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## **Furman Humanities Review**

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Please direct all correspondence to:

Timothy Fehler

**Furman Humanities Review**

Office of Undergraduate Research & Internships

Furman University

3300 Poinsett Highway

Greenville, SC 29613

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## Contributors

**Elizabeth Fox** ('16) is from Kennesaw, Georgia, and graduated with a double major in History and Religion. She is currently pursuing her MA in the History of Decorative Arts at George Mason University, Smithsonian Associates Program.

**Abigail Hartman** ('17) is completing her degree in History. A native of Greenville, South Carolina, Abigail intends to pursue graduate studies in medieval European history. The Editorial Board selected her essay “Anything and Everything” to receive the Meta E. Gilpatrick Prize for this volume of the *Furman Humanities Review*.

**Anna Lanford** ('17) is a History and Philosophy double major from Charleston, South Carolina.

**Margaret Shelton** ('17) is from Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and is completing her English degree.

**Nathan Thompson** ('16) graduated with a double major in Economics and Political Science. From Arlington, Virginia, Nathan is pursuing his MSc in International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

# “ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING”: THE PROBLEMATIC LIFE OF *CONVIVENCIA*

**Abigail Hartman**

In early 2015, poet and novelist Steven Nightingale published his first piece of nonfiction. *Granada: A Pomegranate in the Hand of God* is in some ways the author’s love-letter to the city in southern Spain, an expression of appreciation for the rich culture and complex past of a place that “has had an uncanny influence in the history of Europe and the world. It is a hive of stories, of sweetness, and of secrets. We might call it a pomegranate in the hand of God.”<sup>1</sup> The pomegranate stands in the book as a symbol of the multicultural, multireligious society of al-Andalus—a society which, in its peaceful heyday when “the three principal religious communities of the Mediterranean settled down to live together,” produced a wealth of literature, architecture, and art.<sup>2</sup>

Nightingale’s goal is to bring these achievements to light, a pursuit he likens to “the excavation of buried treasure” that over the years has been “lost under layers of confusion, ideology, propaganda, ignorance, religious animosity, indifference, and hot debate.”<sup>3</sup> Expressing frustration with academics who would complicate, minimize, or even dismiss this cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Nightingale, *Granada: A Pomegranate in the Hand of God* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2015), 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

zenith,<sup>4</sup> and desiring “to let the work of the period speak for itself,”<sup>5</sup> he embarks on an experiential, sensual exploration of al-Andalus’ artistic triumphs: its enduring Islamic architecture; the musical tradition of *flamenco*; the poetry and philosophy of such men as Samuel ibn Neghrela, a Jew who served as a general and vizier under Muslim rule, and Ramon Llull, a Franciscan who also translated Muslim writings and studied Jewish mysticism. All of these wonders, he argues, were made possible only by the pluralism of Spain’s medieval days, by the coexistence, known as *convivencia*, of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Though not himself a historian, his perspective on the *convivencia* is worth quoting at length, as it embodies one extreme in the debate that has been ongoing since the term was introduced to historiography in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century:

The *convivencia* was a dangerous experiment. It proceeded by fits and starts, setbacks and abominations, strange alliances, unexpected advances, and practical ingenuities. Its achievements, only recently come into focus, were without precedent in Europe. It is a school-room where we might learn, we who even now are failing disastrously to live together at a time with much more dangerous weapons and billions of lives at stake. And we might start by learning from its fate, when in the fifteenth century al-Andalus, with all its accumulated knowledge and accomplishments, met King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel. The two monarchs brought to the Iberian peninsula a will to power, a formidable union, a sense of messianic duty, and, in 1480, their own

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<sup>4</sup> Such dismissal, he implies, can only be explained as the result of sheer bigotry and unwillingness to accept the influence of non-Christian cultures in the making of Spain; see *ibid.*, 246.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

specially designed government agency: the Holy Inquisition.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, Nightingale's take on medieval Spain represents everything that inspires Maya Soifer in her 2009 article "Beyond *Convivencia*" to reject the word altogether. In her view *convivencia* is "loaded with a cacophony of problematic associations,"<sup>7</sup> including a portrait of medieval Spain as a uniquely harmonious society in contrast with a backwards, intolerant Europe. Indeed, she believes the term has been so debated and manipulated over time that it can only have associations, not substance: "*Convivencia* can be anything and everything," and, at the same time, nothing. "Why use a term weighted down by ideological contentiousness and corrupted by generalizations and unprovable assumptions?" she asks rhetorically.<sup>8</sup>

Soifer's article is part of a recent historiographical backlash against the term first coined, or at least popularized, by Américo Castro in 1948.<sup>9</sup> *Convivencia* itself appears at first

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 188. In an endnote Nightingale admits the contentiousness of the term and the continuing debate over how exactly this "living together" worked in daily practice, but adds that "for this writer, these debates are a tiresome and troublesome waste of life, a kind of conceptual tar pit" (p. 354, n. 188). The really interesting question, in his mind, is what was achieved artistically in the period. Presumably, then, he would also have little or no interest in a historiographical paper like this.

<sup>7</sup> Maya Soifer, "Beyond *Convivencia*: Critical Reflections on the Historiography of Interfaith Relations in Christian Spain," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009): 31.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>9</sup> Castro is generally seen as the father of *convivencia*; Alex Novikoff, however, observes that Castro borrowed the term from the philologist Ramón Menéndez Pidal. See Alex Novikoff, "Between Tolerance and Intolerance in Medieval Spain: An Historiographic Enigma," *Medieval Encounters* 11, no. 1 (2005):

glance a deceptively simple word, translating roughly to “living together” and referring to the period of Spanish history—from the Muslim invasion of 711 to the expulsion of the Jews and Muslims in 1492—when those who professed Judaism, Christianity, and Islam inhabited the Iberian Peninsula. That simplicity, however, belies the complexity of the issue, and historians since Castro have used *convivencia* in a variety of ways to describe what that “living together” looked like and what its impact has been on Spanish identity. Castro envisioned the term as (in Soifer’s words) “an idealist construct that aspired to describe the mental processes taking place in the collective consciousness of the three cultures.”<sup>10</sup> Subsequent historians, such as Thomas F. Glick, have reformulated it as a *social* construct, a means of describing the grand structure and evolutionary process of cultural change; others, like David Nirenberg, have applied it at the level of microhistory in an effort to explain the dynamics of interfaith relations “on the ground.” Still others, in the vein of Steven Nightingale, employ it as a concise descriptor of a near-utopian society that the modern world has been struggling ever since to regain. Indeed, the very flexibility and “limitless susceptibility to manipulation and reinvention” that Soifer decries<sup>11</sup> has contributed in large measure to the enduring appeal of the term; for it captures, without actually describing or explaining, the intriguing realities of cultural contact in medieval Spain.

This period of history has gripped non-Spanish imaginations at least since Washington Irving published his *Tales of the Alhambra* in 1832, but interest was revived for Hispanists during the unsettling era of Francisco Franco’s regime. The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw in Spain a nationalist crisis, as scholars attempted to reconcile the glories of a past empire with “the ‘enigma’ of modern Spain . . . hopelessly out of step with,” and

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18 and 20 for a discussion of Pidal’s contributions to Spanish historiography and Castro’s revisionist response.

<sup>10</sup> Soifer, “Beyond *Convivencia*,” 20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.



demonized by, “the rest of Europe.”<sup>12</sup> Spain labored not only under the weight of current political and economic troubles, but also under the “Black Legend” of inquisition and genocide that had dogged her since the 17<sup>th</sup> century—and which Nightingale has perhaps unwittingly restated. Perceived by Europe as backwards, persecutory, fanatic, Spain herself did not seem to know what to do with her history and current identity.

This deep anxiety and pessimism, mingled with a contradictory sense of nationalist pride, underlies the works of Américo Castro. His *España en su historia: cristianos, moros, y judios*, published in 1948, while Castro was in exile in the United States, was written as a corrective to popular views of Spanish history. It was not meant, however, merely as an effort to regain historical truths for their own sake, but as a wake-up call to the nation of Spain. “The greatest service that historiography can offer in these times, replete with threatening omens, is to nail down the reasons for our deficiencies, to comprehend how it is that as a people we were so grandiose in our past undertakings and are so uneasy, troubled, and failure-prone today.”<sup>13</sup> This required an understanding of “how the inner habits of Spanish life have been formed”<sup>14</sup>—a goal Castro insists cannot be achieved using the “economicomaterialistic reasoning” of the then-popular *Annales* school of historians.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Baxter Wolf, “Convivencia in Medieval Spain: A Brief History of an Idea,” *Religion Compass* 3, no. 1 (2009): 73.

<sup>13</sup> Américo Castro, “The Millennium Between ‘España’ and ‘Español,’” in *An Idea of History: Selected Essays of Americo Castro*, trans. and ed. Stephen Gilman and Edmund L. King (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977), 216.

<sup>14</sup> Américo Castro, “The Spanish People,” in *An Idea of History: Selected Essays of Americo Castro*, trans. and ed. Stephen Gilman and Edmund L. King (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977), 190.

<sup>15</sup> Américo Castro, *The Spaniards: An Introduction to Their History*, trans. Edmund L. King and Selma Margaretten (University of California Press, 1971), 3. Castro finds nothing good to say

Questions of economics and demographics fail to reach the heart of the issue, which for Castro is the forging of a collective identity; what is important in his history are thus not “numerical figures” but “acts of human will and volition,” not structures and environmental influences but the ways in which people conceived of themselves and then articulated those conceptions.<sup>16</sup>

Since “language makes history comprehensible” and is “a way of expressing and interpreting life,” Castro turns to his own area of expertise, philology, to elucidate this question of identity-formation.<sup>17</sup> Himself a literary critic (with an especial focus on Cervantes), he focuses on works “expressive of collective life”<sup>18</sup>—classics such as the *Poem of the Cid*, whose structures and vocabularies reveal much about the social milieu in which they were written. What they revealed to Castro was the absurdity of the traditional view held by Hispanists, who believed in an innate, eternal “Spanishness” running through all of Iberian history and who conflated modern Spanish identity with that of the peninsula’s oldest inhabitants.<sup>19</sup> In Castro’s

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of the *Annales*, whom he sees as materialistic and dangerously dismissive of the human side of life. He is especially critical of Fernand Braudel, whose *The Mediterranean* “confers the function of actors in human history on natural elements and population statistics” (7). Castro is vitally concerned with recovering the status of human agency in history, although he admits acerbically that he “sounds anachronistic and reactionary today” (6).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>19</sup> “The Spaniard,” Castro observes sarcastically, “considers himself virtually an emanation from the soil of the Iberian Peninsula, or at least a being as ancient as the prehistoric Peninsular cave dwellers. . . . Thus the Spanishness of the prehistoric inhabitants in the mountainous regions of the Province of Santander continues uninterrupted in the people who make cheese in the grottos of Cabrales”; *ibid.*, 20.

view this myth is debunked through even a cursory study of the word “*españa*” itself, which was not adopted by the inhabitants of what we now call Spain until the late-13<sup>th</sup> century; prior to this, there was no unified Spanish identity, only local affiliations and the common bond of being Christian.<sup>20</sup> To apply the term “Spaniard” prior to the Muslim invasion of 711 was to him a painful anachronism, for that identity was produced only by the *convivencia*, the long period of “living together” following the arrival of the Moors.<sup>21</sup> “The Spanish people came into being,” Castro insists, “in a process starting in the eighth century and continuing through the Muslim invasion, as a conglomeration of three castes of believers—Christians, Moors, and Jews.”<sup>22</sup>

This *convivencia*, as Castro saw it, was not a utopia but a tolerance brought about by circumstances: in the long process of *Reconquista*, the Catholic states of Spain were required to keep themselves in constant readiness for war either with each other or with the Muslims, and thus had no time for scholarly achievements. It was necessary, then, for rulers like Alfonso VI of Leon and Castile (1040-1109) and Alfonso X of Castile (1221-1284) to adopt what Castro considers the uniquely *Islamic* practice of religious toleration, enabling them to take advantage of the intellectual and administrative skills provided by non-Christian subjects.<sup>23</sup> This tolerance, however, was the

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<sup>20</sup> Américo Castro, “The Millennium Between ‘España’ and ‘Español,’” 206.

