=pm>

<sup>2</sup> Alison Des Forges Liebhafsky, *"Leave None to Tell the Story": Genocide in Rwanda* (New York, NY: Human Rights Watch, 1999), 309.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

establish their own, Hutu-dominated, status quo. In this climate of Hutu dominance, Juvenal Habyarimana came to power in 1973.

Habyarimana was an autocrat who maintained the Hutu-dominant status quo, and by 1990 his control over the country had begun to fade. A group of dissidents and opponents to Habyarimana's rule called the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) had been gaining momentum in Uganda, a neighbor of Rwanda where Habyarimana held no power. In 1990, the RPF launched an invasion across the border, plunging Rwanda into a civil war. This invasion would see Habyarimana and his inner circle radicalize, believing that "domestic Tutsi were fifth columnists for the Rwandan Patriotic Front".<sup>4</sup> Habyarimana was still, however, the highest official in Rwanda, and was unable to state these views himself. Instead, Habyarimana supported Felicien Kabuga, a businessman and Hutu supremacist who founded RTLM in 1993.

Felicien Kabuga, Habyarimana's brother-in-law, was a successful businessman, and had amassed substantial wealth by 1993. Kabuga leveraged his financial success, as well as familial connections, to gain entry into the Akazu, a political clique of Hutu radicals personally controlled by Habyarimana. These connections earned him a position in Habyarimana's cabinet as the Presidential Financial Advisor of Rwanda, while his extensive personal wealth was used to help fund the Akazu directly.<sup>5</sup> RTLM, however, would be Kabuga's greatest contribution to

the Hutu power movement. It allowed the government to establish a channel of propaganda which was privately owned, and thus defensible under the principle of free speech.

Kabuga saw the opportunity to use radio as a tool to spread Hutu power messages. Radio was the most popular media format in Rwanda, but there were only two radio stations with the capability to broadcast nationally: Radio Rwanda, the official government station, and Radio Muhabura, a station controlled by the RPF. Neither station had managed to gain a significant audience. Radio Rwanda was woefully outdated, with the station often playing patriotic songs from the 1970s, simply because the station had no other music available in their collection.<sup>6</sup> Although Radio Muhabura's content was far more modern, the station was openly affiliated with the RPF. Radio Muhabura appealed to the Tutsi population, but Hutu listeners of the station risked being associated with the RPF. This limited the growth of Radio Muhabura, as tuning into the station was a political statement many Rwandans did not feel comfortable making. RTLM was able to capitalize significantly on the media vacuum, offering Rwandan audiences contemporary, interesting music without risking association with the RPF. Kabuga was, from the founding of RTLM, open about the station's purpose as a mouthpiece of the Hutu power movement.<sup>7</sup> But because the station was safer than Radio Muhabura and more entertaining than Radio Rwanda they

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<sup>4</sup> McNeil, *Killer Songs*.

<sup>5</sup> Linda Kirschke. *Broadcasting Genocide: Censorship, Propaganda & State-Sponsored Violence in Rwanda 1990-1994*. (London, UK: Article 19, 1996), 41.

<sup>6</sup> Liebhafsky, "Leave None to Tell the Story", 311.

<sup>7</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, *The Prosecutor vs Ferdinand Nahimana and Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza*, 2003.

were able to draw an audience beyond Hutu nationalists and enter mainstream popularity.

Attempts at a peace process between the RPF and the Rwandan government began in 1992. The following year the Arusha Accords were signed. The Arusha Accords were a series of treaties which established a formal ceasefire, and began a formal process of democratization, ethnic integration, and reconciliation between the government and the RPF. The Accords placed restrictions on the content of Radio Rwanda, forcing the removal of Hutu power messaging from the station. RTLM, However, was a private company, not a government entity. This meant that the restrictions on hate speech and racial incitement did not apply, as there was no formal connection between the government and RTLM. Kabuga, however, was a close ally of Habyarimana, who supported the station's Hutu power propaganda and anti-Tutsi messages. Since Hutu power was no longer allowed on Radio Rwanda, Habyarimana began to discreetly assist Kabuga and his station. While RTLM was technically independent, the station broadcast using Radio Rwanda's facilities and personnel.<sup>8</sup> It Used this assistance, alongside its ability to attract a mainstream audience with its musical content, to maximize the impact of its radical Hutu power broadcasts.

RTLM operated as a propaganda outlet disguised as an independent broadcast network. However, RTLM did not

necessarily follow the public stance of the government in order to disseminate this anti-Tutsi propaganda. Instead, RTLM branded itself as something of an underground station, routinely criticizing the government and Radio Rwanda, though never Habyarimana directly.<sup>9</sup> The station targeted Radio Rwanda, the Arusha Accords, and the actions of liberal politicians. These criticisms were in line with Kabuga and Habyarimana's personal opinions but ran counter to the official word of the government. Willingness to criticize the government made clear to everyone in Rwanda and abroad that this was not an official station. This meant that RTLM was protected under free speech laws, since it was officially a private entity.<sup>10</sup> Since RTLM was officially independent, they were able to push Hutu power into mainstream Rwandan culture while hiding behind the protections of free speech.

Despite their criticisms, RTLM was still an explicitly pro-government station, as seen in the statement that "our [RTLM's] objective ... is to fight for the republic and for democracy".<sup>11</sup> Officially, the station had no party allegiance, stating that any Rwandan political group could broadcast their messages on the station, "on the condition that they fight for the republic".<sup>12</sup> In practice, this meant only far-right Hutu power organizations would receive support from the station, such as the Republican Democratic Movement and the Coalition for the Defense of the Republic. These parties were held up

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<sup>8</sup> Radio Netherlands Media Network, *Hate Radio: Rwanda*, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Concordia University, *Rwandan Radio Transcripts: RTLM*, [http://migs.concordia.ca/links/RwandanRadioTrascri pts\\_RTLM.htm](http://migs.concordia.ca/links/RwandanRadioTrascri pts_RTLM.htm), 38.

<sup>10</sup> Concordia University, *Rwandan Radio Transcripts*, 38.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

as proof that RTLM was an independent station. In practice, these were the only parties supported by RTLM which were not affiliated with the government.

RTLM stood against liberalism in Rwanda, opposing moderate political organizations and liberal Hutus. Broadcasting derided racial tolerance, political liberalism, and peace activism as anti-Rwandan beliefs. RTLM broadcasts derided Hutu moderates as unpatriotic and played songs which insinuated liberalism was a form of treason against the Hutu people.<sup>13</sup> In 1993, Simon Bikindi, Rwanda's most popular musician at the time, released a song advocating these views which received extensive airplay on RTLM.<sup>14</sup> Kabuga's message was clear, political moderation was unpatriotic and anti-Hutu, and true Rwandan patriots were radical.

Despite their opposition to moderate politics, RTLM was at its core a Hutu power organization. Anti-Tutsi propaganda was ultimately its primary focus. RTLM decried the Tutsi as fifth columnists, who all supported the RPF and the return of pre-independence Tutsi supremacy. RTLM messages regarding the Tutsi were explicitly dehumanizing, relegating them to a national out-group and reinforcing the idea that Hutus were the only true Rwandans. Tutsis were referred to as cockroaches and routinely degraded, mocked, and belittled on air.<sup>15</sup> Even before the genocide began, Tutsi people had been relegated to a position less than second class citizens by RTLM messaging. They were subhumans, Rwanda was better

without them, and anyone who disagreed did so because they had betrayed their own people.

RTLM's message, ultimately, was that Rwanda consisted of one demographic, radical Hutus. Tutsis, liberals, peace activists, and proponents of racial tolerance weren't simply second-class citizens. Instead, these people were pests. This rhetoric easily justifies ethnic and political violence as nothing more than pest control and describes ethnic intolerance as a patriotic virtue.

On April 6th, 1994 Juvenal Habyarimana was assassinated when a surface-to-air missile struck his private jet while en route to negotiations with the RPF. It remains unclear who exactly was responsible for the attack. The Rwandan government blamed the RPF for the attack, decrying the groups as traitors who lured Habyarimana with peace negotiations and then killed him. There is little evidence to support the involvement of the RPF. Indeed, little evidence at all remains regarding the assassination. United Nations investigators, however, suspected the involvement of the Akazu, who were "planning an apocalypse".<sup>16</sup>

Regardless of which group carried out the assassination, Habyarimana's death would give the Akazu justification to act on their hateful beliefs. The day after the attack on Habyarimana's jet, Rwanda exploded into mass violence. Civilian militias, many being little more than impromptu lynch mobs, took to the streets to hunt Tutsis. RTLM actively supported and encouraged this violence.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>14</sup> McNeil, *Killer Songs*.

<sup>15</sup> Concordia University, *Rwandan Radio Transcripts*, 30.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Gourevitch, *We Regret to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families*, (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 113.



Before Habyarimana had died, RTLM had broadcast Hutu power messages. During the genocide it became a weapon against the Tutsi.

As the violence in Rwanda escalated, RTLM involvement in the killings ramped up as well. Kabuga's rhetoric had at no point been moderate, but as the genocide escalated, RTLM drifted even further into extremism. Anti-Tutsi broadcasts continued, dehumanizing Tutsis, blaming them for Habyarimana's death, and making explicit calls for their extermination. RTLM messages began to exalt genocidal militiamen as liberators, drawing no distinction between Tutsi civilians and RPF militants. Massacres of Tutsis were rebranded as heroic victories against rebels in RTLM news broadcasts.<sup>17</sup> RTLM was not, however, content with glorifying killers. As the violence escalated, the station began directly abetting them as well.

RTLM began to organize lynch mobs and militia groups into a cohesive national militia known as the Interahamwe. The station began issuing kill lists and directing militiamen to locations where Tutsi refugees were hiding.<sup>18</sup> The Interahamwe used this information and organized civilians into death squads. In villages where the Interahame was active, civilians were conscripted into militias and ordered that they "were to do nothing but kill Tutsis".<sup>19</sup> These civilian squads were then ordered to

search the Rwandan countryside for Tutsis, who were to be killed on sight. These militias largely consisted of any able-bodied man available, regardless of military training or combat capabilities. These men were organized into kill squads with their peers and friends, with a focus on grouping friends rather than creating efficient squads with diverse skill sets. As a result, these militias were generally untrained, undisciplined, and had little experience tracking people. RTLM broadcasting allowed the militias to mitigate this disadvantage. RTLM assistance ensured that, even if the militia members were unable to locate Tutsis on their own, there would be a reliable source of information which could provide the Interahamwe a constant supply of Tutsi victims. Approximately 10% of the violence, or roughly 80,000 deaths, are directly attributed to RTLM as a result of their publicization of Tutsi locations.<sup>20</sup>

Rwanda's sudden descent into mass murder significantly escalated the civil war. Pressure on both sides to end the conflict quickly and decisively mounted. The RPF, largely sympathetic to the Tutsi cause, renewed their offensive into Rwanda, hoping to seize control of the country and end the violence. Additionally, the brutality in Rwanda began to draw international condemnation, and a UN task force was deployed to end the violence and protect refugees. By July 1994 the RPF had taken control of Rwanda, with the former

<sup>17</sup> Concordia University, *Rwandan Radio Transcripts*, 80.

<sup>18</sup> Russel Smith, *Africa / The Impact of Hate Media in Rwanda*, BBC News, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Jean Hatzfeld, Linda Coverdale, & Susan Sontag, *Machete Season: the Killers in Rwanda Speak: a*

*Report*, (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006), 36.

<sup>20</sup>David Yanagizawa-Drott, "Propaganda and Conflict: Evidence from the Rwandan Genocide\*", (*The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 129, no. 4 (2014): 1947–94. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qju020>), 1947.

government and their supporters having been driven into exile in Zaire (now The Democratic Republic of Congo). Even as their political situation worsened and the RPF closed in, RTLM maintained their campaign against the Tutsi. As late as July, mere days before the collapse of the Hutu power movement in Rwanda, RTLM was desperately attempting to sway French soldiers from the UN mission to their cause.<sup>21</sup> However, as RPF control over Rwanda grew, the operating situation for RTLM became exceedingly difficult. Felicien Kabuga was forced to flee the country in June of 1994, with the remaining staff following under a month later. Dedicated RTLM staff and supporters initially intended to broadcast from Zaire, but as it became clear the RPF and United Nations would be investigating the violence in Rwanda as a crime against humanity they went quiet.

Despite their silence, the United Nations criminal investigation focused significant attention on the RTLM. In 1998 the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (UNICTR) issued numerous indictments for crimes against humanity against several administrators and radio personalities associated with RTLM. Felicien Kabuga was indicted on multiple charges, including conspiracy and public indictment to commit genocide. (Felicien Kabuga was not apprehended until May 2020 and is currently awaiting trial for these charges at the time of writing.) The UNICTR also charged station director Ferdinand Nahimana and chairman Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza with

conspiracy and public incitement to commit genocide. The trial of these men, and testimony of Barayagwiza in particular, would reveal the extent of the Hutu power conspiracy. UN prosecutors confirmed, via the testimony of these men, that Hutu power was the chief function of RTLM from the station's founding. Barayagwiza confirmed that Kabuga had created the station to be a source of hate speech and ethnonationalist propaganda intentionally.<sup>22</sup> These trials also prove that RTLM staff, at least at the executive level, understood the station was founded to exploit a loophole in the Arusha Accords.<sup>23</sup> Effectively, the trial of Nahimana and Barayagwiza confirmed that RTLM was a propaganda vector with violent intentions and connections to the government, rather than a private company run by a particularly hateful proprietor.

The UNICTR also indicted Simon Bikindi, as well as several radio personalities for public incitement to commit genocide. These trials demonstrate the popularity of RTLM during its time broadcasting, illustrating their use of popular music and wide-reaching and popular broadcast personalities. Simon Bikindi was the most popular Rwandan musician in 1994, and his conviction solidified the connection between Rwandan pop music and Hutu power. The trial of Georges Ruggiu, the only non-Rwandan indicted for the genocide, provides special insight into the operations of RTLM. Ruggiu, a white Belgian, immigrated to Rwanda in 1993, where he found employment with RTLM as a broadcast host.

<sup>21</sup> Concordia University, *Rwandan Radio Transcripts*, 85.

<sup>22</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, *The Prosecutor vs Ferdinand Nahimana and Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza*, 2003, 166.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 167.

His programs on RTLM contained the usual anti-Tutsi propaganda of the station but were generally not broadcast in the Kinyarwanda language. Instead, Ruggiu was intended to appeal to French-speaking foreigners and focused on converting the Belgian-majority peacekeeping forces.<sup>24</sup> These trials prove RTLM was willing to use any avenue to complete their goal of ethnic cleansing, from exploiting popular music to courting the support of Rwanda's former colonizers.