<sup>21</sup> Castro, “The Spanish People,” 191.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>23</sup> Of the cultural efflorescence during the reign of Alfonso X “The Learned,” for example, Castro writes, “Arabic sciences and technical knowledge were imported by the Castilian Christian because of their practical and artistic efficacy. . . . The Jew served as an intermediary between the Moor and the Christian in many ways, and through him the Castilian of the dominant caste was able to become master of his lands, conqueror of the Moor, and

result of necessity. Once the “Hispano-Christian” grew in power and no longer required the cooperation of the other two “castes,” his obsession with religious purity and his will to dominate drove him to expel them from the peninsula.<sup>24</sup> From this act Castro traced the story of Spain’s artistic and intellectual decline, perpetuated by historians who ignored the Jewish and Muslim influence upon Spanish identity and continued to cultivate the myth of the “eternal Spaniard.”

One such historian, from Castro’s perspective, was Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, who wrote his 1956 *España: un enigma histórico* in response to Castro’s thesis. He did not deny, of course, that Muslims and Jews had lived alongside Christians in medieval Spain; what he did reject was the idea that non-Christian cultures had had a formative role in the creation of Spanish identity. In his view, there was a fundamental Spanish identity that could not be essentially altered by contact with other cultures; and this identity could be seen, not in the supposed tolerance of *convivencia*, but in the “passion . . . for divine war” that moved the common people to acts of violence against Jews and Muslims.<sup>25</sup> *Convivencia* was a state of existence imposed upon society by the elite, but it was fundamentally at odds with the eternal Spanish character that valued religious unity above all.<sup>26</sup>

If Sánchez-Albornoz’s critique of *convivencia* has ultimately endured, Castro nevertheless got the better of the debate in the short term. His position was more or less recapitulated in

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eventually executor of the Hispano-Hebrew prophecies of imperial dominion of the world.” Castro, *The Spaniards*, 539.

<sup>24</sup> Castro, “The Spanish People,” 197.

<sup>25</sup> Novikoff, “Between Tolerance and Intolerance,” 23. Sánchez-Albornoz’s work, unlike Castro’s, has not been well translated into English (a fact which itself speaks volumes regarding the outcome of the debate); comments on his *España* in the present essay must therefore draw upon other historiographical articles, such as Novikoff’s.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

1985 by J. N. Hillgarth, whose “Spanish Historiography and Iberian Reality” investigates the “power of certain myths” in Hispanist literature.<sup>27</sup> One such myth sprang from the pen of Isidore of Seville, who envisioned the Goths as the people chosen by God to rule over Spain, and this myth has continued in various manifestations throughout Spanish history. Hillgarth believed that the Isidorian myth powerfully motivated Ferdinand and Isabella’s efforts to unite the peninsula under their own Catholic banner when it was revived in the 15<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>28</sup> and he saw it breathing still in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century writings of “eternal Spain” historians like Sánchez-Albornoz. Américo Castro, too, was “inspired by a myth,” one that “can be summed up in the word he often uses, *convivencia*.”<sup>29</sup> Yet Hillgarth found Castro’s myth more fruitful, less untrue, than that of Sánchez-Albornoz. For “despite many outbreaks of intolerance . . . Christians, Jews, and Muslims did coexist for centuries in Spain—unlike the rest of Western Europe,”<sup>30</sup> and in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century Spain, “which had rested on the support of three religions, was thrown out of balance by the removal or denial of two of the three.”<sup>31</sup> *Convivencia* thus remained to Hillgarth what it was to Castro: an idealist concept, a “myth” or construct of a people’s identity, important in its oppositional nature to the myth of an eternal Spain.

By the time Hillgarth wrote, however, historians were already “engaged in correcting Castro’s mistakes”<sup>32</sup> and, in the

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<sup>27</sup> J. N. Hillgarth, “Spanish Historiography and Iberian Reality,” *History and Theory* 24, no. 1 (1985): 23.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 33. Hillgarth, while obviously favoring Castro, nevertheless admits here that Castro “sometimes forced [the consequences of cultural contact] further than the evidence allowed.” Thus, Hillgarth seems to have generally approved of the corrective work of colleagues like Glick—although he takes issue with what

process, substantially reinterpreting *convivencia*. The most influential scholar in this pursuit was Thomas F. Glick, whose 1969 article “Acculturation as an Explanatory Concept in Spanish History” (with anthropologist Oriol Pi-Sunyer) and 1979 monograph *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages* introduced a sociological perspective to the study of the *convivencia*. Alex Novikoff aptly sums up Glick’s perspective as “‘post-Castro and post-Sánchez-Albornoz,’ that is, steering clear of the quest for national origins.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the fascination with such quests was becoming less popular as the very definition of a “nation” was heavily revised. Whereas Castro could speak of a “progressive formation of the [Spanish] WE,” traceable “in documents, oral literature, or works of art as it attains its collective plenitude,”<sup>34</sup> by the 1970s-80s theorists were dismissing such philological foundations of nationalism out of hand: “Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long-delayed political destiny, are a myth,” Ernest Gellner stated definitively in 1983. “What do exist are cultures, often subtly grouped, shading into each other, overlapping, intertwined.”<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Glick expressed disappointment with both Castro and Sánchez-Albornoz for fixating on “the issue of modal personality.”<sup>36</sup> Proclaiming the debate officially over—since “however one may approach it, the central phenomenon of medieval Spain . . . is the meeting and bilateral adjustment of

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he sees as Glick’s heavy-handed critique of *convivencia* (see *ibid.*, 34).

<sup>33</sup> Novikoff, “Between Tolerance and Intolerance,” 30.

<sup>34</sup> Américo Castro, “The Historical ‘WE,’” in *An Idea of History: Selected Essays of Americo Castro*, trans. and ed. Stephen Gilman and Edmund L. King (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977), 320.

<sup>35</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 48-49.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas F. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 10.



two distinct cultures, Christian and Muslim”<sup>37</sup>—Glick encouraged his compatriots to step outside its constraints. *Convivencia*, he and Pi-Sunyer argued in 1969, was a (necessary) statement of the obvious; what it had not yet been able to achieve was the “delineation of a *structure*” of social change. If such an overarching model was to be developed, “then the mechanisms and conditions of cultural diffusion must be described systematically and classified” by sociological historians.<sup>38</sup>

Glick and Pi-Sunyer’s article was primarily theoretical, but Glick followed his own recommendation in his 1979 monograph *Islamic and Christian Spain*, adopting a comparative approach in an attempt to explain, on the macro level, the processes by which Christian and the Islamic societies shaped one another in the period of *convivencia*. Glick’s book reveals little interest in the effects of “living together” on the consciousness of the modern Spaniard: Glick sees this as a narrow, idealist way of understanding *convivencia*, one which failed to grapple with the effect of historical variables like “power, wealth, numbers, or technology” on cultural contact and adaptation.<sup>39</sup> Instead, the work examines Christian and Muslim societies as two “blocs” with “different cultures . . . [and] different socio-economic systems” that gave them their distinctive structures. Implicit in this understanding of Spanish history is an ironic reversal of Castro’s self-professed “humanism”: where Castro finds the core of society in its literature and art, Glick finds it in the society’s economic structure—whether “urban-artisanal,” as he characterizes the Islamic society, or “static-agrarian,” as he terms the Christian.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas F. Glick and Oriol Pi-Sunyer, “Acculturation as an Explanatory Concept in Spanish History,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 11, no. 2 (1969): 138.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>39</sup> Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, 296.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 6. Castro would presumably have had the same negative assessment of Glick as he had of Braudel (cf. Castro, *The*

Unburdened by the weight of nationalist polemic, and apparently unconcerned with what medieval art reveals about constructions of identity, Glick approaches Iberian history with precisely the goal he and Pi-Sunyer outlined in 1969: delineating a structure of social evolution, a model that could be applied beyond the spatial and temporal borders of medieval Spain.<sup>41</sup> Beginning the work with a section on “Society and Economy,” which forms the bulk of the book and includes discussions of Mediterranean trade networks, ecology, agriculture, settlement patterns, kinship structures, and feudalism, he moves on to a meticulously divided assessment of cultural diffusion: of technology, of science, of language. Interestingly, however, and despite the increased accessibility of local archives following the collapse of the Franco regime,<sup>42</sup> Glick’s work is less an original examination of primary sources than it is a tremendous effort at synthesizing the many focused articles and sweeping histories already available. He marries topical studies on (to choose a few examples at random) watermills, mutton-eating, and the cultivation of cereals with broader, more theoretical works, including Marc Bloch’s *Feudal Society*, Maurice Lombard and Harold Livermore’s structuralist histories of Spain, and, yes, Fernand Braudel’s *The Mediterranean*. Castro may have eschewed such a materialistic focus; but in Glick’s view, as he argued in his 1969 article, only through this “total history” approach “will the true structure of Spanish history”—and the true dynamics of *convivencia*—“be discernible in full relief.”<sup>43</sup>

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*Spaniards*, 6); perhaps fortunately for Glick, however, Castro died in 1972, seven years before the publication of *Islamic and Christian Spain*, and thus did not have the opportunity of reviewing it.

<sup>41</sup> Glick and Pi-Sunyer, “Acculturation as an Explanatory Concept,” 138.

<sup>42</sup> Novikoff, “Between Tolerance and Intolerance,” 28.

<sup>43</sup> Glick and Pi-Sunyer, “Acculturation as an Explanatory Concept,” 154.



Glick himself was critical of Castro's term, seeing it as a "catch-all mechanism used to explain all phenomena of cultural change contingent upon the contact of cultures, an inclusivity which obscures what are in reality a number of different mechanisms"<sup>44</sup>; for his own purposes he preferred to use the term "acculturation," which, while also a catch-all mechanism, implies a range of contact-dynamics and has no inherent link to medieval Spain as a unique phenomenon.<sup>45</sup> Given his ambivalence, it is perhaps ironic that his revivification of *convivencia* should have had such profound influence on historiography. From the 1960s to the 1990s in particular, social historians such as Robert I. Burns and John Boswell applied his acculturative model to the burgeoning field of "Mudéjar studies," which examined the structure and evolution of Muslim societies under Catholic rule.<sup>46</sup>

His substantial contributions to future bibliographies attest to Burns' particular influence in this field. Like Glick, his work

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<sup>44</sup> Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain*, 281. However, he seems to have warmed to the term or at least come to accept it by 1992, writing, "*Convivencia* survives. What we add to it is the admission that cultural interaction inevitably reflects a concrete and very complex social dynamic. What we retain of it is the understanding that acculturation implies a process of internalization of the 'other' that is the mechanism by which we make foreign cultural traits our own." Thomas F. Glick, "Convivencia: An Introductory Note," in *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*, ed. Vivian B. Mann, Thomas F. Glick, and Jerrilynn D. Dodds (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1992), 7.

<sup>45</sup> Glick and Pi-Sunyer, "Acculturation as an Explanatory Concept," 138.

<sup>46</sup> The term *Mudéjar* (roughly, "those who stayed") began to be used by scholars around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to refer to those Muslims who remained in Iberia after the Reconquest but who did not convert to Christianity. *Morisco*, by contrast, refers to Muslims who converted to Christianity following Ferdinand and Isabella's 1492 ultimatum: convert or leave.

on the late-13<sup>th</sup>-century crusader society of Valencia was the product of his interest in “structural ethnology” (he held a doctorate in anthropology as well as in medieval history<sup>47</sup>), but it also owed much to the Frontier Thesis that had been put forward by Frederick Jackson Turner in his 1893 essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” Much like Castro’s articulation of *convivencia* itself, Turner’s central argument—that American exceptionalism was the product of “the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward”<sup>48</sup>—was largely rejected by subsequent historians even while they “salvaged elements from the Thesis, rearranged in novel forms.”<sup>49</sup> One of these new forms was the concept of the frontier not as unique to North America, but in fact ubiquitous in Western history: in 1958, for instance, Archibald R. Lewis argued that “few periods can be better understood in the light of a frontier concept than western Europe between 800 and 1500 A.D.” and urged historians to investigate these centuries “in the light of a frontier thesis.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Lawrence J. McCrank, “R. I. Burns as Ethnologist and Historian of the Old World and the New,” in *Iberia and the Mediterranean World of the Middle Ages*, ed. P. Chevedden, D. Kagay, and P. Padilla (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1996), 2:20.

<sup>48</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” (American Historical Association, 1894; Reprint, Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2014), 3.

<sup>49</sup> Burns himself, while rejecting the core of the thesis and admitting that Turner himself would be unlikely to recognize its various adaptations, nonetheless paid homage to it—not least in the title of his influential essay “The Significance of the Frontier in the Middle Ages,” in *Medieval Frontier Societies*, ed. Robert Bartlett and Angus MacKay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); quote at 309.

<sup>50</sup> Archibald R. Lewis, “The Closing of the Medieval Frontier, 1250-1350,” *Speculum* 33, no. 4 (1958): 475.

It was this “neo-Turnerian” conception, along with a re-definition of the frontier not as “free land” waiting to be claimed by whites but as “zones of intercultural contact,” that Burns drew upon in his own research.<sup>51</sup> “The analogy of the colonial experience itself with those of the sixteenth and later centuries is clear,” he states in his 1984 magnum opus, *Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Crusader Kingdom of Valencia*: “the seizure and control by a dominant alien minority, supported from the homeland, growing by steady immigration, disdainful and wary of the native population.”<sup>52</sup> In numerous essays, and with extensive research into the “marvelous and varied registers” of the conquering monarchs,<sup>53</sup> Burns investigates the impact of these colonizers upon the social structure of the colonized in terms less of *convivencia* than of acculturation. When Muslim society survived in Valencia, it was not because of enlightenment on the part of the Catholic conquerors; it was because of the resilience of the Muslim culture and its ability to “recrystallize” after the shock of contact.<sup>54</sup> The coexistence and cooperation of Muslims, Jews, and Christians to which the archives attest “was not,” Burns stresses, “tolerance. Neither people would have conceded that our modern tolerance was a virtue; neither could have sympa-

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<sup>51</sup> Burns, “The Significance of the Frontier,” 310.

<sup>52</sup> Robert I. Burns, SJ, *Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Crusader Kingdom of Valencia: Societies in Symbiosis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), xviii.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, xv. Burns acknowledges that cross-cultural interactions were not written about directly; historians must come at the question through the “patient archeological probing” of official documents, which “tend to stress legal disabilities, tax collections, administrative interventions, religious tension, the *chronique scandaleuse* of the police blotter, and clashes at arms” (12). In *Muslims, Christians, and Jews* these records include surrender documents, edicts and charters, and lawsuits—particularly those related to land ownership and boundary disputes (see 237-238).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

thized with our secular-humanistic principles. But it was a *modus vivendi*, an experience not without its human warmth and practical respect for irreconcilable difference. And it provided an effective ground for unremitting cultural interchange.”<sup>55</sup>

Nor was Burns the only one to argue that questions of tolerance and intolerance, exclusion or *convivencia* were the wrong ones to ask. In his influential 1977 work *The Royal Treasure*, John Boswell also approached the case of Muslims living under the Crown of Aragon through the untapped riches of royal archives. His focus, however, was on the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, and in his introduction Boswell defined his approach vis-à-vis an earlier work by Burns:

His study [*Islam under the Crusaders* (1974)] is, therefore, one of a society just beginning to establish its internal organization; indeed, what primarily interests Fr. Burns is the mechanisms and dynamics of the *establishment* of Christian hegemony over a Muslim population. The following study, on the other hand, is an effort to examine the position of Muslims once this hegemony was securely in place, i.e., what life was like for an established dissident minority.<sup>56</sup>

Using royal letters, tax records, legal cases, and laws, Boswell sought to elucidate the “symbiosis” that existed between the Catholic monarchs of Aragon and their *mudéjar* subjects, and thus to “reconstruct” the “broken and crumpled spider’s web” of *convivencia*.<sup>57</sup>

In Boswell’s view, however, it was critical that students of Spanish history not swing to extremes either of oppression or social harmony when considering this symbiotic relationship.

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>56</sup> John Boswell, *The Royal Treasure: Muslim Communities under the Crown of Aragon in the Fourteenth Century* (Yale University Press, 1977), 18.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

The case of the *mudéjar* was full of “paradoxes”<sup>58</sup> and “contradictions” that could not be understood by naively asking “whether Muslims were ‘well’ or ‘ill’ treated or whether the Christians of Aragon-Catalonia-Valencia were ‘kind’ or ‘cruel,’ ‘tolerant’ or ‘intolerant.’”<sup>59</sup> Rather, an exploration of shifting royal policies from monarch to monarch revealed that the *mudéjars’* situation as a minority and their integration into the larger society were contingent upon such “historical factors” as war, finance, demographics, and the whim of the ruling class, and differed from region to region.<sup>60</sup> In Aragon, for instance, a long period of acculturation and a small *mudéjar* population may have allowed for a certain degree of “*convivencia* based on mutual acceptance and supra-ethnic loyalty.”<sup>61</sup> By contrast, “co-existence between the ethnic groups in Valencia was simply that: co-existence.”<sup>62</sup> The differences boiled down to socio-historical factors:

In no case could it be argued that the general situation of Muslims, whether desirable or undesirable, was due to the bigotry or tolerance of particular Christians, or to the enlightenment or fanaticism of the ruling classes, or to the justice or injustice of Christian authorities. The situation of the Muslims and their relation to Christian society around them was created and maintained by organizational and structural forces which operate on most pluralistic societies, which respond to stress by exaggerating social distinctions and cleavages regardless of the desires or wishes of individuals involved, and which are better analyzed in terms of their effects than their moral desirability.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 404.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 398-399.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 407.

The top-down, institutional version of *convivencia*, stemming more from Glick's anthropological approach than from Castro's idealist conception of the term, continued to be the dominant historiographical perspective through the duration of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Concurrently with Burns and Boswell, Elena Lourie published numerous essays on the situations of both Muslim and Jewish minorities in Aragon, including several that were reprinted in her 1990 collection *Crusade and Colonisation: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Medieval Aragon*. The compendium also featured an original piece that examined the sometimes-contradictory, always-ambivalent attitude of the Aragonese monarchs toward their *mudéjar* population, which at once protected Muslims as an economically beneficial minority and excluded them from the Christian "*communitas regni*."<sup>64</sup> Like Burns, Lourie examined royal policy in newly conquered territories like Majorca and Valencia, looking in particular at the range of fiscal demands, from ransom payments to tax burdens, made of the Muslims; and like Boswell, she stressed the paradoxes of this supposed *convivencia* in which Muslims were distrusted by the Crown and hated by the populace, yet also sought after as colonists and granted royal protection.<sup>65</sup>

Also in the early 1990s, Mark Meyerson published his contribution to this popular field. *The Muslims of Valencia in the Age of Fernando and Isabel: Between Coexistence and Crusade* returns to the Crown of Aragon in the waning years of *convivencia* as if to complete the trilogy begun by Burns and Boswell, this time in an effort "to comprehend more fully the reasons for the breakdown of *convivencia*, which for the most part occurred under the Catholic monarchs, Fernando and his

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<sup>64</sup> Elena Lourie, "Anatomy of Ambivalence: Muslims under the Crown of Aragon in the Late Thirteenth Century," in *Crusade and Colonisation: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Medieval Aragon*, ed. Elena Lourie (Hampshire, UK: Variorum, 1990), 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77.



wife, Isabel I of Castile.”<sup>66</sup> Again, however, he cautions against a too rosy view of Spain prior to the rise of these remarkable rulers: “In both Islamic and Christian societies there existed a form of institutionalized tolerance of religious minorities. Yet because this tolerance was institutional, an artificial governmental creation, it by no means guaranteed a harmonious intermingling of religious groups.”<sup>67</sup> Indeed, he challenges the dichotomy inherent in his own title by pointing out the “latent ideological antagonism” embedded in the “institutional forms structuring Iberian Christian-Muslim-Jewish coexistence”—the crusade ideology in the midst of coexistence, and the coexistence in the midst of crusade.<sup>68</sup>

Like Lourie, Meyerson sees the foundation of this tenuous “living together” as essentially economic, since all layers of Valencian society depended on the labor and taxes of these religious others. “The Mudejars could not be extracted [from the economy] without the entire edifice crumbling,” he writes. “The fortunes of nobleman, cleric, and burgher were all linked, some more directly than others, to the Mudejars’ fate,” and for this reason the elite tended to resist any suggestion that Muslims should be forced to convert or flee.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, during the early part of his reign Ferdinand himself tended to follow in the footsteps of his “ambivalent” predecessors, being less concerned with the religious purity of the land than with ensuring “that the Crown received as great a share as was possible of the economic benefits accruing from the Mudejars’ labor and enterprise.”<sup>70</sup> Where Meyerson diverges from Lourie is on her

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<sup>66</sup> Mark D. Meyerson, *The Muslims of Valencia in the Age of Fernando and Isabel: Between Coexistence and Crusade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); e-book version distributed by Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 4.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-144.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

sharp dichotomy between the attitude of the rulers toward the Muslims and that of their Christian subjects. Armed with documents from the Archivo del Reino de Valencia that allow him to “explore some areas . . . that have been left largely untouched by scholars working in earlier centuries,”<sup>71</sup> he shifts the historical perspective downward to the host of mundane economic transactions that took place outside the parameters of official decree. In light of such data, he argues that, on the contrary, “the popular Christian view of the Mudejars did not differ substantially from that of the king.”<sup>72</sup> Christians patronized Muslim shops (the practice of purchasing meat from Muslim butchers became particularly contentious<sup>73</sup>), and vice versa; Muslim artisans bought materials from Christian suppliers, and vice versa; Muslims established credit with Christians, and vice versa.

Just as economic considerations dictated royal policies, then, so in daily life the activities of buying and selling provided the counterweight to the religious exclusivism that might otherwise have brought latent antagonisms to the fore.<sup>74</sup> “It was above all the daily interaction between Muslim and Christian in the workplace and the marketplace,” Meyerson stresses, “that lent stability to Muslim-Christian *convivencia* in Valencia, and allowed for the breakdown of some, although by no means all, of the social barriers between them.”<sup>75</sup> Violence occasionally did break out due to “both religious hostility and economic resentment,” but so long as it was contained by the

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>73</sup> The manner in which animals were slaughtered had significant religious implications, so that by the late 15<sup>th</sup> century laws were being passed forbidding Christians from purchasing meat from either Muslim or Jewish butchers. The practice was apparently ongoing, however, and continued to plague Ferdinand and the Inquisition. See *ibid.*, 47.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.



institutions set in place by Lourie's ambivalent monarchs, "*convivencia* was able to persist, much as it always had, with a potentiality for ethnic violence."<sup>76</sup> Isolated incidents of persecutions, however brutal, need not have spelled the end.

These incidents take front and center stage in David Nirenberg's 1996 *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*, a work which draws upon the pioneering scholarship of Natalie Zemon Davis in its fusion of social and cultural history. Despite his subtitle, which reviewers have criticized as misleadingly broad,<sup>77</sup> Nirenberg focuses on the dynamics of "systemic" violence in southern France and Aragon: anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish crusades in 1320-1321; ritual "Holy Week" attacks on Jewish communities by their Christian neighbors; charges of miscegenation levelled against one group by another. His approach, however, is markedly different from the tradition of Mudéjar scholarship: rather than asking questions regarding cultural diffusion, the evolution of social structures, or even the "experiences" of minorities, he comes to local and royal archives in order to explore the "functions and meanings of . . . violence within medieval societies."<sup>78</sup> Through this exploration, he questions a teleological understanding of cross-cultural interactions and relative tolerance or persecution, not only in Spain, but in medieval Europe at large. Societies like those in Aragon, he argues, did not degenerate from a state of interfaith harmony into bigotry and cataclysmic violence; on the contrary, not only eyewitness accounts of riots but also civic cases—in which minorities were

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Meyerson's review, in which he commends the book but questions the applicability of Nirenberg's conclusions to regions on the other side of the Pyrenees. Mark D. Meyerson, "Review: *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*," *Speculum* 74, no. 2 (1999): 467.