Estimating the impact of RTLM on the Rwandan Genocide is difficult. Although it is almost indisputable that they played a role, the exact scope of this role is difficult to determine. RTLM's organization and direction of militia activities claimed an estimated 80,000 lives but gauging the impact of their dehumanizing propaganda is more difficult. Although not necessarily causal, regions with full radio coverage which would have been more exposed to RTLM propaganda experienced a 62-69% increase in reported killings, suggesting that radio coverage played a role in the scale of violent persecution.<sup>25</sup> It is effectively impossible to determine how many people were inspired to kill by RTLM, however corollary data as well as their active and persistent involvement in the violence suggests that the station did exacerbate the atrocities. This view is shared by General Dallaire, Commander of the UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda during the genocide, who believed that "simply jamming [the] broadcasts ... would have had

a significant impact on the course of events".<sup>26</sup>

Ultimately, while RTLM played a direct role in the genocide, its most damaging contribution was its normalization of ethnic hatred and racialized violence. Testimony of militiamen involved in the killing repeatedly emphasized the social pressure to kill, as well as the social reinforcement of violence. For the Interahamwe, killing Tutsis was a job and a social activity. Militiamen would eat breakfast together before leaving to hunt Tutsis and would share drinks and celebrate when they returned. Hunting and killing Tutsis became a chore, or a source of amusement. Remorse was seldom felt, and wherever it crept in it was suppressed.<sup>27</sup> Moderate Hutus were regarded on the same level as Tutsis, which made expressing any sympathy, remorse, or mercy a dangerous and socially unpopular proposition. Killing Tutsis was simply what was done. It was expected that, excepting the elderly or the disabled, all Hutu would do their part to carry out the extermination of Tutsis. RTLM cannot be entirely credited with creating this culture, but it cannot be entirely dismissed either, given the statistical correlation with violence in regions with radio access. RTLM's use of popular media, and its ability to draw an audience, ensured that radicalism, Hutu supremacy, and racial violence would become essential aspects of Rwandan popular culture. The efficacy of RTLM's propaganda is unmeasurable, but its consequences are unforgettable.

<sup>24</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, *The Prosecutor vs Georges Ruggiu*, 2000, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Yanagizawa-Drott, "Propaganda and Conflict", 1947.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *The Impact of Hate Media*.

<sup>27</sup> Hatzfeld et al., *Machete Season*, 40.

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## Masala Chai

Olivia Shorter

In 1901, the British embarked on a campaign to open a profitable tea market on the Indian subcontinent. However, the campaign failed to introduce British tea culture. This oversight led to a revolt against British culture in the form of India creating their own tea culture, centered around expressly Indian customs and a uniquely Indian drink -- masala chai. India co-opted tea for its own purpose, resulting in a new national drink that supported the formation of an Indian identity. The Indian adaptations focused on the preparation, cost, consumption, and identity associated with tea. Despite British efforts to market traditional British tea consumption, uniquely Indian adaptations allowed masala chai to become a secular symbol of Indian nationalism and an important aspect of Indian cultural identity lasting to the present day.

The British initially used India for land and labor to grow their tea crops. Many initial attempts were made at growing one type of tea in India. However, the climate did not seem to take to the particular strain, *Camellia sinensis*.<sup>1</sup> Eventually, a local species in the same genus, *Camellia assamica*, was found to thrive in the Indian climate. The tea cultivation in India began in 1835 but really started to take form after 1845, when land restrictions were eased.<sup>2</sup> By 1880, the plantations were firmly established as major exporters. By the 1900s, the British associated tea with India to the point where

packaging in Europe often included colors or iconography associated with India to capitalize on this. During this time, tea was not consumed by the general Indian population, although ‘westernized Indians’ did drink tea. Later, the British sought to open India as a new market to make revenue from *selling* tea.

Opening a new market in India would allow the British to sell their tea without having to pay export costs. A movement was started in 1901 “to increase the consumption of tea in [India] especially by the native inhabitants” after the British realized that they had “neglected a possibly large market at their own doors”.<sup>3</sup> The goal was to make drinking tea a staple of Indian consumerism. However, by 1904, there was negligible change, with few people taking to tea. Each year until 1914, there were complaints that “increasing the consumption of tea in India [was] undoubtedly the most difficult branch of work”.<sup>4</sup> In 1935, the attempt was reorganized; the “‘Indian Tea Market Expansion Board’ (ITMEB) [was] provided with an expanded budget, [beginning] what was undoubtedly the largest marketing campaign in Indian history”.<sup>5</sup>

The majority of tea production was initially controlled by the British. In 1885, it was estimated that “of the total land acquired for plantation... more than 96 per cent was

<sup>1</sup> Lizzie Collingham, “Chai: The Great Tea Campaign”. In *Curry: A Tale of Cooks & Conquerors*, ed. Lizzie Collingham, (Oxford: Society for Science, 2006): 194.

<sup>2</sup> Bhubanes Misra, “Quality, Investment and International Competitiveness: Indian Tea Industry,

1880-1910.” *Economic and Political Weekly* no. 6 (1987): 230.

<sup>3</sup> “India, Tea Drinking,” 880.

<sup>4</sup> Collingham, “Chai: The Great Campaign,” 195.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Lutgendorf, “Making Tea in India: Chai, Capitalism, Culture.” *Thesis Eleven* no. 1 (December 2012): 19.

under the possession of the British planters”.<sup>6</sup> Over time, the “estates owned and managed by the Indians increased more than five times” and allowed for the nation to have full control, from production to consumption, over tea.<sup>7</sup> Through the change of plantation ownership, tea became “a very important article of commerce,” and in the 1940’s it made up nearly a third in value of all Indian exports.<sup>8</sup> Overtime, tea production became increasingly controlled by India.

The British attempted to control the way that Indian tea was prepared. To do this, the British Tea Association created many poster boards across India that showed the steps to make a proper cup of tea. One poster (Fig 1.) presents a strong view of British sentiments surrounding the Indian tea culture in numerous aspects. The poster is written in Urdu and has 5 steps in text, illustrated with a Hindi woman beside each one. The British believed that they could micromanage the use of tea from growth to brewing. However, the existence of the poster presents the limited power that the British *actually* possessed when it came to Indian tea production -- the population was *not* following British convention, and there was a need to reform the Indian tea culture. These instructions were not well followed, and when they were, it was only by the upper-class Indians.<sup>9</sup> The majority of the population made an Indianized version, which would eventually be called chai.



Fig. 1. A Perfect Drink. Woman preparing tea.

While the British introduced the product of tea, they mainly focused on handing out free packets, and only gave in-person instructions for brewing tea to the wealthy.<sup>10</sup> While the British had six steps to making tea, the Indian conception arrived at a different production by “simply dumping all ingredients into a single vessel and boiling them briskly”.<sup>11</sup> The most important difference between the British and Indian teas were the ingredients. The Indian drink was heavily milk based -- “it was often 50 percent or more of the concoction, and some Indians eliminated water entirely”.<sup>12</sup> The drink also included finely crushed spices, such as ginger, pepper, cardamom, and cinnamon, and the tea leaf itself would be crushed to produce a stronger flavor. These changes were deeply rooted in Indian

<sup>6</sup> Misra, “Quality, Investment,” 231.

<sup>7</sup> Misra, “Quality, Investment,” 231.

<sup>8</sup> E.A Watson, “the Tea Industry in India.” *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 84, no. 4346 (1936): 461.

<sup>9</sup> Guatam Bhadra, *From an Imperial Product to a National Drink: The Culture of Tea*. (Calcutta:

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<sup>10</sup> Lutgendorf, “Making Tea in India,” 20.

<sup>11</sup> Lutgendorf, “Making Tea in India,” 21.

<sup>12</sup> Lutgendorf, “Making Tea in India,” 21.

culinary traditions. The sweet and milky drink appealed to “north Indians who like[d] buttermilk and yogurt drinks (lassis)”; “Indians have been flavoring milky drinks with spices for centuries”.<sup>13</sup> The drink was made differently in each community depending on “their own taste and cultural mores”.<sup>14</sup> The new drink’s name, masala chai, directly translates to ‘spiced tea’ and is based on familiar Indian tastes. The recognizable flavors and adaptability of the drink transformed the classic British drink into something that appealed to the Indian masses.

This adaptation of tea was not appreciated by the British who, when they discovered chai in the 1930s, described it as an “unsavoury and badly prepared decoction known as ‘spiced tea.’” The Indian Tea Association (ITA) doubled down on their efforts to exterminate this distasteful version of tea.<sup>15</sup> The British attempt to distance itself from spiced tea only made chai become a more favorable option, as it used an imperial product in an anti-British drink. The Indian culture during the 30s and 40s was disdainful of Colonial rule. Having a drink that embodied Indian history and started a small revolt of British power was an appealing idea.

The consumption of tea in Britain and India differed dramatically and was a formative difference between the two tea cultures. The British attempted to push their tea practices on the Indians, who in turn changed almost every aspect of the tea ceremony, including paraphernalia, location, and class association. The British drank tea in a private space with specialized utensils. For tea to appeal to the masses of India, it needed to be removed from private consumption and placed in the public realm. The British

campaign to sell tea was based heavily on getting the public hooked on tea. Tea was considered addictive, the ITA used strategies including handing out free tea packets and creating mandatory tea breaks in their workplaces to hook the Indian population. The mass movement to hand out tea was made by “motorized ‘tea vans’, equipped to dispense millions of cups of free tea and comparable numbers of ‘pice packets’”.<sup>16</sup> A ‘pice’ was used to define “packets costing a pice (a farthing)” and contained the leaf needed to make one cup of tea.<sup>17</sup> This was the first step that brought tea out of the home and into the public. The biggest change for how tea was consumed, however, came from the introduction of chai wallahs.

While there was no history of tea as a beverage in India previous to British cultivation, there was a long history of coffee as an important beverage. In the cities, tea became just as popular as coffee. Chai wallahs began to emerge as independent Indians sold their own take on the spiced tea. They sold in busy hubs, like markets and train stations. In India, the two majority religions (Islam and Hinduism) had specific food production rules. This led to many restaurants being divided on the basis of religion, and specific food types often became associated with religion. In addition, there were many caste specifications as to who could eat or drink after a lower caste had touched the dining-ware, even after repeated washing, leading to more division in food consumption. These divisions were not only limited to food production, but to the people that one ate with as well. Importantly, tea, being a foreign foodstuff, “lie[d] outside Ayurvedic classifications and [was] therefore free from the burden of purity associations.”<sup>18</sup> While the multiple stalls

<sup>13</sup> Collingham, “Chai: The Great Campaign,” 196-200.

<sup>14</sup> Bhadra, *From an Imperial Product*, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Collingham, “Chai: The Great Campaign,” 200.

<sup>16</sup> Collingham, “Chai: The Great Campaign,” 195.

<sup>17</sup> “India, Tea Drinking in.” *Journal of the Society of Arts* 51, (Nov 21, 1902): 880.

<sup>18</sup> Collingham, “Chai: The Great Campaign,” 200.



addressed Hindu preparation restrictions, there remained concerns related to Muslim production and caste division.

The tea stalls and earthenware cups solved the caste problem. The “tea stalls at the railway stations catered to communal sensibilities and were divided into Muslim and Hindu sections” and the cups were disposable.<sup>19</sup> The disposable cups were (and still are) made out of clay and broken by the buyer after used. This “ensures that no one is polluted by drinking from a vessel made impure by the saliva of another person” and allows for anyone to buy chai without fear.<sup>20</sup> This universal ability to consume chai is important because it made chai unassociated with any one group -- “The neutrality of tea makes it easier to share with impunity with members of a caste normally rejected as eating or drinking partners”.<sup>21</sup>

Tea stands and wallahs brought tea into the public sphere and into a class and religion neutral environment. In addition, the drink could be bought and consumed quickly, as opposed to the extensive time investment of the British sit-down tea. The functionality was distinct, changing from a period of time set aside to talk to consuming tea while walking to work and whenever was convenient. The limited time and public atmosphere appealed to the working class of India and transformed the consumption of tea to fit the working class, instead of the elite British, eliminating the need for the standard British tea service. Chai also required a lower quality of tea and used fewer leaves to produce more final product. These three factors all contributed to the immense economic savings for chai as opposed to British tea.

The specific items the British used when making tea and the objects associated with it -- “teapots, china cups and saucers, sugar bowls, and milk jugs— were too costly for most people.”<sup>22</sup> Making tea had an “economic value, both in terms of its purchase and the costs associated with its preparation”.<sup>23</sup> The tea paraphernalia made it so that tea was too expensive and so that, in the early years of the tea campaign, only the upper class participated in drinking tea. The economic costs of tea paraphernalia were also one of the main reasons India pushed back against British tea norms in the early 1910s. The British convention included extensive service: pots, infusers, cups, saucers, creamers, sugars, and specialty utensils. The cost of the service was too much for any working-class family. This is one of the reasons that led to the current ceramic disposable cups. The elimination of British teaware also called for a new way to make tea. As discussed earlier, the instruction poster (Fig. 1) had specifications for creating tea, involving all of the different aspects, while all making chai called for was to put everything in a pot at the same time and boil it. The “fuss of pre-heating a porcelain pot and setting out a separate creamer and sugar bowl” was eliminated with the removal of the accoutrements and cut down the time investment needed to make tea.<sup>24</sup> The rituals of consumption were linked to wealth. The typical British process of making tea became “like the performance of ceremony for a special occasion”.<sup>25</sup> The wealthy Colonial and Indian people would use the British conventions of tea to establish their position in the aristocracy. When the British expanded their tea markets to Indian clientele, they started by attempting to get the Indian people

<sup>19</sup> Collingham, “Chai: The Great Campaign,” 196.

<sup>20</sup> Collingham, “Chai: The Great Campaign,” 200.

<sup>21</sup> Collingham, “Chai: The Great Campaign,” 200.

<sup>22</sup> Collingham, “Chai: The Great Campaign,” 20.

<sup>23</sup> Rachel Berger, “Between Digestion and Desire: Genealogies of Food in Nationalist North India.” *Modern Asian Studies* no. 5 (2013): 1625.

<sup>24</sup> Collingham, “Chai: The Great Campaign,” 194.

<sup>25</sup> Bhadra, *From an Imperial Product*, 16.

addicted to tea by passing out free samples. The pice packets contained one cup worth of low-quality tea. To the British, this meant the broken leaves and dust that were left after packaging the full leaves. The Indian Tea Association (ITA) released a pamphlet in 1907 that contained the proper way to brew Indian tea.<sup>26</sup> In addition to the steps of tea, it holds a summary of the history of tea in India up into that point. This was printed before the widespread use of tea by Indians. However, tea was occasionally consumed by 1907, and the British push to place tea into India was going strong. This source praises the “rolled leaf” in its whole form and mentions the importance of the full leaf and the production to create it. Both the Colonial British and the London makers preferred tea leaves that were “of good quality unmixed with low class fannings and free from dust”.<sup>27</sup> During this time, one strategy used to introduce tea included ‘one pice’ packet containing one cup worth of leaf fragments.<sup>28</sup> While the whole of production at this time was oriented to making full leaf tea, the remains would be given away to the Indian public. The fragments became the preferred type of leaf, and the ‘dust’ of leaves was used in chai, as it was mixed with the assorted spices. The dust brewed more efficiently and with a stronger flavor than the full leaf preferred by the British. Initially the chai wallahs would even grind the leaves themselves.<sup>29</sup> However, dust tea had a completely different, more inexpensive method of manufacturing.