<sup>78</sup> David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 15.

habitually accused of such crimes as well-poisoning and miscegenation—reveal the fact that legal as well as physical violence was always embedded in society.

Nirenberg's argument does not seem far removed from the moderate stance of Burns or Meyerson, who stress that antagonisms were always present in the midst of *convivencia*; but whereas Meyerson focuses on the role of economic exchange in restraining that antagonism, Nirenberg contends that acts of violence themselves helped stabilize *convivencia*.<sup>79</sup> In his chapter on "The Two Faces of Sacred Violence," for instance, he makes the case that the ritual reenactment of Passion plays symbolically integrated Jews into Christian life at the same time that the ritual stoning of the *call* (the city's Jewish quarter) reinforced the boundaries between the two.<sup>80</sup> The rhythmic quality of these aggressive acts set the parameters within which coexistence could take place. "*Convivencia* was predicated upon violence," he unequivocally concludes; "it was not its peaceful antithesis."<sup>81</sup>

Nirenberg's work, with its focus on interpretation and meaning rather than large-scale social change or even small-scale minority experiences, represents one of the most dramatic reinterpretations of Castro's term to date. More than simply

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<sup>79</sup> Nirenberg cites approvingly Meyerson's thesis of "the economic foundations of *convivencia*," but emphasizes (as Meyerson himself acknowledges) that "none of these [economic] relations need preclude violence or hatred." Rather, such social networks "enmeshed moments of violence and gave them meaning" (Ibid., 40).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 218. Lucy K. Pick makes a similar argument regarding the use of polemical literature in maintaining *convivencia* in her *Conflict and Coexistence: Archbishop Rodrigo and the Muslims and Jews of Medieval Spain* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2004); in particular see page 3, where she cites Nirenberg and draws a parallel between physical violence and the verbal violence of religious polemics.

<sup>81</sup> Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 245.

“scrap[ing] the varnish of romanticism off the old concept,” as Soifer has put it,<sup>82</sup> his thesis harkens back to Sánchez-Albornoz’s more polemical critiques and throws the very applicability of the word *convivencia* into question. Nirenberg himself sees “no reason why *convivencia* need designate only harmonious coexistence” and thus is willing to retain the term, so long as it is divested of any romantic overtones: one need not throw out the baby with the bathwater, his work implies.<sup>83</sup>

Soifer, however, is not the only recent historian to believe Nirenberg did not go far enough in his analysis: Brian Catlos repudiates *convivencia* altogether in his 2004 *The Victors and the Vanquished*. In some ways this work, which examines “the period in which *mudéjar* society was born and matured” in Catalonia and Aragon,<sup>84</sup> harkens back to Mudéjar studies; he nods to his illustrious predecessors and places himself in their “socio-anthropological tradition,”<sup>85</sup> adopting a macro-historical approach toward the adaptations of Muslim institutions—financial, ideological, and administrative—to the “trauma” of conquest.<sup>86</sup> If anything, his work is even more exhaustive in

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<sup>82</sup> Soifer, “Beyond *Convivencia*,” 22. Soifer is ultimately unimpressed with Nirenberg’s approach, arguing that it posits *convivencia* as a “balancing act” maintained by “an indeterminate mechanism that infuses social reality with just the right amount of antagonism and toleration, somehow keeping the whole system in check. What it does not even attempt to answer is where the hostility and the need for cooperation come from, and how the desirable balance is achieved” (23). This seems, however, to be an oversimplification of historians like Nirenberg or Meyerson, who are very much interested in the mechanisms whereby *convivencia* was maintained.

<sup>83</sup> Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, 8.

<sup>84</sup> Brian A. Catlos, *The Victors and the Vanquished: Christians and Muslims of Catalonia and Aragon, 1050-1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

analyzing law codes, court cases, and tax records in order to understand the degree to which Muslims were integrated into the conquering society. He acknowledges that “no such study of a minority community can be complete . . . without endeavoring to understand how individuals were affected,” and thus concludes his work with a series of six microhistories that focus on the dynamics of inter-cultural exchange at the local level. Yet these case studies—unlike Meyerson’s review of economic transactions or Nirenberg’s examination of ritual violence—are primarily administrative, and are in fact less concerned with the experience of individual *mudéjar* than with the relationship between the judicial systems of the conquerors and of the conquered.<sup>87</sup>

This relationship, he concludes, could be relatively symbiotic despite its many tensions. He is reluctant, however, to call the symbiosis *convivencia*, a term he refers to in a more recent work as “flawed and nebulous”<sup>88</sup> and associates with a false and anachronistic belief in a tolerant Spain. In an almost verbatim endorsement of Burns’ thesis, he observes that “the liberties which [the *mudéjar*] enjoyed did not result from an impulse of ‘tolerance’ on the part of the count-kings—this is a concept which is hardly regarded as a virtue today and was certainly not in the thirteenth century.”<sup>89</sup> Rather, individual Christians and Muslims (and, by extension, Jews) must be understood as operating within a number of social spheres in addition to the religious, any of which could dictate the terms of social interaction at a given time—sometimes violent, some-

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 261. The first three case studies each focus on a particular litigation involving tax exemption or a land dispute; the last three deal with particular officials, Muslim or Christian, in order to elucidate the performance of local administrations.

<sup>88</sup> Brian A. Catlos, *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom, c. 1050-1614* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 89.

<sup>89</sup> Catlos, *Victors and Vanquished*, 321.

times amicable.<sup>90</sup> At all times, however, this interaction was dependent upon numerous pragmatic factors. Catlos even coined a new word for it: *conveniencia* rather than the too idyllic *convivencia*.<sup>91</sup>

“Catlos,” Soifer notes with what might be approval and might be derision, “cuts through the Gordian knot of issues surrounding *convivencia* by rejecting it altogether.”<sup>92</sup> Yet it appears that Catlos, in his effort to distance himself as much as possible from associations like Nightingale’s, has created with *conveniencia* a view of medieval Spain as problematic as that generated by *convivencia*. Where the latter may be accused of overstating ideology and thus minimizing the pragmatic calculations involved in coexistence, Catlos’ new term risks overstating pragmatics and dismissing altogether the ideological underpinnings for the practice of tolerance in the medieval

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 389. A similar argument is put forward by Jonathan Ray, who argues that *convivencia* should be reassessed from the perspective of the minorities themselves (in Ray’s case, this minority is the Jews rather than the Muslims). Like Catlos, Ray contends that Jews possessed a multiplicity of identities that went beyond the religious and shaped their social lives. Thus, “rather than continue to discuss this [medieval Spanish] society in terms of religious communities, it might be more profitable to view it as a product of a variety of contending identities and social, cultural, and religious tensions that existed between the individual and a number of possible groups” (Jonathan Ray, “Beyond Tolerance and Persecution: Reassessing Our Approach to Medieval *Convivencia*,” *Jewish Social Studies* 11, no. 2 (2005): 13). Nevertheless, Ray sees this approach as returning *convivencia* to its roots and gives no indication of wishing to see the term jettisoned (1).

<sup>91</sup> Catlos, *Victors and Vanquished*, 407. Catlos expands somewhat upon his own term in *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom*; see pages 521-522 in particular.

<sup>92</sup> Soifer, “Beyond *Convivencia*,” 24.

period.<sup>93</sup> Hillgarth might call *conveniencia* a new myth, important in its critique of the more romantic notions associated with *convivencia*, but nonetheless incapable of presenting a full picture of the dynamics of medieval Spain.

And this is, perhaps, at the heart of the *convivencia* critique: it fails to capture historical reality. As conjured by Nightingale, with its burden of wonder and nostalgia for what another popular author has called “A Vanished World,”<sup>94</sup> it can even distort that reality. On the other hand, the responsibility for these distortions cannot all be laid, as Soifer seems inclined to lay them, at the door of *convivencia*, for scholars like Glick, Boswell, and Nirenberg attest to the fact that the “nuts-and-bolts explorations of interfaith existence” that she craves can be made without rejecting the term.<sup>95</sup> Rather, the misrepresentations spring from the complexities, ambiguities, and apparent contradictions of medieval Spanish society itself. Medieval Spain cannot be summed up in a single word, whether that word be *convivencia* or *conveniencia*, for each was present in

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<sup>93</sup> Pragmatism may indeed have been the largest single factor in the case of Spain. Over the last several decades, however, there has been a historiographical reaction against the too rapid dismissal of “tolerance as a medieval virtue,” and there are many who would question Burns’, Boswell’s, or Catlos’ claims that to speak in terms of toleration is anachronistic. See, for instance, John Christian Laursen and Cary J. Nederman (eds.), *Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration Before the Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); also István Bejczy, “*Tolerantia: A Medieval Concept*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, no. 3 (1997): 365-84.

<sup>94</sup> Chris Lowney, *A Vanished World: Medieval Spain’s Golden Age of Enlightenment* (New York: Free Press, 2005). Lowney’s post-9/11 book is heavily influenced by contemporary issues, and is suffused, even more than Nightingale’s *Granada*, with a despairing nostalgia for the “common society” that medieval Spain almost attained (see p. 14).

<sup>95</sup> Soifer, “Beyond *Convivencia*,” 31.



different ways and at different times; popular and scholarly treatments of the era from Catlos to Nightingale are thus most problematic not when they employ a particular term, but when they attempt to use a single paradigm to the exclusion of all others. Novikoff, who refers to the debate as an “historiographical enigma” and seems uncertain what to make of it, nonetheless acknowledges this point: “The contrasting images one is presented with” in scholars’ reinterpretations of *convivencia* “are themselves evidence of a world more varied, more changing, and more complex than any overarching concept or generality can convey.”<sup>96</sup>

Paradoxically, that has been the charm of *convivencia* since 1948. It suggests more than it tells, and its tantalizing suggestions have continually fueled research—by those who reject it as well as by those who accept it. What was *convivencia*? How was there coexistence? Was there tolerance, or is tolerance the wrong frame to use? What made Spain unique, or was Spain unique at all? What motivated the rulers, and what motivated the common folk in their daily life? Was society harmonious or conflictive, or are the two mutually exclusive? *Convivencia* has not stopped the questions being asked, nor has it hindered scholars from proposing thoughtful answers. If it is a myth, it nevertheless seems to be a more fruitful one than Soifer has given it credit for—Nightingale’s new book notwithstanding.

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# REBUILDING GERMANY'S CHILDREN: THE NAZI INDOCTRINATION AND POSTWAR REEDUCATION OF THE HITLER YOUTH

**Elizabeth Fox**

## Introduction

On May 8, 1945, as the Allies advanced deep into German territory, the Third Reich disintegrated. In the aftermath of World War II, the horrors of the Nazi dictatorship were fully exposed when the Nazi political foundations finally crumbled, reflecting the wreckage of most German cities, such as Berlin. German civilians were left to rebuild their country, their lives, and the German psyche. As they looked upon the debris of their homes and towns, the Germans were traumatized, lost, and helpless; the once proud and mighty Nazi national identity was shattered. As a result, they turned to the German youth population to shoulder the great burdens of reconstruction, the majority of whom had participated in the Hitler Youth and were also psychologically devastated and lost. Günter Grass, former Hitler Youth member of the *10<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Division Frundsberg*, once reflected on having been in the Hitler Youth generation of Germany, noting that he felt “too young to have been a Nazi, but old enough to have been formed by the Nazi regime.”<sup>1</sup> Despite having been formerly molded and shaped by Nazi indoctrination, Germany’s youth became the best hope for

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Jan-Werner Müller, *Another Country: German Intellectuals, Unification and National Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 10.

the future and, through reeducation and democratization, the means through which Nazi principles could be extricated from the German consciousness. In the author's opinion, the accounts of former Hitler Youth members and other German adolescents do, in fact, attest to the shift towards democratization. One of the postwar tasks at hand was the reconstruction of the German ideology, especially that of the youth, to enable this formerly proud people to come to terms with events during the war and how best to move forward. The rebuilding of Germany's children was the daunting mission facing the Allies and German citizens.

This essay will examine the success or failure of democratization in Germany after World War II through an examination of postwar memoirs of former Hitler Youth members, as well as an oral history interview with a former member, Erich Neumeier [Fig. 1]. It explores whether or not those who looked back on their participation in the Hitler Youth continued to base their lives on the Nazi ideals with which they had been indoctrinated or if their reeducation during the rebuilding of Germany after World War II was a success. While the brainwashing of German adolescents was accomplished through the regime's schooling, physical training, and Fascist pageantry of the Hitler Youth organization, this essay will argue that the ultimate disintegration of Germany at the end of the war and in the postwar period, combined with the Allied efforts at postwar reeducation and democratization, successfully influenced a shift away from Nazi ideals; the formerly indoctrinated youth were the first to be influenced. In the wake of the indisputable failure and disillusionment of the Germans, Nazi principles simply could not withstand the impending wave of democracy that began to affect postwar Germany.

### **Notes on the Evidence**

In order to discuss contextually the Hitler Youth and the Allied postwar reeducation in Germany, one must describe the methodology undergirding the evidence used in this essay. The

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2016

- 1 ERICH NEUMEIER
- 2 7-7-1927 JINGOLSTADT GERMANY
- 3 FATHER WORKED FOR A DEFENCE CO AS AN OFFICE WORKER, MY MOTHER WAS A HOUSE KEEPER. I HAD A 2 YEAR OLDER BROTHER
- 4 JINGOLSTADT GERMANY - 60 MILES NORTH OF MUNICH, ON THE DANUBE RIVER.
- 5 HAPPY CHILDHOOD, PLAYING SOCCER, SWIMMING IN THE DANUBE, EXPLORING THE NEIGHBORHOOD PARK
- 6 YOUNG VOLK 10 YEARS, HITLER YOUTH 14 YEARS. APPROXIMATELY 95% JOINED BOTH ORGANIZATIONS. WHEN YOU WANTED TO BELONG YOU JOINED.
- 7 NO RANG, JUST A MEMBER.
- 8 IN YOUNG VOLK WE HAD A WEEKLY MEETING, HAD SPORT - (RUNNING, JUMPING) AN BUILDING MODER GLIDER AIR PLANES, (I WOULD SAY SIMILAR TO THE BOY SCOUTS)

Figure 1. Portion of Erich Neumeier Interview, page 1. Conducted on April 6, 2016.

majority of primary and secondary sources provide comprehensive histories on how both the processes of Nazi indoctrination and Allied postwar reeducation policies shaped the ideologies of German youths. However, various historical accounts have placed little emphasis on critically evaluating the postwar memories of former Nazi youths. Debates on whether democra-

tization was extremely successful have occurred amongst historians. When discussing studies made by German scholars such as James Tent decades after the postwar period, historian Jaimey Fisher claims they did not grasp the impact of reeducation in its cultural and social context; instead “these studies generally focus on (re)educational policy and neglect the wider public sphere debates about generation and ‘the German youth’ as well as their consequences for German culture and national identity more generally.”<sup>2</sup> Konrad Jarausch also agrees with Fisher that postwar discussion and analysis have in the past focused on the history rather than addressing the question of democratization. He argues that the problematic aspects of the entire process were largely ignored by Whig history, which emphasized the optimistic long-term success (albeit a significant aspect of democratization) rather than perspectives of the process at the time.<sup>3</sup> With respect to the views of these historians, attempts will be made to trace what democratization meant to German youths by analyzing the memories and perceptions of former Hitler Youth members.

The methodology in this essay places primary importance upon tracing the postwar memory of German youths and creating a thoughtful analysis of their narratives. The problem underlying most of these postwar memories, mainly those of Erich Neumeier, is their silence concerning their participation in furthering the Nazi cause as Hitler Youth members, as well as their roles and thoughts during the democratization process that transformed post-1945 Germany. For instance, in my interviews with Neumeier, not once did he comment on Hitler, anti-Semitism, or the treatment of the Jews. Former Hitler Youth members such as Neumeier, Alfons Heck, and Günter

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<sup>2</sup> Jaimey Fisher, *Disciplining Germany: Youth, Reeducation, and Reconstruction After the Second World War* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995*, trans. Brandon Hunziker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 131.



Grass indicate that they viewed their experience in the youth organizations as times of social fellowship, rather than Nazi indoctrination; this leads to the question, in Neumeier's case at least, whether or not his silence is possibly still a remnant of postwar guilt, shame, and denial manifesting itself. A number of sociological studies have deeply analyzed the problem of silence that afflicted postwar Germany regarding Nazi atrocities. In the article "Towards a Science of Silence: The Consequences of Leaving a Memory Unsaid," this type of postwar silence is termed by sociologists as mnemonic silence, meaning "the absence of expressing a memory," whether intentional or unintentional, overt or covert.<sup>4</sup> It shows that silence sometimes does not mean actual forgetting but the act of trying to forget. The article categorizes this silence as "refusing to remember overtly while remembering covertly"; and it is perhaps done by Neumeier as he is justifying his Hitler Youth experience and innocence as a young naïve man who never got to fully participate in democratization due to his move to America. In this category, deception can be involved, but the motivations in refusing to remember can occur because "speakers are tuning what they say to the perceived attitudes or expectations of their audience, articulating some aspects of their memory while leaving others unmentioned."<sup>5</sup> The article also mentions the *rebound effect*, in which intentional silences may not elicit greater forgetting, but ironically "can actually make speakers more likely to remember the suppressed material in the future

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<sup>4</sup> Charles B. Stone, et al., "Towards a Science of Silence: The Consequences of Leaving a Memory Unsaid," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7, no. 1 (2012): 39.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 41. While I do not doubt Neumeier gave a true account of his life in the Hitler Youth based on what he experienced and perceived as a young boy (since he was not mature enough to realize the consequences of his participation), it is possible that he failed to acknowledge or willingly admit how he felt about Nazi indoctrination in the Hitler Youth after decades of realizing the extent of Nazi atrocities.

rather than to forget it.”<sup>6</sup> This explains how postwar accounts like those of Alfons Heck and Günter Grass are created and analyzed years after the postwar period, the time when they remained silent in order to focus on finding stability in post-WWII Germany. Sociologists Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger similarly argue that “the passage of time may in itself increase the probability of finding [overt] silence as witnesses pass away or grow old, and collectives grow bored or tired.”<sup>7</sup> Silence according to them is a coping mechanism for acknowledging and remembering the past. Thus, former Nazi German youths have recently sought to recollect and write down their postwar experiences years later, as a way of at least claiming some responsibility for their actions—“keeping completely silent about certain issues is increasingly becoming a non-option for many nations [i.e. Germany].”<sup>8</sup> Overall, these sources, including the new interview, further this essay’s analysis of how postwar memory is analyzed in terms of the history of the Hitler Youth and the democratization process in post-1945 Germany.

### **Hitler Youth Background and Indoctrination**

In 1926, Nazi politician Kurt Gruber successfully re-vamped Hitler’s official youth organization led by Baldur von Shirach, giving it the title *Hitlerjugend*. The activities and involvement of the Hitler Youth can be summarized in three main goals: “to mobilize and to discipline an entire generation of German youth in the spirit of National Socialism; to loosen

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

<sup>7</sup> Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Chana Teeger, “Unpacking the Unspoken: Silence in Collective Memory and Forgetting,” *Social Forces* 88, no. 3 (March 2010): 1110.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1104.



their ties to the Church, the family, and the past; to inculcate the ideal that the State was everything and the individual nothing.”<sup>9</sup>

The Hitler Youth can be described as a social organization with activities that required physical fitness and military instruction. This obligation involved participation in athletic games, which indirectly introduced youth to actual military operations and strategies. In an oral interview conducted by this author, Erich Neumeier, a former member of both the *Jungvolk* and the *Hitlerjugend*, stated that he remembered participating in sports activities as well as constructing and flying gliders. In his written description, he compares his time in both organizations, which he claimed were similar to the Boy Scouts<sup>10</sup>:

I was in the young volk at 10 years, Hitler Youth at 14 years. Nearly 95% joined both organizations. When you wanted to belong, you joined. I did not have a rank. I was just a member. In young volk, we had weekly meeting, had sport [running, jumping] and building moder [model] glider airplanes. . . . I did not feel that I was weaned from my family.

I joined the “pilot” Hitler Youth section. My fondest memory were learn how to fly a glider. . . . I liked to fly tremendously. There were other sections of Hitler Youth; . . . you were free to choose your group after changing from young volk to Hitler Youth at 14 years.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Craig W.H. Luther, *Blood and Honor: The History of the 12<sup>th</sup> SS Panzer Division, “Hitler Youth,” 1943-1945* (San Jose: R. James Bender Publishing, 1987), 13.

<sup>10</sup> Erich Neumeier, interviewed by Elizabeth Fox, April 6, 2016, 1. Neumeier was born in 1927 in Ingolstadt, Germany just outside of Munich on the Danube River. This interview represents a credible account of his experiences in and perceptions of the Hitler Youth before and during the war, as well as his perception of the postwar reconstruction, democratization, and reeducation process. Neumeier is a friend of Elizabeth’s grandfather.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

In essence, the *Hitlerjugend* became an important organization that indirectly trained these young men into becoming Nazi soldiers and fighting machines. The Nazi *Schutzstaffel* (Elite Guard or SS) was primarily responsible for supporting and recruiting young boys from the Hitler Youth, serving as a connection for members, and, in fact, manipulating them to enter into SS positions. The SS “fed its insatiable thirst for power and its penetration into the collective mind and social fabric by replenishing its personnel from the politically conditioned HJ [*Hitlerjugend*].”<sup>12</sup>

The Hitler Youth’s education on Nazi principles became the quintessential foundation of the organization that shaped the activities and training of its members. In addition to teaching about the race and ideologies of enemies, such as Jews and Communists, instruction emphasized German history (from its modern history in 1871 up to the humiliating end of World War I) and the life of Hitler. Their most important handbook, which gave an overview of those Nazi principles, was entitled *The Nazi Primer*; in it, the goals of the Hitler Youth (“character building, physical training, and training in the National Socialist worldview”) clearly echoed the ideals emphasized by Nazi leadership.<sup>13</sup> The *Primer* outlined complex ideas pertaining to German population and culture that are ultra-nationalist in attitude. For instance, the *Primer* emphasized the need for racial purification in the German community, which was presently in danger of creating impure variations in races (or “hybrids”)—therefore, “a Jew who, during the ‘System Time,’ has assumed a German name and adopted the Christian belief is and remains a Jew.”<sup>14</sup> In this way, it advocated for the preserva-

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<sup>12</sup> Gerhard Rempel, *Hitler’s Children: The Hitler Youth and the SS* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 257.

<sup>13</sup> Harwood L. Childs (trans.), William E. Dodd (comm.), *The Nazi Primer: Official Handbook for Schooling the Hitler Youth* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1938), xix.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. “System time” refers to the period of the Weimar Republic between 1918 and 1933.

tion of the Aryan race, the most perfect civilization in the world, from mixed, abnormal peoples like the Jews, who seek to corrupt them and the natural order of the universe. This racial concept was a hidden rejection of democracy that instead upheld National Socialism as a suitable ideology in creating the pure, rather than individualistic, German state. William E. Dodd, the former U.S. ambassador to Germany from 1933-1937, effectively summarized the overall significance of this indoctrination as “preparing the way for a Nazified world where all freedom of the individual, of education, and of the churches is to be totally suppressed.”<sup>15</sup>

These Nazi ideals were espoused by the German youth who separated themselves from their traditionally conservative moral guides—namely the church, school, and family unit. Thus, the Hitler Youth became a modern organization that appealed to independent young minds, as autonomy was granted to them as well as the “opportunity for young people to be respected and responsible.”<sup>16</sup> For example, parental consent was not required to join the SS Panzer Division or the Hitler Youth. Additionally, membership into these organizations eventually became mandatory, breaching the voice of parental authority and replacing it with that of the State in the guise of youthful rights of independence. This sparked an intergenerational conflict, specifically between the older generation of the Weimar Republic and the new, young generation of Nazis. A former enthusiastic member of the *Hitlerjugend*, Alfons Heck, was driven to the Hitler Youth organization as a ten-year-old due to his “crav[ing] for action” and for freedom from responsibilities.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, devoted *Jungvolk* member Eberhard

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>16</sup> Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Alfons Heck, *A Child of Hitler: Germany in the Days When God Wore a Swastika* (Phoenix: Renaissance House Publishers, 1985), 9.