This eventually led to technological inventions of tea crushing machines and selling tea dust. This is just one example of the Indian tea culture taking and twisting the British perception of how to consume tea. Dust tea became widely preferred in India, and major tea companies advertised their

‘dust’ tea. One advertisement (Fig. 2) shows a main brand, Brooke Bond Tea, advertising the ‘A1 dust tea’. This ad is targeted to Indians, specifically in Hindi. Even the inclusion of the word ‘chai’ is a significant aspect, showing that the Indian creation had replaced the British black tea in popularity by this time. The ad also uses bright colors commonly associated with India: yellow, red and green. The colors combined with the use of the word ‘chai’ and Hindi language all indicate this ad was directed at an Indian audience, selling an ‘authentic’ Indian drink. The British never adopted the use of dust tea, and it was seen as an Indian-only type of tea.



Fig. 2. Brooke Bond's A-1 Dust Tea Advertisement.  
Box of tea on the back of a bird.

British instructions on how to make the best cup of tea were posed in a way to use the most amount of tea per cup, requiring more frequent purchases. The masala chai supplemented the flavors of the tea leaf with the plethora of spices they added. This meant that “in spiced tea they tended to use fewer tea leaves”.<sup>30</sup> While the Indian consumption of chai by the cup increased the amount of tea

<sup>26</sup> Indian Tea Association. *A Few Facts About Indian Tea and How to Brew it*. London: Indian Tea association, 1907.

<sup>27</sup> Misra, “Quality, Investment,” 236.

<sup>28</sup> Lutgendorf, “Making Tea in India,” 24.

<sup>29</sup> Lutgendorf, “Making Tea in India,” 24.

<sup>30</sup> Collingham, “Chai: The Great Campaign,” 194.

leaves required didn't increase at an equal pace. The British attempted to 'count every cup' when understanding the Indian consumption. However, "the figures by no means represent[ed] the actual quantity of brewed tea".<sup>31</sup> To the annoyance of the British, the convention of chai limited both the British understanding of Indian tea culture and the use of the product. By the second half of the 20th century, chai was a staple of Indian culture. However, "the per capita consumption in India was still only about half a pound, compared with nearly ten pounds in Britain".<sup>32</sup>

In the early years, tea and male gender became linked in India. In British culture, women made and served tea, but in India, the British had a hard time getting people to drink it, so they instituted tea breaks in all of their factories and workplaces. Tea was seen as minorly addictive, and the British believed they only needed to get people to try it once before it was a habit. To this end, a "chai break was readily incorporated into the culture of work among the labouring classes, with the hope that labourers would incorporate the practice into their home life".<sup>33</sup> This led to the association of tea with working, specifically male labor.

There was also a parallel trend promoting tea as an energizer and stimulant, which appealed to middle class workers. Many posters (Fig 3.) were placed in train stations in 1920 remarking on the health benefits of tea. The posters discussed long term effects but emphasized the stimulant aspects of it. The location of this poster in a public transit taken by middle class workers demonstrates the intended audience. The placing of these posters in public zones and the fact that the first Indian run tea stalls were also along train stations shows the deeply

held association that tea had with the working class.



Fig. 3. *Tea as a Health Drink*. List of health benefits to tea with British tea set.

There was a harsh British pushback to this evolution of gender norms. This came from the fact that the British tea culture was directly opposite, tied to conventions of "aesthetics of "femininity" built around women and tea consumption...the domestic, non-labor, wealthy private."<sup>34</sup> The Indian association with the working male was contradictory to British norms. In response, there were propaganda posters focusing on *women* with tea. As discussed with Figure 1, the woman is included as part of the instructions. She isn't acting them out, she is meant to be seen as a part of the instructions. It explicitly states that a woman should make the tea. The subliminal message of using a woman to make the tea pushed the British gender norms, asserting the idea that women should be the ones making tea. The British became uncomfortable with their own

<sup>31</sup> "India, Tea Drinking," 880.

<sup>32</sup> Collingham, "Chai: The Great Campaign," 194.

<sup>33</sup> Berger, "Between Digestion," 1626.

<sup>34</sup> Piya Chatterjee, *A Time for Tea: Women, Labor and Post-Colonial Politics on an Indian Plantation* (Durham NC & London: Duke UP, 2001): 41.

creation of gender norms within Indian tea culture.

Another interpretation of this is that the British association between males and tea was based on racist stereotypes of Indian masculinity. “The indigenization of tea into Indian working-class masculinity could thus be read as a strategy to maintain the Colonial representation of the colonized Indian man as effeminate.”<sup>35</sup> However, this fails to account for the Indian understanding of gender and focuses on the British culture. The linking of masculinity with tea came from the labor, public, objects and class. Chai moved to a public consumption, which had more neutral gender association compared to the “feminized domains of the ‘private.’”<sup>36</sup> In addition to the British paraphernalia and the “consumption rituals, tea delineated new domains of desire, very much associated with femininity.”<sup>37</sup> All of the Indian consumption aspects of chai were in direct contrast to the British feminized tea. Still, the British “attempted to brand tea as a woman’s drink” in order to manipulate the Indian culture.<sup>38</sup>

This masculine association did not continue through to the second half of the 20th century, not through British efforts, but because of the 1940s nationalistic push. The 1940s brought a dramatic increase of nationalistic efforts, largely due to the push for independence. Chai had an interesting role as an universal drink, as it was used to assist images of an united India. How this became associated with gender is the new images tying chai to the family. During this period, the nuclear family became a metaphor for the larger family of India as a nation. The “metaphor of the family with its emphasis on love and lineage” was thought to overturn the view of the divided nation. Chai was selected as a uniquely and universally Indian drink

and “as debates about the family became more sophisticatedly tied to the future of the nation, food became more simplified...representing the unchanging, organic substance that so thoroughly symbolized the Indian authentic.”<sup>39</sup> New advertisements, both for tea and for the future nation, included family elements. These posters (like fig. 4) often had an equal balance of genders in a *domestic* place drinking chai. This dramatic twist to chai being a family and universal drink “muted the gender bias” and from the 1940s on, chai in India had a neutral gender relationship.<sup>40</sup>



Fig. 4. *Tea in Parsi Family*. Four individuals inside drinking tea with British paraphernalia.

The 1940s universal drink campaign eroded gender bias, but it emphasized ethnic diversity. Numerous posters and advertisements (Fig. 6) showed a divided scene, with different communities and “well known marks of their communities and

<sup>35</sup> Christine Vogt-William, "Transcultural Tea Times: An Overview of Tea in Colonial History." *Cross/Cultures* no. 129 (2010):134.

<sup>36</sup> Chaterjee, "A Time for Tea" 22.

<sup>37</sup> Vogt-William, "Transcultural Tea Times," 134.

<sup>38</sup> Vogt-William, "Transcultural Tea Times," 134.

<sup>39</sup> Berger, "Between Digestion," 1643.

<sup>40</sup> Bhadra, *From an Imperial Product*, 23.

religions” in the background.<sup>41</sup> These markers included architecture, clothing, and landscape, with the link among them being chai. These propaganda posters blatantly place tea as an “essential link between different cultural zones in the subcontinent”.<sup>42</sup> Advertisements erased all imperial associations with tea and presented the drink as essentially and inherently Indian. While this time was a tumultuous period of division, tea was branded as a ‘universal beverage’ and “India's True Ambassador” (Fig. 5). Almost none of these posters referenced the possibility of partition or placed one group above the other. They simply championed tea as India’s connector.



Fig. 5. *Tea as a Universal Drink*. Cup with a hand holding tea leaf.



Fig. 6. *Races of India*. Four male figures drinking tea.

The British attempted to change the culture of India to include tea in order to create new economic revenue. India was able to co-opt tea into serving their own purposes. India subverted and innovated the British tea culture to create masala chai. The mode of consumption was shifted to quick and small cups, usually drunk individually and on the way to work. While initially most propaganda surrounding tea was made by and for British purposes, by the late 40s independent Indian companies had emerged to take advantage of the emerging tea culture of India. Chai became a popular Indian drink, and eventually a symbol for ‘Indianness’. Tea changed to being made in large batches with distinctly Indian blends of spices. The complete alterations in the recipe, consumption, and identity associated with tea culminated in the invention of masala chai. Because chai was a secular and economic revolt against the British norms, it penetrated all levels of Indian society. Masala chai became uniquely situated as a secular economic symbol for Indian nationalism.

<sup>41</sup> Bhadra, *From an Imperial Product*, 27.

<sup>42</sup> Bhadra, *From an Imperial Product*, 16.

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## Long Live Death: Haiti and the People's Revolution

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### Introduction

During the final weeks of 1803, the residents of the French colony of Saint-Domingue successfully rid themselves of their colonial masters. Haiti, the second non-indigenous independent nation in the Western Hemisphere and the first modern nation to have abolished slavery, emerged from the ruins of one of the most oppressive societies the world has ever seen. Widely regarded as the most successful slave rebellion to have ever occurred, the Haitian Revolution has become a historical paragon of liberation and human rights.

While there is historical consensus that this revolution ended with the French exit in 1803, there is less unanimity in the question of when it began. The most common understanding is that the slave revolts of 1791 started Saint-Domingue on the path toward emancipation and independence, yet these arguments fail to grasp the inequitable realities of those initial revolts. In fact, while the revolts of 1791 undoubtedly marked a turning point in the history of Haitian independence, they were far from revolutionary in their ultimate agendas. Led primarily by slave elites rather than common plantation laborers, the groups of rebels that began the initial revolts soon transformed into a few highly centralized insurgent military organizations who used their followers as bargaining chips in their negotiations with colonial authorities to secure liberty only for themselves and their fellow officers, rarely supporting outright abolition.

When widespread emancipation was eventually granted, it came not as a result of a popular crusade, but out of the military necessity for French colonial administrators to secure the loyalty of enslaved people in the face of civil war and foreign invasions. The regime that emerged thereafter, led by Toussaint Louverture, preserved the free status of emancipated laborers, yet established an authoritarian labor dictatorship designed to keep these laborers in the exact same economic positions, doing the exact same work on the exact same plantations where they had been kept in bondage in years prior.

The elite agendas that dominated the initial revolts and subsequent labor regimes prevented 1791 from marking the beginning of a popular rebellion in Saint-Domingue. The true people's revolution of Saint-Domingue did not actually occur until 1802, when French attempts at reimposing slavery were met with a massive, decentralized popular uprising. Across the colony, common laborers took up arms in defense of their newly attained liberties, not acting because of obedience or coercion, but out of desperation and self-preservation. It was this revolution from below, not the actions of those on top, that led to the expulsion of colonial rule and the preservation of human liberty.



## Slavery in Saint-Domingue

During most of the eighteenth century, French Saint-Domingue was the most profitable colony in the Western Hemisphere. At the height of its development in 1789, there were over 163,405,221 pounds of sugar and 68,000,000 pounds of coffee exported from the colony, making Saint-Domingue nearly one and a half times more productive than the entire British West Indies. Altogether, exports from Saint-Domingue created an average annual profit of 280,000,000 francs for the landholding elite of French society.<sup>1</sup> Although only 793 of the 8,000 total plantations in Saint-Domingue were given over to sugar cultivation, sugar remained by far the most lucrative product in the colony, consistently steering administrative policies in favor of maximizing production and exports. Because sugar cultivation was immensely labor-intensive, French profits in Saint-Domingue were entirely dependent on the labor of enslaved Africans. The extent of this dependency can be seen clearly when examining the population demographics of the colony; by 1791, the population of Saint-Domingue consisted of 40,000 white people, 28,000 “free-colored”<sup>2</sup>, and over 500,000 slaves.<sup>3</sup>

Rather than spend money to provide slaves with adequate housing, food, clothing, and medical care that would promote natural

population growth, it was more economically feasible to simply work a slave to death and replace them with another African captive. Thus, the mortality rate among slaves was exceedingly high; 5 to 6 percent of all slaves died each year, the mortality rate among enslaved children reached as high as 50 percent on some plantations, and the total enslaved birth rate stayed at around 3 percent for most of the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> It was therefore necessary to continually import new African laborers in order to maintain plantation productivity, with the import rate continuing to climb as extractivist colonialism solidified its role as the dominant economic lifeblood of Saint-Domingue. Beginning in the 1730s, between 10,000 and 20,000 slaves were imported to the colony each year, and these numbers continued to grow through the 1780s. At its peak in 1790, over 48,000 African men, women, and children were trafficked across the Atlantic, unloaded from their captors’ ships in the harbors of a foreign island, branded with the initials of those who purchased them, and sent off to begin their lives as forced laborers in a plantation economy that was unmatched in its brutality.<sup>5</sup>

The 10 percent of Saint-Dominguans who were not enslaved were made up of landed white elites, landless white residents (*petit blancs*), and free-colored residents whose landed status varied greatly. For most

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<sup>1</sup> Robert K. Lacerte, “The Evolution of Land and Labor in the Haitian Revolution, 1791-1820.” *The Americas* 34, no. 4 (April 1978): 449.

<sup>2</sup> For American readers, it is important to know that the use of the term “colored” as a racial category does not have the same connotations in the Francophone as it does in the United States.

Throughout this paper, I will use the terms “free-colored” and “free people of color” to refer to the

unique social group composed of mixed-race descendants of African and European heritage.

<sup>3</sup> Lacerte, “Land and Labor in the Haitian Revolution.” 449.; Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 39.

<sup>4</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 39-40.