Weinbrenner learned from his teacher that “by resisting his parents he exhibited true *Heldenmut* [heroic courage].”<sup>18</sup>

The Hitler Youth also promoted itself as an organization of opportunity for all those of different backgrounds. The organization’s members were rewarded based on merit rather than social standing. In their immaturity, selfishness, and ignorance, these young boys sought power and strength over other children as they attempted to climb the ranks in their organization and be rewarded for their military and athletic prowess. In spite of this desire for Nazi power and leadership, the majority of the Hitler Youth, primarily its youngest members, were attracted to join the organization for the camaraderie and Fascist pageantry, normalizing the organization and its purpose. During his time in the Hitler Youth, Günter Grass reveled in this youthful fellowship without question: “The wishful thought of [the Hitler Youth] slogan, *Youth Must Be Led by Youth!* was backed by promises of overnight hikes and other outdoor activities in the woods along the beach.”<sup>19</sup> Erich Neumeier claimed that he had “a happy childhood, playing sooccer [sic], swimming in the Danube, exploring the neighborhood park. . . . As a young boy, I heard from my father, actually just good news. My father had work, our family had more than enough to eat. Germany was rising industrulic [sic]. I would say [I was] happy and proud to be a glider training pilot [in the Hitler Youth].”<sup>20</sup> Neumeier further expressed his disinterest in Nazi politics during his times in the *Jungvolk* and Hitler Youth, commenting on the fact that he never discovered the negative aspects of Nazism (i.e.

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<sup>18</sup> Frederic C. Tubach, *German Voices: Memories of Life During Hitler’s Third Reich* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 106. Weinbrenner had frequently rebelled from his Protestant parents, who were opposed to National Socialism, another example of intergenerational conflict.

<sup>19</sup> Günter Grass, *Peeling the Onion*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (Orlando: A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Inc., 2007), 20.

<sup>20</sup> Neumeier, “Interview,” 2.

anti-Semitism).<sup>21</sup> To most German youths, their required duty as German citizens was to participate in the Hitler Youth—there was no scrutiny of their actions since they did not understand the hidden political implications of the Nazism they naively practiced. In essence, as Alfons Heck reflected, “Children are too immature to question the veracity of what they are taught by their educators.”<sup>22</sup> Like many of his peers, Neumeier did not fully realize the implications of his actions, but was just happy to be a child who “belonged” in a social organization. This illustrates the brilliance of the Nazi establishment in indoctrinating youth.

Other postwar accounts reveal the realistic tensions of participation in the organization. Ilse Koehn, a former member of the German Girl’s League, *Jungmaedel*, faced hardships in her organization, providing a different story regarding her involvement as a half-Jewish girl in the Hitler Youth. Koehn’s identity as a *Mischling* (mixed-blood) was a hidden but common situation amongst other former members. In a classified document titled “Expulsion of A Mischlinge from the Hitler Youth” from the Archives of the Wiener Library in London, correspondence and orders from the Chief of the NDSAP Personnel Office detail the investigation into whether or not the two sons of Hildegard Becker should continue membership in the Hitler Youth when it was discovered while undergoing divorce proceedings that Becker’s mother had a Jewish identity.<sup>23</sup> In spite of Becker’s declaration that she was only half-Jewish and that she “obviously tried hard to prevent expulsion of her sons,” the NDSAP officials rejected the boys’

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Heck, *Child of Hitler*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> “Expulsion of a Mischlinge From The Hitler Youth. The 'Final Solution' (September 1939-May 1945): 'Mischlinge', Mixed Marriages, Non-Aryans, Racial Disgrace. Eyewitness Accounts.” July 1938 to January 1939. Archives of the Wiener Library, London. The Wiener Library, London, United Kingdom. *Archives Unbound*. Web. 15 Mar. 2016.

continued membership in the Hitler Youth, “even if they were only 1/8 part Jewish.”<sup>24</sup> The situation with Becker and her sons reflects the danger of being discovered, even with the smallest remnants of Jewish ancestry. Such threat of discovery could affect the most loyal Hitler Youth members, as seen in the fear of Ilse Koehn and her family. Koehn joined the *Jungmaedel* because her friends had told her “how much fun they had, singing and playing all kinds of games”; the real function of these activities, however, was to instruct these girls on Nazi philosophy.<sup>25</sup> In one harsh situation, Koehn was forced along with thousands of Berlin children to evacuate to East Prussia, when in fact they were sent to Czechoslovakia without the knowledge of their families; there, Hitler Youth dignitaries, including Baldur von Schirach, welcomed them.<sup>26</sup> These girls were told to lie in their letters to their parents that they were safely secure in their area when in actuality they lived in cruel, strict, and unfair conditions. This situation focused on forming the German boys and girls into effective Nazi leaders who should follow orders regardless of the circumstances.

Overall, while the Hitler Youth organizations had success in the indoctrination of the youth toward Nazism, it was later discovered that there were hidden tensions that were revealed in the aftermath of the war. Many children were affected by the cruel, unjust exploitation of the Hitler Youth organization. As Gerhard Rempel remarks, members of the Hitler Youth were “a generation of misguided idealists. Hitler’s children demonstrated a youthful capacity for fidelity. That loyalty was abused.”<sup>27</sup> The transformative experiences and continuous blind loyalty of the Hitler Youth members to the Third Reich was put to the test when democratization took control of Germany in the postwar period.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ilse Koehn, *Mischling, Second Degree: My Childhood in Germany* (New York: Greenwillow Books, 1977), 8.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>27</sup> Rempel, *Hitler’s Children*, 262.



### **Stages of Reeducation: Demilitarization, Denazification, Democratization**

The collapse of Nazi Germany in 1945 abruptly ended Nazi indoctrination. In an attempt to salvage the remnants of German society and reduce the long-term trauma felt by the German population, the Allies implemented stages for what they hoped would be successful reeducation leading to democratization. The Allies targeted the youth as the bulwark upon which Western Germany (also the subsequent new Bonn Republic) could reconstruct and once again be successfully integrated into Western society. The phase of demilitarization divided Germany into zones controlled by the United States, Great Britain, France, and Russia. Under foreign Allied occupation, Germany was required to eliminate Nazi military organizations like the *Wehrmacht*, *Waffen-SS*, and *Volkssturm* militia. German soldiers willingly underwent this demilitarization process for “fear of being captured, especially by the Russians, as well as the urge to make their way home unrecognized.”<sup>28</sup> This act of capitulation largely contrasted with the Nazi militant values and mindset of the Hitler Youth, marking the first turn for many from militarization to civility.

Denazification became an essential phase in eradicating Nazi organizations and culture that contained elements of Fascism. In October 1945, the Allied Control Council issued its eighth law providing legal ramifications for denazification measures. These measures effectively “dissolved the N.D.S.A.P., its formations, and its affiliated organizations, of which some sixty-two were enumerated, making it illegal to revive the Party, either under its old name or a new one, and providing for the confiscation of the Party’s assets, property,

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<sup>28</sup> Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 23. The Germans also desired to have a normal and peaceful civilian life when leaving the frontlines, which made disarmament and demobilization easier.

files and documents.”<sup>29</sup> Additionally, German businesses and industries were “prohibited from employing former Party Members in any but the lowest positions,” in order to remove former members from professional society and reduce their influence.<sup>30</sup> Censorship was also placed on Nazi films, newspapers, and other media, gradually becoming replaced by its American alternatives, such as the newspaper *Die Neue Zeitung*. One specific Allied attempt of censorship occurred in German cinema, in which a 1951 film titled *Die Sünderin* (*The Sinner*) in 1951 told the story of a woman who resorts to prostitution and later commits suicide.<sup>31</sup> The film provoked uproar in the Protestant and Catholic churches that protested against the film’s immoral themes. Through such critical involvement, the church, once a traditional enemy of the Hitler Youth, became an institutional authority whose mission was to help rebuild postwar Germany based on conservative values. As a result, “by the beginning of the Bonn Republic, these well-entrenched interests dominated the process of social and cultural reconstruction.”<sup>32</sup>

Although the majority of Nazi control was effectively eliminated, historian Konrad Jarausch argues that denazification was largely unsuccessful in the short term. Denazification boards failed to eradicate most former Nazis from professional life, which, to be sure, was a difficult and impractical goal to attain in the short term; they also failed to convince them of

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<sup>29</sup> “Europe 1945: Number 2: Germany Under Allied Occupation (As Mirrored In The German Press). Wiener Library Publications,” October to December 1945 (Archives of the Wiener Library, London, The Wiener Library, London, United Kingdom), *Archives Unbound*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Heidi Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany: Reconstructing National Identity After Hitler* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 92.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

their collective responsibility in the Holocaust.<sup>33</sup> The bureaucratic process of removing ardent Nazis from officer positions and finding new appropriate officers was slow and unpopular amongst the German masses. One mayor in Hamburg claimed that removing former Nazi and SS members would lead to a “class of disgruntled and sacked ex-Party members” that would be “dangerous, ill-advised and a threat to law and order”; he also rejected “employment of proven anti-Fascists and former concentration camp inmates as contrary to the best interests of democratic administration.”<sup>34</sup> In spite of such claims and initial backlash, local governments, primarily in West Germany, underwent tremendous efforts to purge Nazis from society and carry out their own programs of denazification. The denazification processes differed with regards to Soviet-controlled areas versus those of the Western Allies—the Soviets using their own brand of indoctrination and brutality—but such processes were underway in all areas of Germany.

Democratization benefited from the reeducation of the postwar German youth, primarily through the reorganization of the schools. Upon their reopening, schools faced problems such as the lack of textbooks approved to replace those that emphasized Nazi propaganda, like *The Nazi Primer*. In addition, when observing literacy and general knowledge, it became apparent that the German children lacked the proper education due to the former emphasis placed on Nazi indoctrination rather than on core teachings. Further, democratization required qualified teachers who were not former Nazi Party members:

In view of the great political responsibility towards the German youth and future, the prospective teachers are required—and this point is expressively stressed by the TÄGLICHE RUNDSCHAU, the paper of the Soviet command—to belong to those classes of the German masses that are known for their democratic traditions

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<sup>33</sup> Jaraus, *After Hitler*, 54.

<sup>34</sup> “Europe 1945: Number 2,” 5.

and leanings, namely the workers, the peasants and the working intelligentsia.<sup>35</sup>

The brutal stages of demilitarization, denazification, and democratization reflect the long, arduous process of reconstructing Germany to overcome the brainwashing and indoctrination employed by the Nazi Regime in their attempt to control all aspects of German society.

### **Responses to Reeducation: Tracing Postwar Memory**

The main problem in analyzing postwar memory is the silence of many Germans during the democratization process extending into the 1950s and 1960s. Author Joachim Fest admitted that he would not have immediately put pen to paper, writing his precise early memories, if he had not had a radio commission to author his account of German history.<sup>36</sup> In collectively working through his experiences, Fest termed the post-1945 period as “The Great Denial,” in which the “early years after the war was later described as a ‘communicative silence.’”<sup>37</sup> This silence was formed not because of repression by the Allied forces but because of Germany’s determination to forget the horrors of their recent past. According to Tubach, “For mere physical and psychological survival, it was necessary for us to look forward; to look back meant facing a wall too high and formidable to be scaled.”<sup>38</sup>

Following World War II, German youths, especially older Hitler Youth members born before 1930, had become disoriented by the reality of National Socialism and its subsequent destruction of Germany. Amidst the rubble and dilapidated towns of Germany, they felt lost without the Nazi authoritarian

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<sup>35</sup> “Europe 1945: Number 2,” 29.

<sup>36</sup> Joachim C. Fest, *Not Me: Memoirs of a German Childhood*, trans. Martin Chalmers (London: Atlantic Books Ltd., 2012), 14.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>38</sup> Tubach, *German Voices*, 100-101.

ideology in which they were raised. Therefore, when the occupied German state was in the beginning stages of its democratic transformation, German youths actually protested against democratization. Initially, many of these adolescents remained loyal to the Führer and to National Socialism, believing that democracy would fail like it had with the Weimar Republic. Their resistance is evidence that actions in denazification were ineffectively carried out in the beginning of the postwar period. Having been traumatized by the war, these youths clung to the ideals of Nazism, unwilling to admit their defeat. The indoctrinated youths continued to claim in the summer of 1945, “Hitler was a great man who insisted that ‘[Germans] have not really lost the war.’”<sup>39</sup>

Proud, nationalistic German youths sought to fight against Allied control. They believed the American occupiers threatened to change the traditional social and political structures of German society and replace them with Americanized versions. Fisher states that there was contention between the Germans and Americans over Allied educational reforms that Germans believed would intrude upon other societal aspects of the German identity. Drawing upon the American “Zook” Report, Fisher explains that Germans strongly protested proposed changes in the structure of German schools based on the American democratic model; this revealed “how youth and education afforded postwar Germans one last front on which to fight the Allies and on which to stake their identities.”<sup>40</sup> The youthful resentment against this Allied control is also reflected by surveys in the U.S. zone. The majority of Germans opposed denazification “in practice, most often because they felt that too many ‘small fish’ were being netted while the bigger ones were getting away.”<sup>41</sup> Germans claimed that these democratic

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<sup>39</sup> Jaraus, *After Hitler*, 31.

<sup>40</sup> Fisher, *Disciplining Germany*, 72.

<sup>41</sup> Steven P. Remy, *The Heidelberg Myth: The Nazification and Denazification of a German University* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 151.

policies carried out by the occupiers were ignorant of the realities of postwar life in Germany. In response to interview questions, Erich Neumeier stated that he believed the Marshall Plan, an American initiative that aided to help rebuild postwar Western Europe, had good intentions but was poorly organized and lacked understanding of the German people, customs, and beliefs. This was evidenced in the corn that was sent as a food ration to the starving German people—however, “in Germany corn is strictly food for picks [pigs]. So in Germany, Bavarian people thought the Americans think of us as [pigs].”<sup>42</sup> Despite their need for such aid, the majority of German youth were attempting to retain their sense of nationalistic pride for their country, even in ruins, unwilling to lose their dignity in the face of such calamity.

Although the former Nazi youth initially protested against democratization procedures, they also felt betrayed by Hitler and the Third Reich. While in the organization, Hitler Youth members became inspired by the German nationalist pride presented in their ritualistic activities and elaborate spectacles celebrating Nazism and Hitler’s leadership. Hitler became the archetype of National Socialism whom all the young boys and girls placed on a pedestal—as a father figure, he mattered more than Nazi ideology.<sup>43</sup> Upon swearing their oath of fealty to the Führer in a ceremonial fashion, the members cast Hitler in a magical charismatic aura and thereby were inspired by his majesty; this is just one example of the effect of Nazi pageantry employed by the organization. Heck discusses an event where Hitler gave his speech to all the Hitler Youth members, who were overcome with emotion in hearing him speak; in that moment, Heck “belonged to Adolf Hitler body and soul.”<sup>44</sup> Their admiration for Hitler and the Nazi ideal turned to shock when Germany collapsed and suffered through the postwar period.

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<sup>42</sup> Neumeier, “Interview,” 4.

<sup>43</sup> Tubach, *German Voices*, 43.

<sup>44</sup> Heck, *Child of Hitler*, 23.



Having been convinced of the invincibility of their Führer, Nazi Regime, and organization, Hitler Youth members questioned why Hitler's Third Reich failed so miserably against the Allied powers. As the Nazi organization failed to protect them when they suffered from postwar depression, German youths began to portray themselves as victims rather than perpetrators of Nazi actions, hence Grass' observation: "The crimes coming to light with peace, the flip side of war, were making victims out of perpetrators."<sup>45</sup> The victimization of the Hitler Youth kept them from admitting to themselves and others their complicity in furthering the Nazi cause against the Jews, raising the question of whether or not they were blameless. Although the Hitler Youth members often naively participated in their activities without fully understanding the actual indirect purposes—the effects of displaying power and superiority over younger members, for example—they were ultimately indoctrinated into having a sense of a strong nationalistic and racial superiority.

In the postwar period, they were held accountable for their actions against the Jewish race, regardless of their indoctrination as youths. According to historian Tony Judt, postwar Germany had been democratized and "raised to see Nazism as responsible for war and defeat; but its truly awful aspects were consistently downplayed."<sup>46</sup> When the Adolf Eichmann trial occurred in 1960 in Jerusalem along with the Auschwitz trials later in Frankfurt, the German public became exposed to the evils of the Nazi regime. German youth radicals of the 1960s then began to claim that the Bonn Republic in West Germany actively sought to cover crimes formerly committed by Nazi youths and failed to allow Germans to confront their past—"as a result, in the eyes of their sons and daughters they stood for nothing. Their material achievements were tainted by their

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<sup>45</sup> Grass, *Peeling the Onion*, 240.

<sup>46</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 416.

moral inheritance.”<sup>47</sup> These postwar protests represent the guilt former Nazi youths faced as a refusal of taking responsibility. Erich Neumeier admitted having “troubles being classified as a ‘Nazi’ criminal,” mainly because he, like many other German youths, felt that “I was doing the same as the American GIs – defending my country.”<sup>48</sup> However, as Günter Grass explains in his memoir, “Guilt—whether proven, presumed, or concealed—remains. . . . It says its piece, fears no repetition, is mercifully forgotten for a time, and hibernates in our dreams.”<sup>49</sup>

The negative attitudes of the German youths impacted the reception towards democratization as a failure in the short term, making it initially difficult to undo the damage of Nazi indoctrination. Former Hitler Youth members who became Allied prisoners of war felt bitter resentment in losing to the Allies and were dehumanized through their experiences as Nazi fighting machines. For instance, Heck was captured by French military occupiers, who sent him to a penitentiary in Wittlich as a prisoner of war when they found out he was a Hitler Youth leader (*Bannführer*). He went through a process of reeducation, recalling a time when he viewed documentary films of death camps with indifference:

The mountains of emaciated corpses had the opposite effect from what our conquerors intended. We thought they were fakes, posed to indict all Germans. The French became so incensed by our indifference that they rammed us with rifle butts. It was some time before I could accept the truth of the Holocaust, nearly three decades more before I could write or speak about German guilt and responsibility.<sup>50</sup>

In a similar way, Günter Grass faced the challenges as a POW when there were rumors that prisoners would be transferred to

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 417.

<sup>48</sup> Neumeier, “Interview,” 4.

<sup>49</sup> Grass, *Peeling the Onion*, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Heck, *Child of Hitler*, 204-205.

the Soviet zone—great fear struck the hearts of many prisoners. Grass also mentioned “rumors of a mass release of prisoners, occasionally combined with talk of shipping the youngest inmates off for reeducation: to America! They’ll knock the Hitler Youth out of you, the older soldiers jeered.”<sup>51</sup> The harsh scare tactics that the Allies instigated began to influence the POWs, who were radically changed through the reeducation process—“completely unprepared for a West Germany in the throes of rapid economic growth and expansion, POWs appeared as sage observers from another age.”<sup>52</sup>

The German youths encountered in their postwar lives a stage of reexamination of their values, focusing mainly on their present survival rather than speaking out on their atrocities as Nazi youths. Having been let down by the fall of the Third Reich and rejection by the Allies as Nazi criminals, the youths distrusted their older authorities. As the Nazi foundations that they wholeheartedly followed became destroyed, the youths were unsure of where to place their faith; they therefore frequently withdrew from the community and maintained a focus only within themselves.<sup>53</sup> These youths displayed a disinterest towards government matters, taking no sides in party politics regarding democracy, Nazism, or otherwise — “by all accounts most Germans were intent on one thing, *das Überleben*, or mere survival, and Allied armies were grappling to impose a victor’s order on the wartime chaos.”<sup>54</sup> However, their social adaptation in a postwar Germany that was slowly becoming renewed as a nationalist state influenced the evolution of their ideals over time. Algot Joensson, who became a national director of an affiliate of the Swedish Trade Union Federation in 1941, provided his perspective on democracy

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<sup>51</sup> Grass, *Peeling the Onion*, 188.

<sup>52</sup> Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 90.

<sup>53</sup> Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 257.

<sup>54</sup> Fehrenbach, *Cinema in Democratizing Germany*, 1.

when compiling an observational report of the Bavarian areas struck by postwar devastation. He urgently called for the creation of democracy to rebuild Germany, an initiative that would be led by its youth, and argued for trade unions to become the “core of democracy.”<sup>55</sup> His argument sought to train youth to become progressive contributors in rebuilding the German society and aiding in its democratic development: this call was made “in order to be able to reach a judgment on a problem, [the German youth] will demand facts and, eventually, they will learn respect for facts, for the view of other people and for people themselves—a respect which is quite necessary in a democracy.”<sup>56</sup>

German youths in the western zones were also influenced by democratic youth organizations, which were headed by the Education and Religious Affairs Branch with foreign military officials guiding their activities.<sup>57</sup> According to the U.S. military’s program guidelines, the democratization process in these organizations would be “achieved by acquainting the young people with such activities and interests as woodcrafts and athletics that were normal to youths of similar age in the United States.”<sup>58</sup> One German youth, Manfred Fischer, who was chosen to participate in this re-indoctrination process, loved this experience, in which “good food, fireside meetings, talks about America, and simple interactions with the American soldiers in charge of the youth camp filled the days.”<sup>59</sup> These

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<sup>55</sup> Algot Joensson, *Organized Labor and Democracy in Germany*, Office of the Military Government for Germany (U.S.), Manpower Division, Visiting Expert Series No. 15, October 1949, *University of Wisconsin, The History Collection Database*, 9.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>57</sup> *The U.S. Armed Forces German Youth Activities Program*, Historical Division Headquarters, United States Army, Europe, 1956, *University of Wisconsin The History Collection Database*, 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Tubach, *German Voices*, 153. Upon the arrival of American soldiers occupying German territory, Fischer had lived with

organizations represented a quasi-*Hitlerjugend* that encouraged the spread of democracy rather than the Nazi cause. Most importantly, they helped to guide former Hitler Youths to eventually find their way toward democracy in a newly developed Germany and, thus, to move Germany toward the healing of its psyche.

### **Legacy of Democratization in Postwar Germany**

One major effect stemming from the democratization process was the fracturing of unity between East and West Germany. Differences occurred in democratization procedures of the Eastern zone of Russia and the Western zones of America, Britain, and France that almost hindered the growth of a new German nationalism. According to German intellectuals, Germany suffered from “post-fascist democratic deficit” in which they sought to create stronger democratic institutions that pushed against totalitarianism, but struggled to identify with them.<sup>60</sup> With American influences, West Germany actively pursued an effective democracy, modeled differently from the pre-Nazi Weimar Republic, to combat against Nazism; this zone became increasingly westernized. Conversely, Russia’s ruthless denazification process created in the East German zone “a seemingly ‘more German Germany’ steeped in authoritarianism.”<sup>61</sup> For instance, the Free German Youth (FDJ) was established as a youth organization similar to those in the Western zones but with communist purposes. While the organization sought to convert its young members by including “fun into their activities, using some of the same techniques as the Hitler Youth,” its main focus was to develop the political

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American GIs, who used his home for U.S. Army Headquarters; he created a bond and admiration for these Americans despite their takeover.