<sup>5</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 39.

of the eighteenth century, landed whites held considerably more power and privilege than their landed free-colored counterparts. The latter retained their status over the *petit blancs*, who despised being underneath mixed-race people in the sociopolitical hierarchy. In 1789, when news that the Declaration of the Rights of Man had been published by the new revolutionary government in the metropole, free-coloreds claimed that French law had confirmed their equal status. Free-coloreds started advocating for total racial equality—though not

### **A Colony in Combat**

On August 14, 1791, slave elites—drivers, coachmen, managers, and other positions of relative status—from about a hundred different northern plantations met on the Lenormand de Mézy sugar plantation.<sup>6</sup> They discussed the growing conflicts between the white and free-colored elites of Saint-Domingue, as well as the recent revolutionary events in the metropole. Realizing that the moment was ripe, they took the decision to organize a rebellion among the rural and urban slaves of the Northern Province. They chose Wednesday, August 24, as their day to strike, giving themselves ten days to organize the revolt. This was a surprising choice, as almost all slave conspiracies across the Americas during the eighteenth century were planned for Sundays or holidays when slaves were well-rested and could move between

including slaves, as many free-coloreds owned their own plantations and kept their own slaves. Both landed and landless whites vehemently opposed the elevation of mixed-race privileges, and infighting broke out between the three groups. Conflicts among the non-enslaved tenth of Saint-Dominguans erupted throughout 1790, while the nine-tenths who were enslaved continued to cultivate the cash crops that funded these opposing forces. That is, until the following August.

plantations without arousing suspicion. This unusual decision is an indicator of how carefully planned and ambitious this revolt was, as the entire Colonial Assembly was scheduled to meet in the northern city of Cap Français on August 25, providing “a unique opportunity to eliminate the entire political elite of Saint-Domingue.”<sup>7</sup> The planned urban uprising was suppressed before it truly began, as a few groups of overzealous rebels initiated premature conflicts in Le Cap that were easily quelled by colonial forces.<sup>8</sup> This undoubtedly limited the momentum for urban rebellion, yet the political elite of Saint-Domingue were still caught completely off-guard when the rural slaves of the Northern Province rose up in unified defiance on August 25.

The initial plantation revolts were immensely successful. Rebellious slave groups moved across the northern plains

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<sup>6</sup> Such meetings were common and took place with the knowledge of plantation owners, who allowed slave elites to communicate in order to coordinate various methods of overseeing enslaved laborers. Both the meeting at the Lenormand de Mézy plantation and the Vodou ceremony at Bois Caiman

were likely conducted with the full knowledge of plantation managers.

<sup>7</sup> David Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, 87-88.

<sup>8</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 99.

setting fire to sugarcane fields, destroying cultivation equipment, executing white residents, and recruiting more slaves to their cause. By the first of September, 184 plantations had been destroyed, and by the end of the month “all of the plantations within fifty miles of either side of Le Cap had been reduced to ashes and smoke.”<sup>9</sup> The number of active insurgents grew rapidly as the rebellion spread, numbering between twenty to eighty thousand by the end of September.<sup>10</sup> The military experience of *bossales* (African-born slaves—as opposed to *creole* slaves, those born in the Americas) proved invaluable in defending these growing insurgent camps, as colonial troops were faced with African guerilla tactics for the first time.

Lacking sufficient troops to fight against a mass slave revolt in the midst of their own civil wars, white and free-colored elites began freeing and arming their slaves to supplement their forces. Many slaves were forced by their masters to defend their plantations from the insurgents, facing threats of violence against their communities if they refused. Others were legally required to join colonial armies, such as those around Le Cayes, where a decree in late 1791 required one-tenth of male slaves from the surrounding plantations to join the white army as auxiliary troops and defend white supremacy against both the armies of the free-colored and the rebelling slaves.<sup>11</sup> Many others joined these armies voluntarily, seeking the opportunity to abandon their status as slaves for the superior status of soldiers. For the next several decades,

becoming a soldier was the only avenue of social advancement for male cultivators, while women were barred from enlisting in the military and were therefore deprived of any legal path leading away from plantation-based servitude.

In their attempts to attract as many slave soldiers as possible, opposing militaries led by white and free-colored elites (and, later, British and Spanish invaders) made various promises to those who joined their forces, such as granting freedom to slave elites and improving conditions on the plantations for common enslaved laborers. Yet it became increasingly clear that these promises could be easily broken at the leisure of those who made them. Free-colored property-owners in the Western province declared that any slave who joined their forces would be freed, and several insurgent groups in the region accepted the deal. This new cadre of Black troops (given the name “the Swiss”) aided the western free-colored elites in fighting against both white colonial forces as well as non-compliant rebel groups. Yet when white and free-colored delegates agreed upon a cease-fire in October of 1791, the Swiss suddenly became a liability whose emancipation would set a bad precedent in the colonial system. It was decided that the Swiss were to be deported to the Mosquito Coast in modern-day Nicaragua. Acting in his own interests, the captain of the ship that was transporting them tried and failed to sell the Swiss as slaves in Belize, then simply dumped them on the beaches of British-held Jamaica. British authorities, refusing to tolerate such militant Black men in their

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<sup>9</sup> Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 96.

<sup>10</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 113.

<sup>11</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 135.

colony, immediately shipped them back to Saint-Domingue. There, the ship transporting them was kept in a remote harbor under the watchful eyes of French soldiers, who executed sixty of the captives and kept the rest imprisoned on the ship, where they gradually died from disease and starvation. The tragedy of the Swiss became well-known among Black communities across Saint-Domingue, and it would remain a permanent warning for any slave choosing to trust the promises of colonial elites who offered freedom only when it was convenient for them to do so.<sup>12</sup>

Colonial elites were not the only ones exploiting slaves' indignation, as the insurgency came to be dominated by local military elites whose goals were emancipation for themselves and their officers and the continued enslavement of the troops and communities under their jurisdictions. In the Northern Province, the two primary insurgent leaders were Jean-François Papillon and George Biassou. A French official by the name of Gros spent several weeks as a captive in an important northern insurgent camp, and eventually came to serve as a secretary to Jean-François during his negotiations with colonial authorities. Gros later recorded an account of his experiences in captivity, claiming that Jean-François shared with him his thoughts on general emancipation: "In taking up arms, it was never my intention to fight for general liberty, which I believe is a delusion, as much because of France's need for its colonies as

because of the danger of granting uncivilized hordes a right that would become infinitely dangerous to them and would inevitably lead to the destruction of the colony."<sup>13</sup>

Yet Jean-François and Biassou were still abolitionists, and like other abolitionists of the time, they pursued the goal of reforming slavery rather than getting rid of it altogether.<sup>14</sup> In a series of letters written to colonial authorities in December of 1791, the two insurgent leaders asked for liberty for themselves and their officers and general amnesty for their troops, whom they would agree to lead back to plantations to continue their enslaved servitude if certain reforms were made. "Oh, sirs," one letter reads, "in the name of humanity, deign to look favorably on these unfortunates by clearly outlawing such harsh mistreatment, abolishing the terrible plantation prisons, where the stays are miserable, and trying to improve the condition of this class of men so necessary to the colony, and we dare assure you that they will take up their work once again and will return to order."<sup>15</sup>

Less than four months after the initial revolt, it was already clear that the insurgency was far from populist in its agenda. Rebel forces were controlled by local military elites who used the troops and communities under their jurisdictions as bargaining chips in their negotiations with colonial administrators to advance their own desires for freedom while neglecting to advocate for a more radical agenda that would extend those freedoms onto their fellow insurgents.

<sup>12</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 119-121.

<sup>13</sup> Gros, *In the Camps of the Insurgents*, 1791.

<sup>14</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 128.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-François and Biassou, *Letters to the Commissioners*, December 1791.

### The Road to Emancipation

With the arrival of the Second Commission in Saint-Domingue in September of 1792, real reforms of slavery began to emerge as French authorities became increasingly desperate to put an end to the slave insurrection and restabilize its most profitable colony. Léger-Félicité Sonthonax, the leader of the Second Commission, made it clear to the citizens of Saint-Domingue that his mission was to unify and pacify the colony. He fully allied himself with “citizens of 4 April” (free people of color who had been granted full citizenship by the Decree of April 4, 1792), while denouncing both insurgent slaves and insurgent white elites as enemies of the Republic. The first step in Sonthonax’s plan to revitalize the colony’s export economy was to convince rebellious slaves to return to their former plantations. He issued a decree on May 5, 1793 that initiated substantial reforms aimed at improving their living and working conditions. The decree protected slaves from being forced to work on Sundays, provided shorter working hours for women who were pregnant or nursing, allowed slaves to bring official complaints against their masters and managers to local officials, and granted amnesty to any insurgent slave who returned to their respective plantations. The decree still had its limitations, such as continuing to allow drivers and managers to punish their slaves with up to fifty lashes from a whip. Additionally, these overseers were still permitted to punish any captured escapees by branding them and slicing their ears off.<sup>16</sup> Still, Sonthonax’s May 5th Decree introduced substantial reforms to the slavery

system, enough to convince many insurgents to lay down their arms and resume their lives as enslaved laborers, yet many rebel groups continued the fight, demanding either further reforms to slavery or its outright abolition.

Sonthonax continued to gradually expand these reforms, and began offering emancipation to any slave who joined his military forces. Yet these offers were not much different than those being made by Spanish and British administrators seeking to draw slave support in their attempts at conquering the Northern and Southern Provinces, respectively. Insurgent groups and independent slaves continued to ally themselves with whichever side provided them with the most tangible path to economic and social mobility. The most important example of insurgents claiming foreign loyalty occurred in the North, where Jean-François and Biassou—along with Biassou’s top lieutenant Toussaint Louverture—had sworn loyalty to the Spanish crown, confident that French rule over Saint-Domingue would soon collapse and eager to ally themselves with the victorious party. Thus the Second Commission found itself in control of a colony whose population was fractured along lines of racial oppression, economic disparity, and ever-changing loyalties.

The Second Commission was performing a delicate balancing act in its attempt to unify the colony, but it was severely disrupted by the actions of one especially uncooperative Frenchman: François-Thomas Galbaud. On May 7, 1793, Galbaud arrived in Cap Francais as the newly appointed Governor-General. He

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<sup>16</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 154-155.

immediately went about crafting compromises between the whites and free people of color in the city, seeing racial unification among freed people as the most essential step in establishing a lasting peace in the colony. He appointed white and free-colored men to administrative positions, secured trade deals with the United States, and made concessions to white elites that were uncharacteristic of the political favoritism toward free people of color that the Second Commission had demonstrated.<sup>17</sup> His administrative actions were done without the approval of the Second Commission, and Sonthonax and Polverel argued that his concessions were in violation of “the April 4 law’s prohibition against the appointment of colonial landowners” to administrative offices.<sup>18</sup> On June 13, Sonthonax and Polverel ordered Galbaud to vacate the colony and return to France, a command that Galbaud reluctantly obeyed. While on board the *Normande* in the Le Cap harbor, however, Galbaud became the political tool of indignant white sailors, officers, and political prisoners who viewed him as the only colonial official who could challenge the authority of the Second Commission and enact policies that favored white interests in Saint-Domingue.<sup>19</sup> The sailors convinced Galbaud to march into Le Cap, reclaim his Governorship, and expel the Second Commission to the metropole. On June 20, Galbaud and his new militant followers stormed Le Cap, took control of its arsenal,

and forced Sonthonax and Polverel to flee into the northern plains on the outskirts of the city.

In their desperation to gather sufficient forces to recapture the city, the Second Commission and their free-colored supporters extended a series of olive branches to three distinct groups of Black residents in and surrounding Le Cap: prisoners of war, urban slaves, and rural insurgents. Sonthonax and Polverel ordered the release of all imprisoned insurgents being held in the city’s jails. These prisoners were freed on the condition that they join in the defense against the white aggressors, an offer that was certainly enticing for men who had originally been captured doing that exact thing.<sup>20</sup> Now with several hundred experienced soldiers under their command, the Second Commission sought to gain the dual support of Le Cap’s urban slaves as well as the insurgent camps residing in the northern plains by issuing a new decree. On June 21, Sonthonax and Polverel offered liberty to all “black warriors who will fight for the Republic, under the civil commissioners’ orders, both against the Spanish and against other enemies, whether interior or exterior.”<sup>21</sup> Black residents of Le Cap started to sow dismay in the city, some of them taking the Second Commission’s offer and joining their forces, others taking part in the chaotic violence that had engulfed the city, all of them freeing themselves from bondage.<sup>22</sup> Another group that answered this

<sup>17</sup> Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 169-174.

<sup>18</sup> Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 181.

<sup>19</sup> Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 187.

<sup>20</sup> Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 210.

<sup>21</sup> AN, DXXXV 40, 400. Registre servant à la transcription des proclamations, ordonnances et

autres actes de la commission civile, imprimés depuis le 13 juin [1793] jusqu’au 13 mai 1794, Haut de Cap, 21 juin 1793. Cited in Fick, *Making of Haiti*, 159.

<sup>22</sup> Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 214-215.

call was a camp of insurgents based just outside of the city. The group's leader, a maroon named Pierrot, brought his 3,000 troops to the outskirts of the city where they took an oath of allegiance to France. The next day, the newly formed army of the Second Commission descended upon Le Cap, forcing Galbaud and his followers to make a hasty retreat. During the ensuing panic, fires broke out and engulfed the city, replacing about 85 percent of its buildings into piles of ash.<sup>23</sup> Out of the destruction, however, came the emancipation of all those slaves who had aided in the defense of Le Cap—people who would come to be known as the “citizens of 20 June.” Although the Second Commission had formally allied itself with the free-colored “citizens of 4 April,” the bulk of their support in Saint-Domingue was now made up of the “citizens of 20 June.” Thus, Sonthonax and Polverel were now compelled to prioritize the demands of the Black communities that they now depended on over those of the free-colored elites, many of whom were outraged by the surge of manumissions that occurred throughout the summer of 1793.<sup>24</sup>

Facing growing threats of British and Spanish invasions, the Second Commission saw the need to gain the loyalty of as many Black troops as possible. They extended their emancipation offer to the northern insurgent camps led by Jean-François, Biassou, and Louverture. All three replied with unyielding loyalty to the Spanish crown, convinced that the emancipation that the Bourbons had offered them was more reliable than that

promised by the disintegrating French Republic.<sup>25</sup> The Second Commission achieved much more success in the South, where Polverel convinced armed slaves around the cities of Port-au-Prince and Jacmel to accept the emancipation offer and swear loyalty to the Republic.<sup>26</sup> A series of additions to the emancipation offer, such as the July 11 decree stating that the wives and children of loyal soldiers would also be emancipated, helped to attract a growing number of prospective emancipees.<sup>27</sup>

As the threat of Spanish invasion in the northern province grew, the Second Commission became increasingly desperate to solidify the loyalty of their newly emancipated military force—and the Black leaders under their command were fully aware of that desperation. On August 25, during a “festival of liberty” in Le Cap, a group of 600 Black soldiers presented a petition to Sonthonax demanding general liberty across the entire colony of Saint-Domingue. Sonthonax accepted the petition and promised to draft a decree of general emancipation. However, he explained to the petitioners:

The law that I will proclaim needs to be carefully thought out. It must protect the rights of your masters and your own rights. The sudden passage to liberty has to be planned in such a way that it will not rupture the bonds on which all societies are based, so that agriculture will not suffer, so that the earth will yield enough produce to nourish the warriors employed in fighting the enemies of the Republic.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 240.

<sup>24</sup> Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 246.

<sup>25</sup> Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 251.

<sup>26</sup> Fick, *Making of Haiti*, 161.

<sup>27</sup> Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 260.

<sup>28</sup> Sonthonax, speech of August 25, 1793, in AN, D XXV 5, d. 52. Cited in Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 270.

On August 29, 1793, Sonthonax declared that all current slaves were now free, yet the plantation system on which Saint-Domingue's economy was completely dependent was to stay entirely intact. "Do not think that the liberty that you will enjoy means laziness and inactivity," Sonthonax wrote, "in France, everyone is free and everyone works; in Saint-Domingue under these same laws, you will follow the same model." Former slaves—now legally referred to as "cultivators"—were required to remain on the plantations of their former masters and continue doing the same agricultural work for at least a year thereafter. Cultivators were to be paid one-quarter of the total profits of their plantation, effectively tying their commercial well-being to that of the plantation owners. All forms of corporal punishment were abolished and replaced with strict financial penalties, up to the complete loss of salary for cultivators who were found to be in "violation of discipline." Additionally, Sonthonax declared that the only legal form of employment for ex-slaves would be agricultural work, domestic servitude, or military service (which was only available to men). Articles 33 and 34 of the decree stipulated that any man or woman who was unemployed or working in an illegal setting were "found to be vagrants, arrested, and put in prison." Article 35 expounds on the punishments for these crimes, reading, "The men and women imprisoned in these cases for the first time will be held for a month. The second time they will be held for three

months, and the third time they will be sentenced to a public work detail for one year."<sup>29</sup> Thus, the old system of slavery was replaced by a labor dictatorship that maintained the existing socioeconomic hierarchies by requiring former slaves to stay in the same place, do the same work, and take orders from the same masters. Still, most cultivators were likely ecstatic to be declared free citizens of France and to see their masters' whips disappear. Over the next ten months, Sonthonax and Polverel continued to oversee the implementation and enforcement of their new labor system, escorting cultivators back to plantations and solidifying their military strength.

The emancipation decree was not enacted as an expression of French revolutionary ideas of human liberty and equality. It was instead an act of desperation by a crumbling colonial administration whose only hope for survival lay in the support of the colony's poorest and most oppressed inhabitants. Both white and mixed-race French officials back in the metropole were furious with the Second Commission for extending the ideals of their revolution onto enslaved Black people, eventually summoning Sonthonax back to France in July of 1794 to answer for his actions.<sup>30</sup> Out of the vacuum left by the exit of the Second Commission emerged a new regime that was determined to preserve and expand the system of coerced, unfree labor that Sonthonax had constructed.

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<sup>29</sup> L ger F licit  Sonthonax, *Decree of General Liberty*, August 29, 1793.

<sup>30</sup> Fick, *Making of Haiti*, 190.



### **Toussaint Louverture and the Limits of Liberty**

Despite the frustration that colonial administrators felt toward Sonthonax's emancipation decree, they could not deny its effectiveness in strengthening the weakened state of French authority over Saint-Domingue. Facing war with the Spanish and the British, as well as domestic social and political upheaval, the National Convention came to an agreement that ratifying the emancipation decree was the only way to solidify French loyalty among their colonial subjects. On February 4, 1794, the National Convention abolished slavery across the entire French Empire, stating that "all men living in the colonies, without distinction of color, are French citizens and enjoy all the rights guaranteed by the constitution."<sup>31</sup>

Back in Saint-Domingue, Louverture heard the news of French abolition and began to reconsider his loyalty to the Spanish Bourbons. Before 1794, Sonthonax's offer of general emancipation had been enticing in its rhetoric and ideals, but the Second Commission was an unsteady administration that could barely hold onto what little jurisdiction it had. Sonthonax's offer paled in comparison to the tangible and reliable liberty that Louverture and his fellow officers had already secured from the far more stable Spanish monarchy. However, now that general emancipation was being offered not just by one tiny administrative body but by the entire French Empire, Louverture saw a reliable path toward universal liberty for Saint-Domingue. Additionally, the power

vacuum left by the exit of the Second Commission provided a unique opportunity for Louverture to strengthen his own political status and authority. In early May 1794, Louverture publicly changed his allegiance to the French, bringing with him all of the territories he had captured for Spain in the western region, as well as 4,000 to 5,000 well-armed and well-trained troops.<sup>32</sup>

After consolidating his control over the Western region, Louverture set about continuing the authoritarian labor regime constructed by Sonthonax. Louverture was convinced that maintaining the extractivist plantation economy was crucial, both to protect the economic lifeblood of Saint-Domingue and to preserve the newly acquired liberties of emancipated laborers. He understood that the ever-changing political body of the metropole had only confirmed the emancipation of Saint-Domingue's slaves because it was the best possible way to protect French economic interests there. If the colony did away with its plantation system and stopped sending its precious commodities across the Atlantic, Louverture believed—rightfully so—that the reinstatement of slavery by the French or by another European power would be inevitable. It was therefore necessary to continue the restrictive labor codes that Sonthonax had designed in order to rebuild the plantation system and retain Saint-Domingue's status as a profitable extractivist colony. "Without work," Louverture declared, "there is no liberty."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The National Convention, *Abolition of Slavery*, February 4, 1794.

<sup>32</sup> Fick, *Making of Haiti*, 184.

<sup>33</sup> Dubois & Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean*, 144.

The plantation infrastructure of Saint-Domingue was in tatters due to the constant conflict over the previous four years. By 1795, sugar and coffee exports had both plummeted to roughly two million pounds—compared to their peaks in 1788, these exports had fallen by 98.9 percent and 96.7 percent, respectively.<sup>34</sup> In Louverture's eyes, the best strategy to revitalize the plantation economy and prove to the metropole that an emancipated Saint-Domingue could be just as profitable as an enslaved one was to encourage white planters to return to the colony and resume ownership of their former plantations.

In the process of re-establishing a ruling class with power split between white and colored elites, Louverture made the position of cultivators permanent, criminalizing all paths leading away from plantation life—except for military service. Louverture rightfully believed that maintaining a widespread standing army was crucial in protecting his regime against foreign subverters, as well as preventing any revolts from the plantations. By building his forces primarily from rural workers, Louverture established an armed Black elite that worked in economic cooperation with wealthy planters to ensure that cultivators were abiding by his increasingly strict labor codes. The chance at social and economic advancement was too enticing for many cultivators to pass up, so countless men from across the colony chose to abandon their scythes for swords. As a result, as many as a quarter of Black men in Saint-Domingue

were serving in the military by the end of the century.<sup>35</sup>

As he strengthened the authority of his agrarian dictatorship, Louverture began to pass even more restrictions on the economic freedom of plantation cultivators. In order to continue to entice wealthy white planters to purchase property in Saint-Domingue, it was important to prevent large plantations from being broken up and sold off to less powerful buyers. He specifically sought to end the post-emancipation practice of cultivators pooling together their resources to buy small plots of land that could be communally owned and operated. On May 7, 1801, he passed a law that prohibited the sale of parcels of less than fifty *carreaux*—one *carreaux* being about a third of an acre.<sup>36</sup> This effectively made it impossible for former slaves to legally acquire land, solidifying their permanent position at the bottom of Saint-Domingue's economic hierarchy.

So far, Louverture's agrarian policies had been extremely successful in rebuilding the colony's export economy. Sugar exports had risen from 1,750,387 pounds in 1795 to 18,535,112 pounds in 1801, with coffee exports rising from 2,228,270 pounds to 43,420,270 pounds during the same period.<sup>37</sup> Yet the reconstruction of Saint-Domingue was still very much a work in progress, and Louverture remained ever desperate to expand and retain his political authority. With Napoleon gradually consolidating power in the metropole, Louverture saw the need to firmly establish himself as the ruler of Saint-Domingue lest a new French-

<sup>34</sup> Lacerte, "Land and Labor," 449, 453.

<sup>35</sup> Lacerte, "Land and Labor," 453.

<sup>36</sup> Lacerte, "Land and Labor," 452.

<sup>37</sup> Lacerte, "Land and Labor," 453.

appointed governor seek to unravel the delicate social fabric that he had spent years weaving. In early February 1801 Louverture passed a new constitution which named him governor-for-life and firmly declared that slavery would never return to the colony. It also reconfirmed the dependency of Saint-Domingue's prosperity on cash-crop cultivation, placing even more restrictions on plantation workers. Article 17 of the new constitution granted Louverture the power to "encourage" an increase in the "number of hands" available for cultivation, indicating his plans to eventually import more African laborers to work on plantations.<sup>38</sup> To some, this was a necessary measure in revitalizing Saint-Domingue's export economy and protecting the free status of cultivators. To others, it was an indication that Louverture was rebuilding the systems of colonial exploitation that the rebels of 1791 had been determined to destroy.

Many of Louverture's supporters felt alienated by the agenda set forth by the new constitution, including Hyacinthe Moïse, the general and "agricultural inspector" of the Northern Province. Moïse was a former slave who had been by Louverture's side since the early days of the 1791 revolt, and the two had grown so loyal to one another that Louverture had actually adopted Moïse as his nephew. Yet Moïse had always been much more sympathetic to cultivators than any other general, and he often made exceptions when enforcing Louverture's increasingly restrictive labor codes. He was reluctant to use violence against offending workers, and

even began advocating for the parcelization of land for military officers, going directly against Louverture's goals of preserving large estates. When the Constitution of 1801 was published, Moïse was horrified at the prospect of importing more Africans into the colony. There is an unfortunate lack of historical evidence pointing to what he did next, but it seems that he had at least some part in organizing—or at least doing nothing to stop—a series of uprisings that broke out in the northern plains in October 1801. The rebellion was quickly suppressed by generals Dessalines and Anri Christophe, and they immediately arrested Moïse on Louverture's orders. When he arrived in Le Cap on November 4, Louverture ordered his military tribunals to declare Moïse and the other rebel leaders guilty without trial. Although Moïse maintained his innocence, Louverture sentenced his nephew to execution by firing squad.<sup>39</sup>

Betrayed and enraged, Louverture made a declaration on November 5, denouncing the internal enemies of his regime, criticizing the laziness of cultivator communities, and demanding stricter enforcement of his October 1800 labor codes. "In a well-ordered state," he declared, "idleness is the source of all disorders." He decreed that any individuals found to be engaging in laziness or vagrancy—as well as any officers found to tolerate this behavior—were to be promptly executed.<sup>40</sup> Louverture also ordered the creation of a new system of surveillance to help enforce these drastic new policies. All residents of Saint-Domingue

<sup>38</sup> Toussaint Louverture, *Constitution of the French Colony of Saint-Domingue*, 1801.

<sup>39</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 245.

<sup>40</sup> An English translation of the decree of November 25th, 1801, can be found in George Tyson Jr., ed., *Toussaint Louverture* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1973), 51-56.

were now required to carry “security cards” with them at all times, which listed the individual’s name, age, sex, address, and place of employment. The punishment of not being able to produce this card on demand depended on one’s national status. European-born Frenchmen—whom Louverture described as “foreigners” and “metropolitans”—would be detained and deported, while any “creole” would be detained and sent to work on a plantation.<sup>41</sup>

Growing frustrated—and likely threatened—by Louverture’s accumulation of power, First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte formulated a plan to unseat his new rival and reestablish Saint-Domingue’s subservience to French authority. After spending months consolidating a massive invasion force, Napoleon put his brother-in-law Charles Leclerc in charge of the expedition and briefed him on a three-step plan to reassert French control in the colony without firing a single shot. First, Leclerc and his fleet would arrive in Saint-Domingue under peaceful pretenses and make any promise necessary to get Louverture to hand over ports and military bases to the French. After the troops had firmly established their presence there, Leclerc was to demand Louverture to cede all of his political authority. All of Louverture’s senior officer corps would remain in power and be used to quell any potential uprisings that would occur upon Louverture’s removal.

Finally, after the new colonial administration had solidified its authority, Leclerc was to round up every member of the military above the rank of officer and have them deported. “Once the blacks have been disarmed and the principal generals sent to France,” Napoleon wrote to Leclerc, “you will have done more for the commerce and civilization of Europe than we have done in our most brilliant campaigns.”<sup>42</sup>

Louverture was familiar with Napoleon’s aggressive political strategies, however, and was well aware that Leclerc would be nothing more than a usurper. After issuing his November 5 declaration, Louverture spent the next few months bolstering as much military force as possible. He toured the countryside calling on veteran cultivators to take up their arms and join his army; he hid caches of weapons in strategic locations across the colony; he informed his generals that if their fortifications were besieged, they were to hold out as long as possible, then burn their fortification to the ground, retreat into the mountains, and wait for the European invaders to die from disease. “Annihilate and burn everything,” Louverture ordered, “so that those that come to put us back in bondage always encounter here a portrayal of the hell they all deserve to go to.”<sup>43</sup> But when the French fleet—carrying over 20,000 well-armed soldiers—was spotted off the northeast coast of the island on

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<sup>41</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 248-249. Despite the clear steps toward authoritarianism that Toussaint took at this moment, Dubois points out the ironic progressivism that this measure entailed. By defining a “creole” as any individual born in the colony or in Africa, Toussaint’s decree ended the legal differentiation between American-born creoles and African-born bossales, “not to grant them rights as citizens but to limit those rights.”

<sup>42</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 254.; Fick, *Making of Haiti*, 209-210.; Bonaparte to Leclerc, July 1, 1802, in Roussier, *Lettres du Général Leclerc*, 305-306, cited in Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 255-256.

<sup>43</sup> Le gouverneur général au général Dessalines, 19 Pluviôse Year X (8 February 1802), reproduced in Lacroix, *La Révolution de Haïti*, 319. Quoted in Gérard, “Liberté, Egalité, Escavage,” 66.

January 26, 1802, Louverture realized how slim his chances of success were, exclaiming, “All of France has come to Saint-Domingue.”<sup>44</sup>

On February 3, Leclerc arrived in the harbor of Le Cap with 5,000 troops and commanded General Christophe to allow him and his forces to enter the city. Instead of complying, Christophe ordered the city to be razed. Leclerc entered Le Cap a few days later and found only ashes and rubble.<sup>45</sup> Napoleon’s plan to peacefully conquer Saint-Domingue had failed before it began, and Louverture’s regime was now in open rebellion against the French Republic.

Louverture’s preparations did little to stop the French army from quickly conquering a series of strategic fortifications along the Northern Province. As his generals

### **A People’s Revolution**

Now with total political authority over Saint-Domingue, Governor Leclerc’s first order of business was to remove the threat of mass revolt by disarming the general population. He ordered General Dessalines to go around the colony and demand cultivator communities to surrender their weapons, which the general was happy to do. Dessalines met any reluctance from cultivators with swift and brutal shows of force, eventually being given the nickname “The Butcher of the Blacks” by Leclerc himself. Unbeknownst to the governor, however, Dessalines was secretly hoarding these weapons in secret caches for future use. For the next few years, Dessalines was determined to make himself an indispensable

began to see the inevitability of French victory, they began to defect one-by-one, bringing their territory, troops, and munitions with them. Louverture was forced to spend most of the next four months as a fugitive as he watched the number of troops under his command gradually dissolve. At the end of April, General Christophe—who commanded the largest force still loyal to Louverture—defected to the French, bringing 1,500 regular troops and 4,000 armed cultivators with him. Realizing his defeat, Louverture proposed a cease-fire and recognized Leclerc’s authority over all of Saint-Domingue. In early June 1802, Louverture was arrested and deported to France for imprisonment. Less than a year later, he would be found dead in his cell.

leader in Leclerc’s army until the exact right moment of betrayal presented itself, which, as Laurent Dubois writes, “was certainly no consolation for those who were his victims during this period.”<sup>46</sup>

Once it became clear that his regime would not be threatened by a well-armed peasantry, Leclerc went about revitalizing Saint-Domingue’s export economy. Before he left France, he and Napoleon decided that the expedition would only require funding for the duration of the journey, after which they could pay and supply their soldiers using profits from sugar and coffee exports. Yet that plan had depended on the peaceful conquest of the colony, and the violence of the invasion had left the plantation system once again in tatters. Now being faced with

<sup>44</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 250.

<sup>45</sup> Fick, *Making of Haiti*, 210-211.

<sup>46</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 281.

an underperforming economy and an oversized military, Leclerc attempted to remedy both problems by disarming Black troops and sending them back to their original plantations. Dozens of all-Black brigades were disbanded, their men being stripped of their weapons and their social status in one fell swoop.<sup>47</sup>

In the midst of trying to rebuild the ruins of Saint-Domingue's plantation economy, Leclerc was also facing the worst outbreak of yellow fever that had ever been recorded in the colony. The deadly disease spread among the colonial administration and military at an unbelievable rate, killing an average of a hundred men each day in the final months of 1802. By the end of the year, the French population had been decimated; of the forty thousand or so that had arrived in February, between twenty and twenty-five thousand had died.<sup>48</sup>

To make matters even worse for Leclerc, Napoleon had spent that year passing a series of laws aimed at maximizing the effectiveness of French extractivism in its colonies. On May 20th, 1802, the First Consul formally repealed the Law of February 4th, 1794, which had abolished slavery in the entire French Empire. Colonies would now be under the authority of "special laws," that Napoleon could devise and impose at will. He decided to test the effectiveness of these special laws in the colony of Guadeloupe, where he ordered his general there to reimpose slavery in all but name. Free black citizens were stripped of all civil rights and denied the right of mobility, and all wages and profit-sharing that may

have been set up since 1794 were immediately cancelled. A mass rebellion soon rose up under the leadership of the Black officer Louis Delgrès, who while preparing his forces gave a public proclamation explaining the righteousness of his dissent and the goals of the insurgency:

Our old oppressors permitted a master to emancipate his slave. But it seems that, in this century of philosophy, there exist men, grown powerful thanks to the distance that separates them from those who appointed them, who only want to see men who are black or who take their origins from this color in the chains of slavery. First Consul [Napoleon] of the Republic, warrior-philosopher from whom we expected the justice we deserved, why have we been abandoned to mourn how far we live from the land that produced the sublime ideas we have so often admired? . . . Citizens of Guadeloupe, you for whom a difference in the color of the epidermis is enough of a title so that you do not fear the vengeance that threatens us—unless they force you to carry arms against us—you have heard what motivates our indignation. Resistance to oppression is a natural right. Divinity itself cannot be offended that we are defending our cause, which is that of humanity and justice. Yes, we are resolved to defend ourselves, but we will not become aggressors. Stay in your homes, and fear nothing from us. We swear solemnly to respect your wives, your children, your properties, and to use all our power to make sure others respect them. . . . And you, posterity! Shed a tear for our sorrows, and we will die satisfied.<sup>49</sup>

After the arrival of the French General Antoine Richepance and his army, the rebels soon found themselves overwhelmed and on the backfoot. While defending their last stronghold at a site called Matouba, Delgrès

<sup>47</sup> Lacerte, "Land and Labor," 454.

<sup>48</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 281.

<sup>49</sup> Louis Delgrès, *Proclamation*, 1802.

and his followers chose to die rather than return to bondage. Joining together in a chorus of “No slavery! Long live death!” they gathered their stockpiled barrels of gunpowder and ignited them, ending their rebellion with one final act of destruction.<sup>50</sup>

The legacy of Louis Delgrès and his co-conspirators would have died with them, if not for the 1,200 Guadeloupean rebels who had been captured and deported by the French authorities in the early months of the insurrection. In July 1802, the vessel carrying these prisoners stopped in the harbor of Le Cap on its way out of the Caribbean. While the ship was docked, a few of the prisoners escaped and made their way into Saint-Domingue where they found refuge among local cultivator communities, whom they informed of the injustices they had been subjected to. Word quickly spread that slavery had been reestablished in Guadeloupe and that Saint-Domingue would soon follow suit.

Despite the restrictive labor codes that they had been forced to endure since their emancipation, cultivators were keenly aware of the ways in which their current lives of coerced paid labor were preferable to their old lives of bondage and torture. Throughout that autumn, multiple independent groups of armed Black soldiers rose up in defiance of French colonial authority. Instead of denying these rumors, Leclerc seemed to all but confirm them when he issued a proclamation in October that offered “liberty to all those individuals freed in the colony by the

emancipation decrees of 1793 who joined the French in fighting the insurgents.”<sup>51</sup>

The resurgence of slavery was now undeniable, and the resulting insurgency spread like wildfire across the colony. Independent militia groups engaged in fierce guerilla warfare in the areas surrounding French strongholds. Black ex-soldiers who had been discharged from Leclerc’s armed forces began merging with these guerilla bands, bringing weapons, supplies, and military experience to the resistance. A former bossale slave named Jean-Baptiste Sans Souci soon emerged as a leading figure on the northern plains surrounding Le Cap. Sans Souci had been an effective guerilla leader since the 1791 revolt, and now fought for control over the same territory that he had helped seize from French slave masters all those years before.<sup>52</sup> In the South, insurgent groups led by two officers named Cangé and Gilles Bambara besieged Jacmel, setting up a string of ambush sites that temporarily blocked French reinforcements from arriving in the city. Save for the leadership of a few seasoned insurgents, this rebellion remained uniquely decentralized. Hundreds of small, independent cadres of Black soldiers initiated guerilla campaigns with brutal effectiveness. In late August, Leclerc wrote that there were “2,000 leaders” that he would need to deport in order to reassert French control over the island.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the best efforts of Leclerc and his Black generals in rooting out bands of guerilla fighters, the size of the insurgency only seemed to grow with each French

<sup>50</sup> Général Jean-François-Xavier de Ménard, *On the Final Stand of Delgrès*, 1802.

<sup>51</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 286.

<sup>52</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press), 42.

<sup>53</sup> Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 283-287.

victory. Defeated rebels became martyrs in the fight against slavery, inspiring more plantation laborers to join insurgent strongholds.<sup>54</sup> “These men die with incredible fanaticism,” wrote Leclerc, “They laugh at death, and the same is true of the women.”<sup>55</sup> Women and children in rural communities often served as spies for rebel bands, and were also known to fire upon passing French troops and even execute survivors of rebel ambushes.<sup>56</sup> The valor of insurgent women, even those facing certain death, was profound. According to C.L.R. James, “When Chevalier, a black chief, hesitated at the sight of the scaffold, his wife shamed him. ‘You do not know how sweet it is to die for liberty!’ And refusing to allow herself to be hanged by the executioner, she took the rope and hanged herself.”<sup>57</sup>

The martyrdom of slain insurgents also inspired Black troops who were loyal to the French to defect in droves, adding their weapons and military expertise to the revolutionary cause. Beginning in October, after having grown increasingly distrustful of the remaining Black troops under his command, Leclerc began to ruthlessly punish loyal troops for betrayals that they had not yet committed. In Le Cap, he ordered the arrest of all Black colonial troops in the city. He then ordered his men to board 1,000 of these prisoners onto ships in the harbor, tie bags of

flour around their necks, and throw them overboard. According to one French officer, by early November the French had drowned nearly 4,000 colonial troops.<sup>58</sup> Leclerc’s murderous agenda apparently knew no bounds, as indicated by a letter that he wrote to Napoleon in early October in which he advocated for nothing short of genocide. “Here is my opinion on this country,” he wrote, “We must destroy all the *negres* of the mountains, men and women, and keep only children under twelve years old. . . . Otherwise, the colony will never be quiet.”<sup>59</sup> After the rebellious subjects had been purged, France could import a whole new generation of African laborers who had not known the experience of fighting for and obtaining their freedom in the New World.<sup>60</sup>

As Leclerc’s terror campaign continued, the Black generals still under his command began to gradually change allegiances and side with the insurgency. On October 13, French units under the command of Alexandre Pétion and Augustin Clerveaux—who had been tasked with defending the outskirts of Le Cap from Macaya and his insurgent army—defected and allied themselves with Macaya’s rebels. This newly unified force attacked that same night, quickly taking control of several forts and forcing the French to retreat into the city. General Christophe defected soon after,

<sup>54</sup> Girard, Phillippe R. “Liberte, Egalite, Escavage: French Revolutionary Ideals and the Failure of the Leclerc Expedition to Saint-Domingue”, 65.

<sup>55</sup> Charles-Victor-Emanuel Leclerc, *Lettres*, 202, 206. Cited in Fick, *Making of Haiti*, 221.

<sup>56</sup> Geggus, “Slave and Free Colored Women in Saint Domingue,” in *More than Chattel: Black women and slavery in the Americas*, ed. David Gaspar and Darlene Hine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 259-278, here 272.

<sup>57</sup> C.L.R James, *Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, p. 361. Quoted in Moitt, Bernard, “Slave Women and Resistance in the French Caribbean,” in *More than Chattel*, ed. Gaspar & Hine, 239-258.

<sup>58</sup> Dubois, *Avengers*, 289.

<sup>59</sup> Leclerc to Bonaparte, October 7, 1802.

<sup>60</sup> Dubois, *Avengers*, 291.



denouncing the French colonizers and capturing the town of Port-de-Paix in the name of the rebellion. Next was General Dessalines, who led an attack on the French garrison at Gonaïves, forcing the colonial troops there to retreat into the harbor.<sup>61</sup> As Carolyn Fick points out, it would be a mistake to credit these defecting military leaders with the eventual success of the rebellion, as they only defected once it became clear that Leclerc's colonial administration was fighting a war that it could not possibly win. "The masses had resisted the French from the very beginning, in spite of, and not because of, their leadership," Fick writes, "They had shouldered the whole burden and paid the price of resistance all along, and it was they who had now made possible the political and military reintegration of the leaders in the collective struggle."<sup>62</sup> These military leaders had been more than comfortable as decorated officers in Leclerc's army, and had seemingly no qualms with committing atrocities on his behalf—particularly Dessalines, the Butcher of the Blacks. Their defections came not as a result of moral epiphanes, but as a consequence of the realization that they were sailors aboard a sinking ship. They could have stayed loyal to Leclerc and inevitably drowned, or they could board another ship, one being captained by the revolting masses of Saint-Domingue.

On November 2, Leclerc died, adding one more tally to those killed by the ongoing yellow fever epidemic. His chosen successor—whom Leclerc had described as

"a person of integrity, a good military man, and he hates the blacks"—was General Rochambeau, a veteran of the American Revolution. As the new commander of French colonial forces in Saint-Domingue, Rochambeau continued the pattern of atrocities that Leclerc had begun, his personal favorite being the gladiatorial execution of Black prisoners by specially trained attack dogs that had been imported from Cuba.<sup>63</sup> Despite—or, in part, because of—his widespread terror campaigns, popular uprisings against French authority continued to grow, eventually engulfing the colony.

Instead of rushing to expel the last remnants of French colonial authority from the island, insurgent generals—under the primary leadership of Dessalines—chose to first consolidate the myriad rebel cells into one massive, centralized military under their direct control. Seeking to unify the people of Saint-Domingue against the common enemy of white colonizers, Dessalines came to define all people of color—Creole, bossale, and colored—as "Black." He also ordered the removal of the white stripe from the French flag, declaring it as the standard of the new "Indigenous Army."<sup>64</sup> Though he and the officers under his command succeeded in unifying many of the remaining rebel cells, there remained some who refused to swear loyalty to the new centralized military. Sans Souci was the main obstacle to unification in the north, as he rejected all offers extended to him by Dessalines and Christophe. Having just spent several months defending the northern plains from Christophe and his

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<sup>61</sup> Dubois, *Avengers*, 288.

<sup>62</sup> Fick, *Making of Haiti*, 228.

<sup>63</sup> Leclerc, *Lettres*, 148: no. 56 (7 mai 1802); Fick, *Making of Haiti*, 229.

<sup>64</sup> Dubois, *Avengers*, 293.

French troops, Sans Souci refused to start taking orders from his former adversary. He held out longer than most resistant rebels, but as the Indigenous Army continued to absorb insurgents across the island, he eventually agreed to accept Dessalines as his superior. However, Christophe still viewed Sans Souci as a threat to his authority over the Northern Province. He invited Sans Souci to a meeting at his headquarters on the Grand Pre plantation, and when Sans Souci arrived, Christophe had him and his guards bayoneted.<sup>65</sup>

By November 1803, Rochambeau and his colonial administration had been all but abandoned by the metropole. After the death of Leclerc, Napoleon had given up his vision for an empire in the Americas, selling the entire colony of Louisiana to the United States and ignoring Rochambeau's pleas for reinforcements. The northern Indigenous

### Conclusion

During the thirteen-year period between 1789 and 1802, the common people of Saint-Domingue had witnessed frequent military coups, invasions by three competing European powers, an unprecedented epidemic, the burning of their communities, and the deaths of countless friends and relatives. They were promised liberty and freedom by revolting slave elites, by invading foreign nations, and by their own colonial government, all of whom failed to deliver or preserve that promise. After thirteen years of being reluctant participants in a series of wars and regimes that depended on their labor and

Army had forced Rochambeau and his colonial administration to retreat to Le Cap, where they were met with a British blockade that prevented their escape. Choosing British captivity over popular revenge, Rochambeau, his few thousand troops, and many of the white residents of Le Cap sailed into the harbor where they were taken prisoner.<sup>66</sup> The last remnants of French rule over Saint-Domingue had been definitively expelled.

Dessalines now found himself as the undisputed leader of a newly independent country, which was given the name "Haiti," the original name for the island used by its indigenous inhabitants. Haiti, the second non-indigenous independent nation in the Western Hemisphere and the first modern nation to abolish slavery, was to be a paragon of liberation from colonial rule, racial oppression, and involuntary servitude.

their military service yet provided little or no opportunities for improving one's quality of life, the people of Saint-Domingue finally took it upon themselves to demand and protect their liberty by their own volition. Instead of adding their bodies to the military and labor forces of centralized insurgent groups with various competing agendas, as they did in 1791, the people of 1802 partook in a decentralized mass uprising with one unified goal: defense of one's liberty, or death in defeat.

The Haitian People's Revolution of 1802, while being an important milestone in the teleological concept of human rights and

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<sup>65</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 43-44.

<sup>66</sup> Dubois, *Avengers*, 298.

national self-determination, eventually fell victim to the same fate that awaited most popular revolutions in the modern era: the commandeering of the revolution by a handful of elites who, among coming to power, quickly repudiate the popular will that had fueled their usurpation. After establishing himself as the ruler of independent Haiti, Dessalines—now referred to as Emperor Jacques I—quickly went about reconstructing the old labor dictatorship that Louverture had devised in order to maximize national revenue through the exploitation of the most uneducated and underrepresented citizens under his rule. By the beginning of 1805, Dessalines had expelled or massacred

most of Haiti's white population and declared that "no white man, regardless of his nationality, may set foot in [Haiti] as a master or landowner, nor will he ever be able to acquire any property."<sup>67</sup> Yet the new "Creole" state maintained the same hierarchies of labor, commerce, and privilege that had existed since before Haitian independence. The white rulers had been ousted, but their methods of authority were never dismantled, just hijacked by a new aristocracy. For Haitian commoners, a change in their oppressors' skin color did little to remedy their plights as exploited laborers.

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<sup>67</sup> *The Haitian Constitution*, 1805.

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## **A Love So Swede: How a Swedish Immigrant Family Made a Home in the United States**

Cayden Stice

On the eastern plains of Kansas, a crumbling barn rests within a circle of trees, ready to collapse at any moment. Near that barn, bits of concrete and lumber litter the plot of a long-destroyed house. This land was the Nelson family farm, and in the first half of the twentieth century, Elmer and Bertha Nelson found fortune in farming and raised their daughters Hilda and Olga into a life of privilege. For Elmer and Bertha, this fortune was unimaginable in their childhood. Both immigrated from Sweden, separately, originating from lower socioeconomic classes with little room for upward mobility. Though Bertha and Elmer encountered difficulties in the United States, their lives were simple and refined. One of their grandchildren, Janice Stice, provided an oral history in the spring of 2020, detailing their respective immigrations, marriage, family, and deaths. Alongside this oral history, family photos and newspaper clippings document the presence of the Nelson farm and how the family followed migration trends in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Nelson family is a case study in how some immigrants found and established roots in the United States,

navigating hardships and finding success along the way.

Commencing in the 1860s and 1870s, Bertha and Elmer were part of a tide of Swedish immigrants to the Midwest.<sup>1</sup> Starting in the 1860s, Swedish land companies, such as the Scandinavian Land Company, prepared for a surge in immigrants by purchasing thousands upon thousands of acres to resell.<sup>2</sup> These came after efforts by the government of Kansas to bolster immigration rates, seeking to strengthen its population and economics by extension.<sup>3</sup> Further, the few Swedes who had immigrated to Kansas pre-Civil War routinely encouraged others to join them on the plains. One of these early Swedish immigrants to Kansas was Henry L. Kiisel, who published many letters urging Swedes to move westward, whether still in Sweden or already in other parts of the United States. In 1857, Kiisel wrote, "Countrymen in New York and in other eastern states! You who work hard every day for your small daily wage, now is the chance for you to get your own home where you can live independent of Americans, and you will escape working so hard and cease to be dependent upon your daily wages."<sup>4</sup> Other Swedish authors

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<sup>1</sup> A substantial number of Swedish immigrants initially settled in Illinois and other parts of the United States but overcrowding pushed many further into the throes of places such as Kansas. For more information on this process, see Aidan McQuillan, "The Mobility of Immigrants and Americans: A

Comparison of Farmers on the Kansas Frontier," *Agricultural History* 53, no. 3 (1979), 576-96.

<sup>2</sup> Emory Lindquist, "The Swedish Immigrant and Life in Kansas," *Kansas History Quarterlies: A Journal of the Central Plains* 29, no. 1 (1963), 1-24.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

boasted of similar prospects about life in Kansas. A brochure from 1857 noted the perfect agricultural conditions and the cheap land: immigrants could purchase 180 acres in Kansas for the price of a mere twenty acres in other states.<sup>5</sup> While this encouragement directly spoke to Swedes already in the United States, these words made their way back to Sweden and prompted others to find the “Kansan Dream.”<sup>6</sup>

With the prairie plotted out, everyone had the chance to own land.<sup>7</sup> This opportunity was a stark contrast to Sweden, where only the elite and noble classes held property.<sup>8</sup> However, in many instances, religious adherence to the Lutheran Church was a prerequisite to land ownership. Lutheran churches were central to Swedish immigrant communities, a way to preserve the language, cultural tradition, and familiarity of an old home in a new land.<sup>9</sup> The churches also kept cultural purity among Swedish immigrants. Pastors forwent

performing mixed identity marriages, where a person of Swedish descent wished to wed someone of a different background.<sup>10</sup> Yet these churches had limits - over time, integration between American and Swedish traditions emerged. Nonetheless, the formation of community around the church explains the continued presence of Swedish culture in these communities today. Lindsborg, Kansas, southwest of where Elmer and Bertha resided, is a modern mecca for Swedish culture, akin to Chinatowns or Little Italies scattered across the United States.

Such immigrant stories came at the expense of Native American livelihoods. Republic County, Kansas, where Bertha and Elmer homesteaded, had been previously occupied by the Pawnee Nation. By the 1860s, when Swedish settlers began settling the region, the Pawnee people were endangered, with settlers exacerbating difficulties. Since the 1820s, diseases such as

<sup>5</sup> Emory Lindquist, “The Swedes in Kansas Before the Civil War,” *Kansas History Quarterly: A Journal of the Central Plains* 19, no. 4 (1951), 259.

<sup>6</sup> Cross-cultural communication is a staple across many immigrant groups. Similar to how Swedish immigrants communicated back to Sweden, Mexican immigrants to the United States have conversed across the border. These memos have taken place in multiple formats, including handwritten letters, telegraphs, newspapers, among other mediums. For more information on these practices, see Miroslava Chávez-García, *Migrant Longing: Letter Writing Across the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Chapel Hill, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> The term “everyone” may or may not have included women, in regard to the ownership of property. Across Kansas, female homesteaders existed, though often that group was limited to women of European ancestry. The particular allowances by Swedish property companies selling land are unknown. For more information on white female homesteaders in Kansas, see Tonia Compton, “Challenging Imperial Expectations: Black and White Female Homesteaders

in Kansas,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2013), 49-61.

<sup>8</sup> For a further analysis on Swedish culture in the nineteenth century, see Steven Schnell, “Creating Narratives of Place and Identity in “Little Sweden, U.S.A.,” *Geographical Review* 93, no. 1 (2003), 1-29.

<sup>9</sup> Lindquist, “The Swedish Immigrant and Life in Kansas.”

<sup>10</sup> Marriage practices were a strict custom in nineteenth century Sweden. With rigid class dichotomies in place, a marriage was one of a few chances to move upward on the economic ladder of society. Thus, families strategized the best way to have their children wed, and either maintain or grow their wealth. However, because of the difficulties in cross-class relations marriages typically maintained homogeneity among villages. For a further analysis on these marriage practices see Martin Dribe and Christer Lundh, “Finding the Right Partner: Rural Homogamy in Nineteenth-Century Sweden,” *International Review of Social History* 50 (2005), 149-77.

smallpox decimated the population from around eight thousand people to four thousand.<sup>11</sup> Further, an influx of migrants and traders had diminished food sources such as the bison. These troubles intensified as other Native American groups conducted raids on the Pawnee, while Euro-Americans also encroached on Pawnee territory. Despite treaties established with the United States government, the Pawnee continued to struggle because of infringement by immigrants from Europe. As more European immigrants arrived, a narrative emerged of the Pawnee as violent and predatory. European settlers described the Pawnee as "rascals" in need of "scalping," amplifying fears among settlers who began fretting for their safety.<sup>12</sup> This fearmongering led to two schools of thought among settlers on how to proceed. In the first school, settlers believed Christianity and reeducation of the Pawnee was necessary to bring peace. However, the Pawnee refused to engage with this foreign and bizarre ideology. The second school of thought wished to expel the Pawnee to reservations. In the end, the second camp dominated settler thought, and the Pawnee were forcibly sent to tightly packed reservations.<sup>13</sup>

In 1864, a militia from Republic County, composed of white settlers, banded to fight on behalf of "wives, mothers, sisters and daughters, whose lives and homes were

to be protected from ruthless savages."<sup>14</sup> For the next several years, this company of men warred against the Pawnee, pushing the tribe into tighter and tighter confines. An early twentieth century account by a resident, Issac Savage, reads, "The Indians claimed that, by treaty, they had a right to perpetual occupancy of this country; and this claim they kept up until 1870, when they very reluctantly abandoned all the country east of the Republican river, but continued their depredations for a year or two longer in the newer counties farther west."<sup>15</sup> As the Pawnee were pushed away, they began retaliating against the intrusion of settlers. According to Savage, they drove cattle off pastures, scorched crops, and in rare instances, murdered settlers.<sup>16</sup> Swedish settlers became further enraged by this and battles of retaliation ensued.

In *History of the State of Kansas*, William G. Cutler notes that the Swedes of Republic County lived in fear, afraid of besiegement by Native Americans. However, like many other settling parties to the Great Plains, these fears diminished with the continued dominance by Euro-Americans.<sup>17</sup> The Pawnee people, meanwhile, found themselves destroyed economically, socially, and demographically. Come 1875, the majority of Pawnee people left their homeland and moved south to modern-day Oklahoma.<sup>18</sup> While European settlers

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<sup>11</sup> David Wishart, "The Dispossession of the Pawnee," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 69, no. 3 (1979), 387.

<sup>12</sup> David Wishart, "The Dispossession of the Pawnee," 392.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 390-401.

<sup>14</sup> Issac Savage, *A History of Republic County, Kansas* (Eloit, Kansas: Jones & Chubbic, Art Printers, 1901), 46.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>17</sup> William G. Cutler, *History of the State of Kansas* (Chicago, IL: A. T. Andreas, 1901).

<sup>18</sup> To learn more about the history of the Pawnee people, see Roger T. Grange, "The Pawnee and the Impact of Euro-American Cultures: Three Centuries of Contact and Change," *Revista de Arqueología Americana*, no. 12 (1997), 87-111.



enjoyed the land, including Elmer and Bertha, it only came after the violent displacement of indigenous people from their current and ancestral homes. Neither Elmer nor Bertha encountered conflicts with indigenous Americans (Elmer immigrated in 1878; Bertha immigrated in 1900). Elmer's father, Nils Nilson (later respelled as Nelson), told a story of meeting a Pawnee man who visited the family's home seeking food. Nils gave the Pawnee man a bag of flour to ensure peace, and there was never another interaction between the Nelsons and Pawnee people.<sup>19</sup> This story reflects the vulnerability of the Pawnee Nation. Despite years of hostilities with Swedish settlers, the Pawnee scavenged for food from the very communities that displaced and harmed them.

Born Heljmar Nelson in 1876, Elmer immigrated to the United States as an infant, with his parents, Nils and Carolina Nelson, and siblings Mary and Carl. Nils and Carolina had three more children while in the United States, Fredrik, Anna, and Ida, for a total of six. In Sweden, Nils and Carolina had been in the peasant class, bowing their heads to nobles who passed in the streets.<sup>20</sup> Class distinctions were central in Swedish culture in the nineteenth century, including the region of Varmland where Nils and Carolina originated. Because of this social scaffolding, Nils and Carolina had little land and resources to raise their children on. Upon hearing about the cheap abundance of land in the United States, the decision to go west became clear. With the Ada Lutheran

Church, the Nelsons crossed the Atlantic in 1879, initially entering through Canada and coming to the United States through a Chicago passageway.<sup>21</sup> From there, the Nelsons continued toward Kansas, purchasing 160 acres in Kackley, Republic County.

Life was difficult for the Nelson family during their first years in the United States. Nils was a violent drunkard, which amplified his already distempered personality. In Sweden, he imbibed at a local tavern owned by his mother. His mother encouraged him to brawl for her amusement. Because of these brawls, Nils was widely disliked in his Swedish village. In Republic County, this reputation continued among new faces. From Kackley to Scandia (also within the county), Nils took his horse to bars and treated his already disgruntled spirits. His consumption led to blacking out, and in some instances, local legend said his horse carried him home without any orders.<sup>22</sup> At home, Nils was abrasive and cruel to his wife and children, unleashing his temper even more than it manifested in public. Further, these habits created financial havoc for the family. Though Nils maintained some crops and kept horses, the cash flow was paltry. To make up for lost money, Nils contracted Elmer, at seven years old, to other farmers in the community. Elmer conducted fieldwork, stable work, and learned multiple skills throughout his childhood employment. Such skills helped him later on. More importantly,

<sup>19</sup> Janice Stice, interview by Cayden Stice, February 22, 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Stice, interview.

<sup>22</sup> Despite his horses caring for him, Nils seemingly gave no care for his horses. In one fit of rage, he swung a wrench against a horse with such force and frequency, the horse died within a few blows. Ibid.

Elmer stayed away from his abusive father.<sup>23</sup> Elmer seldom discussed his father and the culture of fear that permeated his youth.<sup>24</sup>

Nils lost the original farm in 1893. Elmer, however, searched on to find prosperity. At sixteen years old, Elmer visited a local banker and secured a loan to lease an adjacent property to the original farm. Elmer's good reputation in Republic County and strong work ethic assisted this agreement. Seeing his father's failure, Elmer promised to pay the loan off within ten years. The family relocated, and Elmer set to make true of his promise. Nils, meanwhile, continued to imbibe. Carolina, Elmer's mother, continued raising the other children.

Bertha Nelson, née Anderson, sought efficiency and luxury. She was pennywise and dollar-smart. In this same spirit, she sought the best of what life could offer. Born in 1874, in Kungalu, Sweden, Bertha's childhood was unstable.<sup>25</sup> Her biological mother died when Bertha was only three, and her father remarried to a woman Bertha disliked. Little else is known from her childhood and adolescent years. In her teenage years, Bertha worked as a governess for families much wealthier than herself. This position reinforced her lesser status. Unsatisfied with this arrangement, Bertha communicated with a friend in the United States. In this correspondence, Bertha learned she could live easy, like royalty, on the plains of Kansas. She would not have to work and

could lounge and do as she pleased.<sup>26</sup> Bertha saved her money and left Sweden in 1900.<sup>27</sup>

Bertha soon learned her friend had exaggerated America's promise. After a week living with her friend in Kansas (and this friend's husband), Bertha was informed she needed to have a job. Otherwise, the friend would ask Bertha to find shelter elsewhere. Bertha went and found work as a nanny once more, and from there moved around to a host of other jobs within Swedish communities across Kansas. Bertha's limited education, only to the seventh grade, made her job opportunities sparse.<sup>28</sup> After being a nanny, Bertha also worked as a housekeeper.<sup>29</sup> These positions were similar to the lower-status jobs Bertha held in Sweden, though she nonetheless had more comfort in the United States.

Bertha met Elmer sometime between 1900, when she immigrated, and 1905. At a gathering of Swedes in nearby Concordia, Kansas, the two struck a conversation. Following this encounter, Elmer knew he had found his life partner, or at least someone he wanted to know better. However, Bertha was not smitten. Elmer learned weeks later that Bertha moved to Denver with a friend, searching for better work opportunities than what Kansas provided. Elmer was crushed. Unable to write himself, having never gone farther than first grade, Elmer enlisted his sister, Mary, to write to Bertha. As they conversed, Elmer solidified his thoughts:

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Bertha Nelson, obituary, *The Belleville Telescope*, June 15, 1961.

<sup>26</sup> Stice, interview.

<sup>27</sup> 1910 U.S. Federal Census, *Beaver, Republic, Kansas*; Roll: T624\_454; Page: 3B; Enumeration District: 0094; FHL microfilm: 1374467.

<sup>28</sup> 1940 U.S. Federal Census, *Beaver, Republic, Kansas*; Roll: m-t0627-01255; Page: 2A; Enumeration District: 79-3

<sup>29</sup> 1920 U.S. Federal Census, *Beaver, Republic, Kansas*; Roll: T625\_547; Page: 5A; Enumeration District: 100.

Bertha was the one. She was witty, confident, and independent. Bertha too reflected her love in these letters, and before long, Bertha came back to visit and Elmer proposed. Bertha made one demand for marriage: the farm had to be paid off. In Sweden, neither Elmer nor Bertha would have had land security. For this, Bertha demanded land ownership. Already bound to his promise to the banker, Elmer paid off the farm. Elmer also promised Bertha a life better than what they could have in Sweden. He promised a beautiful house, two stories tall, and she would only have to work if she wished.<sup>30</sup> On March 25, 1905, they said “*Jag gör*” (I do).<sup>31</sup> They were married in Concordia at the home of local businessman Col. and Mrs. N.B. Brown, where Bertha had found work earlier on.<sup>32</sup>

Elmer helmed all farm operations, hiring people from the surrounding area to assist. And when he was not working on his farm, Elmer worked with other farmers, who relied on him as a bank of knowledge with his decades of experience. Elmer was respected in the community, and though he did not speak English, he faced little struggle because of the preservation of the Swedish language. Across Republic County, wheat, corn, hayseed, and livestock were a sample of the variety of agricultural output that the Nelson farm produced over its years of operation. Elmer and Bertha stashed away the profits Elmer made, so their children would have better lives than they had.

Elmer and Bertha raised two daughters, Hilda (b. 1909) and Olga (b. 1914), both of whom lived better childhoods than their parents. In an abundance of photographs, the family displays external markers for a good and happy life. In formal portraits, the family is well-dressed in fur, tailored suits, formal hats, and coiffed hair, despite their humble beginnings. Bertha’s passport photo from 1929 reflects enough wealth to travel, visiting her native Sweden on multiple occasions.<sup>33</sup> Other photos show the family posing around two purchased automobiles. In contrast to those posed photos, though, other pictures display a more candid reality, with the family playing in the snow, working in the garden, or feeding their chickens. Other sources show that Hilda and Olga were well-educated. A homework assignment of Olga’s shows her fine handwriting, contrasted to Elmer who never wrote more than an “X” for his name.<sup>34</sup>

The pride of the Nelson family was their house, built in 1912. As Elmer had promised, it was a two story-structure, decorated with ornate wood details, and a gorgeous fireplace. Doors and window frames were made of oak, as was the custom furniture. While there was no indoor plumbing, the family made do, collecting rainwater from gutters and storing it in cisterns. Every morning, a member of the family hand-pumped a bucket of water from a cistern and kept it in a kitchen cupboard. Anytime someone needed a sip of water, that individual dipped a communal cup, which

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<sup>30</sup> Stice, interview.

<sup>31</sup> Elmer Nelson, obituary, *The Belleville Telescope*, February 23, 1961.

<sup>32</sup> “Kackley Couple Wed 50 Years are Feted,” *The Belleville Telescope*, March 31, 1955, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Bertha traveled on the RSS *Lusitania* in 1912 to visit her sister in Sweden. Stice, interview.

<sup>34</sup> Olga Nelson, “The Dole in England,” homework, n.d.

still exists today. While tedious, this process was necessary. There was never a well for the home, as the water in Republic County was too brackish, unfit for human consumption.<sup>35</sup> For any lavatory duties, an outhouse was situated near the home.<sup>36</sup>

Bertha tended to the house while Elmer managed the farm, reflective of larger trends of gender roles in rural Midwestern farming in the twentieth century. While women managed domestic affairs, men tended to larger operations outside the home. However, the domestic role of women was not strictly confined to the inside of the home itself. Women gardened, took goods to market (namely items like poultry and eggs), fed and milked livestock, and took other roles as needed to sustain their livelihoods.<sup>37</sup> Stories about Bertha demonstrate this diversity in roles. Bertha spent her days keeping the home: cooking, nursing, and cleaning. In one instance, a massive snake slithered into the house and hung over the kitchen doorway. Unfazed, Bertha went and found a gardening hoe, and whacked the snake away. For critters that were destructive to infrastructure, like squirrels, Bertha kept a rifle and was known for her sharpshooting skills. In some cases, Bertha reached the top of telephone poles more than two hundred yards away.<sup>38</sup>

However, despite all the good the Nelsons relished, they experienced multiple troubles. In 1910, Elmer's brother Carl was

engaged, until his fiancé broke the engagement for another man. Following this, Carl fell to a catatonic state, and he died after spiraling deep into a depressive spell. Later on, around the summer of 1912, Bertha was home alone nursing the couple's first daughter, Hilda. Elmer and the farm help were out assisting another local farmer. As she milled about the quiet house, Bertha was alarmed when she heard screams and commotion coming closer to the house. Peering out the window, Hilda to her breast, Bertha was struck with fear as she saw Elmer's other brother, Fredrik, violently ambling towards the house with an axe. Freddy, as he was known to the family, indiscriminately swung the axe, oblivious to his surroundings. He hit fence posts and other strewn about items, ready to harm whatever crossed his way. After some time, Elmer and his helpers returned home and found Freddy in his disturbed mental state. Quickly, they subdued Freddy, bound him in rope, and took him to the Topeka State Hospital, also known as the Topeka Insane Asylum. Elmer found Bertha hidden in an upstairs closet, holding Hilda tight. While the property damage had been minimal, and no lives were lost, the incident scarred Bertha mentally, and she disliked being home alone thereafter.<sup>39</sup>

What led to Freddy's rampage is unknown, though his family suspected he

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<sup>35</sup> There was, however, a windmill-propelled well that retrieved water for the farm's animals. Stice, interview.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> In Mary Neth, "Gender and the Family Labor System: Defining Work in the Rural Midwest," *Journal of Social History* 27, no. 3 (1994), 563-77, Neth outlines the continuum of gender labor division

on rural Midwestern farms. While there were exceptions, general trends outlined women for more domestic work, and men more operational duties.

Whenever men worked in the home, they were considered to be "helping out," while women in farm work were given more approval and acceptance.

<sup>38</sup> Stice, interview.

<sup>39</sup> Stice, interview.

was disturbed from his abusive childhood.<sup>40</sup> While Elmer was out working, Freddy was at home, bearing the brunt of whatever Nils' temper could inflict. Following the axe incident, Freddy spent the rest of his days in Topeka, before dying in 1914. Freddy's remains are buried in Kackley, at the Ada Lutheran Cemetery. He lived to be thirty-three years old.<sup>41</sup>

There was also the issue of Nils, who became angrier and more tedious to deal with in his older years. Elmer's sister, Mary, took their mother Carolina to live with Mary's family, away from Nils' alcoholic abuses. By the end of Nils' life, only Elmer and another member of the community visited, relaying each visit with somber details. Unable to cook for himself, Nils spent his dying years eating nothing but tepid oatmeal and any premade items. He went unbathed, his skin layered in dirt. His home lay in squalor.<sup>42</sup> From his obituary, Nils' final wish was "that God might soon relieve him of suffering by taking him home to Eternal Mansions. His desire has been granted."<sup>43</sup> Nils passed away in 1937 at eighty-eight years old. His remains are buried alongside Carolina's, who died in 1938, in the Ada Lutheran Cemetery.<sup>44</sup>

Despite these tragedies, the Nelson daughters, Hilda and Olga, each set out to live their lives as second-generation Swedish

children born in America. Olga moved to Denver and had two children. Hilda, too, set out and had children of her own. Bertha and Elmer continued life on the farm, reaping more harvests and more profits.<sup>45</sup> As middle age turned into their elderly years, their bodies began to slow, and they sought a simpler life. In nearby Jamestown, they purchased another home to settle in, closer to the community should any emergencies arise.<sup>46</sup> Much like their farmhouse, the Jamestown home was also nicer than most of the era. They also paid this home off, keeping with the original vows of their marriage. In 1955, Elmer and Bertha celebrated their fiftieth anniversary, each wearing yellow flowers. Held at the Ada Lutheran Church, over 180 people turned out for the party, with ample food, song, and golden decorations.<sup>47</sup> When not in the spotlight, they spent their days with friends, at church, and enjoying Hilda and Olga bringing their grandchildren. Elmer hired farmers to come in for more frequent work on the farm and eased into retirement. While he always kept a presence at the farm, he relaxed more and more, spending his days alongside Bertha. As he aged, Elmer kept good health and good spirits. A newspaper clipping from when

<sup>40</sup> The same was suspected of Carl, who was believed to have a weakened mental state too because of permanent childhood trauma. Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; Elk Grove Village, IL, USA; *Swedish American Baptisms, Marriages, Deaths, and Burials*; Parish: *Ada Lutheran Church*; ELCA Film Number: S393-395; SSIRC Film Number: S-395.

<sup>42</sup> Stice, interview.

<sup>43</sup> Nils Johan Nelson, obituary, *The Belleville Telescope*, 1937.

<sup>44</sup> "U.S., Find A Grave Index, 1600s-Current" [database on-line], *Ancestry.com*, Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Even with the Dust Bowl of the 1930s, Elmer and Bertha's frugality allowed them to continue living comfortably. In this event, every window and door was lined with a wet cloth, and though some dust managed inside the home, no economic ruin ensued. Stice, interview.

<sup>46</sup> Mrs. C.W. Segerhammar, "Kackley," *The Belleville Telescope*, October 15, 1956, p. 20.

<sup>47</sup> "Kackley Couple Wed 50 Years are Feted," 2.

Elmer was eighty-one years old shows him shoveling the snow.<sup>48</sup>

Elmer called Bertha “Mami” around his grandchildren. In December 1960, when Bertha suffered a debilitating stroke and was sent to Wichita, he wanted nothing more than to be with Mami. Despite having never been beyond twenty miles of the farm and Jamestown, he traveled to Wichita. Upon arrival at the hospital, Bertha was unresponsive, and Elmer wept, heartbroken and distraught. For over fifty years they had been together, working, loving each other, and raising their children, and now her voice was mute. Within a week of visiting his comatose wife, Elmer passed away in February 1961. He was eighty-four years old. In June 1961, Bertha passed away too, at the age of eighty-six. Their remains are buried side-by-side in the Ada Lutheran Cemetery.<sup>49</sup>

With the deaths of Elmer and Bertha, so came the sunset on the Nelson family farm. In settling the estate, Hilda and Olga fought one another for control. Hilda wanted to liquidate the farm for profit, and Olga wanted to preserve the homestead for future generations to come.<sup>50</sup> After a series of shenanigans, with each sister finding loopholes to outplay the other, Olga took control of the land with the condition that the home was sold to a Concordian businessman. This businessman intended to move the lavish home into town, where it would be a staple for the community. However, that unnamed businessman lost control of his

wallet. After purchasing the home, he sold the home for parts in 1962. Every ornate detail and decoration was auctioned off so he could reclaim his finances. Olga was able to salvage a few bits of the home, though much was lost. These items included some wood detailings, as well as an original cup that everyone used in the kitchen for sips of water. As a result, Hilda and Olga severed ties, and never bothered with one another again.<sup>51</sup>

The farm today is still operational, though uninhabited. It is owned by Olga’s oldest child, Donald Horvat.<sup>52</sup> An adjacent farmer uses the land to yield crops, making a meager amount of money every year.<sup>53</sup> If one visits today, after driving down miles of county roads, they will come to a muddy driveway besieged with tall grass, meeting the abandoned barn. In 2005, one of the last possessions of the barn was saved: the family wagon that took the Nelson family around the farm and into town. Little else remains of the Nelson family’s presence.

As go many stories, details fade, homes are sold, and characters fall to the void of history. While this story is incomplete, I hope it can preserve the legacy of Bertha and Elmer, my great-great-grandparents. Though I never met them, I admire their stamina and persistence, as I know them generations later. Working on this research, there were instances where I found the continued influences of Bertha and Elmer alike in my own family: habits, quirks, and the phenotypic traits that persist today. Looking

<sup>48</sup> Thayne Smith, “TIRESOME JOB,” *The Belleville Telescope*, n.d.

<sup>49</sup> “U.S., Find A Grave Index, 1600s-Current” [database on-line], *Ancestry.com*, Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012.

<sup>50</sup> The family held onto the Jamestown home until 1991, when it was sold. Stice, interview.

<sup>51</sup> Stice, interview.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> This farmer, Loren Sweat, owns the land that Nils originally sought to homestead, but lost in 1893. *Ibid.*

through family photos, my expansive forehead became more understandable as I observed Elmer. This genealogical research was a grounding experience. While the pedagogy of history tends to focus on people and events that are distant, a closer look at family history gave me a tangible point to ground myself in larger narratives. This research has allowed me to reflect on my place in the world and connected me to my family in a way where I can appreciate their victories and struggles.

My grandmother, Janice Stice, was instrumental in this research, providing obituaries, photos, and other items to compile. As we conversed in the spring of

2020, I was amazed at the bank of knowledge she possessed. Toward the end of our conversation, my grandma left me with one other story worth documenting. As a child, my grandma visited the farm and admired the seemingly infinite land. And all she wanted was to run through the wheat and past the cows, to the ends of the earth. Mami Bertha, though, prohibited such dangerous and reckless behavior. But come 2012, into her sixties on the desolate plains, my grandma lived out her childhood fantasy. And so this research ends not with a wrench, an axe, or a cloud of dust. Just a kid-at-heart, running free. Bertha and Elmer would be proud.

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