<sup>60</sup> Müller, *Another Country*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

education system based on socialism.<sup>62</sup> This cruel re-indoctrination and aggression of Communists on Eastern Germany is reflected in the tales of German refugees who managed to escape from the Eastern zone during the postwar period—“forcefully separated from their homes and possessions, they desperately needed immediate assistance to compensate them for their losses and integrate them into West German society.”<sup>63</sup> As Erich Neumeier expressed, even as a member of the Hitler Youth he did not have much concern for politics or perceptions of the Jews before the postwar period. But following the war, his perceptions and concerns were confused and illustrated the mindset of many Germans:

I was not interested in politics. That the stores of Jews were marked as “Ich Bin Ein Jude” was a fact of daily life and really not much concern to me. After the war, after the Koncentration camp stories became public, I became uncomfortable. But I ask myself what happened to the German prisoners of war in Russia? Even up to date only 20-25% were returned. The rest disappeared forever . . . and Russia was an alliance of the West!<sup>64</sup>

The statistics that Neumeier mentioned foreshadow the fact that in the wake of World War II, the Soviet Union was creating a Communist, totalitarian government in its occupied zone of Eastern Germany rather than aiding in democratization. Thus, the differences between East and West German political ideologies served to further divide Germany and confuse its citizens who were often already lost: in denial, emotionally distraught, and “uncomfortable” with what had transpired under Hitler’s Regime.

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<sup>62</sup> Catherine Plum, *Antifascism After Hitler: East German Youth and Socialist Memory, 1949-1989* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, Routledge, 2015), 46.

<sup>63</sup> Moeller, *War Stories*, 22.

<sup>64</sup> Neumeier, “Interview,” 2-3.



Despite the deep political divisions within East and West Germany, the overall process of democratization throughout Germany effectively helped restore over time a new German nation that had formerly been ravaged by postwar crisis. American foreign occupiers established their influence and new organizations, such as the Social Democratic Party led by politicians like Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, who sought to improve the nation's postwar government. As a result, Germany eventually transformed into a developed and, once again advanced, nation. Erich Neumeier had moved away from Germany in 1954, due to the slow recovery of the national economy. He established his home in the United States, where prosperity and "easy money" kept him from returning to Germany. However, after fifteen to twenty years, he arrived in Germany again, only to find its massive transformation. Erich and his wife "felt we did not belong the[re] anymore. Only my brot[h]ers family was importend [important]. Most of our friends had moved and were not in Ingolstadt anymore."<sup>65</sup> With the transformation of the West German nation came the transformation of its youth, who eventually understood and accepted the evils of Nazism and began to work through their guilt and embarrassment. The processes of denazification and democratization were necessary for Germans to come to terms with their past, helping them become a stronger nation in facing the consequences for their actions—in doing so, "acknowledgement of their losses unified West Germans; it became central to defining the Federal Republic as a nation of victims."<sup>66</sup> In eventually accepting their responsibility for Nazi atrocities, many former Hitler Youths were able to record accounts of their perspectives towards Nazism and democracy, as the past was no longer painful. Their responses helped Germany move one step closer towards successful democratization in the long term.

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<sup>65</sup> Neumeier, "Interview," 4-5.

<sup>66</sup> Moeller, *War Stories*, 22.

## Conclusion

While the initial development of democratization was an ineffective failure in the short term, it gradually gained success, as the new West German nation evolved economically and politically due to the efforts of groups like labor unions and former Hitler Youth who had come to terms, as best as they could, with what had occurred during the war.

These former Hitler Youth members began to heal and work toward uniting the new German youth in their efforts to democratize Germany. The Hitler Youth's indoctrination into National Socialism effectively trained its members as soldiers for the Third Reich. Yet according to former members Alfons Heck and Luftwaffe pilot Erich Neumeier, the organization's appeal for them lay in athletics and social fellowship, which used the naiveté of its members to carry out the Nazi cause. After World War II and Nazi atrocities wreaked havoc on Europe and the Nazi state collapsed, former Hitler Youth members struggled to return to normalcy, initially rejecting Allied efforts of democratization in the process. Nevertheless, decades of demilitarization, denazification, reconstruction, and democratization, whether through other youth organizations or experiences in POW camps, helped fully convince Germany's youth of the positive values of democracy. By accepting and taking responsibility for their actions, the former Hitler Youth helped Germany emerge out of the economic and political wreckage of World War II to become a new democratic nation. Hitler successfully indoctrinated the German youth and believed he would through them secure Germany's future in National Socialism; however, as postwar Germany rose from its devastation, so too did its people as they learned to remember, rather than forget their past—"Memory likes to play hide-and-seek, to crawl away. . . . When pestered with questions, memory is like an onion that wishes to be peeled so we can read what is laid bare letter by letter."<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, the youth

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<sup>67</sup> Grass, *Peeling the Onion*, 3.

of Germany, which formerly symbolized the Nazi cause, became the true hope for Germany in its democratization and its steps toward healing the German spirit.

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# SEX EDUCATION, RAPE CULTURE, AND SEXUAL ASSAULT: THE VICIOUS CYCLE

**Anna Lanford**

One in five women will be sexually assaulted during her lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Most of these cases do not occur when a stranger jumps out of the bushes, but with someone familiar to the victim. In fact, statistics show that sexual assault by an acquaintance is even more common on college campuses. As stated in Furman University's Sexual Misconduct Policies, "Over 90% of campus rapes are committed by friends, acquaintances, or friends of friends."<sup>2</sup> In order to combat the high rate of sexual assault, both men and women need to have better understanding of what consent means and that it can be withdrawn at any time. In the legal context, there are various state laws and university policies that define consent and sexual assault. In the philosophical context, scholars such as Lois Pineau discuss the idea of communicative sexuality, which could transform the way we perceive both the victims and perpetrators of sexual assault. In this essay I will argue that the existing legal methods of determining consent are largely unhelpful as we can see from the overwhelming numbers of sexual assaults, especially on college campuses, and that

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<sup>1</sup> National Sexual Violence Resource Center, "Statistics about Sexual Violence," <[http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications\\_nsvrc\\_factsheet\\_media-packet\\_statistics-about-sexual-violence\\_0.pdf](http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_factsheet_media-packet_statistics-about-sexual-violence_0.pdf)>.

<sup>2</sup> Furman University, *Title IX: Gender Discrimination, Sexual Harassment & Sexual Misconduct* (Greenville, SC, August 2015), 7.

communicative sexuality should be adopted as the standard for determining whether an encounter was consensual. I believe that the way to begin implementing communicative sexuality would start with more open discussions with young people about how to lead healthy sex lives instead of the limited sex education they receive today.

I will start by addressing current laws surrounding rape and consent. By examining these issues we can better understand how to fix the problems that exist. Legislation regarding sexual assault offers little protection from abuse involving a friend or significant other, which constitute the majority of rape cases. In rape law there exists the idea of *generalized consent* in which “consent to prior sexual intercourse either indicates consent to subsequent intercourse or suggests a greater likelihood that the defendant reasonably believed the victim consented to the later encounter.”<sup>3</sup> In fact, until recently there were many states, such as Delaware and Hawaii, that in certain cases provided a *rape shield exception* that “allow[ed] for the admission of evidence of prior sexual conduct between the defendant and the victim . . . the more sexual history between two parties, the more evidence admitted under the rape shield exception, thereby increasing the likelihood that an inference of consent [would] be made.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, the evidence of a sexual history could be used against a victim. This negates the right to say no at any point in a relationship, harkening back to the days when a concept such as marital rape did not exist – when “‘I do’ translated into a blanket, irrevocable consent.”<sup>5</sup> Laws like this strip all meaning from the idea that “no means no” and reinforce female subordination to any male figure, whether it be her husband, boyfriend, or just an acquaintance.

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<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Rahko (ed.), “Acquaintance Rape and Degrees of Consent: No Means No But What Does Yes Mean?” *Harvard Law Review* 117, no. 7 (May 2004): 2342.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 2343.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 2342.

In addition to the lack of legal protection from assault by an acquaintance, women face blame for their sexual assault when they consented to other sexual acts but not the intercourse itself. Cases where consent was given to acts preceding a rape “could be viewed as the victim’s assumption of the risk that her limited consent will be misinterpreted as full consent.”<sup>6</sup> In the majority of cases there is no witness, and it becomes one person’s word against another’s. At this point the court must address two questions: when did either party demonstrate intent to have sex and what actions or words were used to create the reasonable belief that consent had been given?<sup>7</sup> However, it may be possible for consent to sexual intercourse to be retracted once given, which further complicates these questions. Courts in Maryland, North Carolina, and California have discussed the idea of postpenetration withdrawal of consent and have all rejected it as a possibility. But there are indeed certain instances when a woman could consent to sex only on certain conditions, such as using a condom, that if ignored, might be considered sex via deception and therefore rape. In this case, there are some states that argue that postpenetration rape could be a separate category from forcible rape, in the same way as rape by use of fraud or drugs are differentiated. But most of the laws currently in place leave the victim to prove that she was raped instead of requiring the accused to show the existence of ongoing consent.

To be able to fix these unjust laws, we must also understand how consent is legally defined. States such as Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, Washington, and New Jersey define consent as “words or overt actions by a person who is competent to give informed consent indicating a freely given agreement to have sexual intercourse or sexual contact.”<sup>8</sup> Colorado’s law states that consent is “cooperation in act or attitude pursuant to an exercise of free will and with knowledge of the nature

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 2348.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 2352.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 2351.

of the act.”<sup>9</sup> In California, consent is defined as “positive cooperation [or] a continual agreement throughout the sexual encounter.”<sup>10</sup> Instead of resistance being required to prove instances of rape, California makes a step in the right direction when it promotes consent as continuous cooperation, which does not rely on the revocation of consent for a sexual experience to be considered assault.

But state laws are not the only institutions that provide definitions of consent. Because of the high instances of sexual assault on college campuses, universities also promote their own definitions of consent. In looking at one example, Furman University defines consent as “informed, freely and actively given, and mutually understandable words or actions that indicate a willingness to participate in a mutually agreed-upon sexual activity.”<sup>11</sup> It even goes as far as to say:

Consent **cannot** be inferred from:

1. Silence, passivity, or lack of resistance alone;
2. A current or previous dating or sexual relationship alone (or the existence of such a relationship with anyone else);
3. Attire;
4. The buying of dinner or the spending of money on a date;
5. Consent previously given (i.e., consenting to one sexual act does not imply consent to another sexual act); or
6. Accepting an invitation to one’s apartment/room.<sup>12</sup>

This addresses many of the issues with general rape laws and concerns about determining consent. The university’s policies warn, “Consent may be withdrawn at any time,” which further supports a person’s right to change her or his mind during a

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 2350.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Furman University, *Title IX*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

sexual encounter.<sup>13</sup> However, even the best definitions of consent, as seen with Furman's example, fail to protect against assault as they are put in practice within the context of rape culture – i.e. attitudes that promote the prevalence of victim blaming, the normalization of male sexual violence, and the generally sexist attitudes that contribute to the pervasiveness of sexual assault within our society.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, I will continue by analyzing rape culture and how it manifests itself in daily interactions between men and women.

Simply defining consent does not stop sexual assault from occurring on this campus or similar campuses across America. Instead, the existence of rape culture throughout our society prevents these guidelines from being effective at preventing sexual assault. Because of this, I will now explain the need for a change in how our society perceives gender in regard to sexuality, which would put an end to rape culture. As pointed out by Lois Pineau in her essay "Date Rape: A Feminist Analysis," we assume that the "normal components of romance include 'male aggression' and 'female reluctance.'"<sup>15</sup> These types of damaging preconceptions can also be seen in the belief that the victim in some way "asked for it" because of her attire, flirtatious behavior, or willingness to participate in certain sexual activities with her attacker. Women are taught that a man's sexual needs are uncontrollable and that acting or dressing provocatively "generates some sort of contractual obligation" to fulfill this need.<sup>16</sup> A provocative woman may indeed agree to participate in some sexual activity, but she has little protection from the court if she were to be assaulted. Oftentimes, this is termed *victim-precipitated rape* where "the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> "Rape Culture." Marshall University. <[www.marshall.edu/wcenter/sexual-assault/rape-culture/](http://www.marshall.edu/wcenter/sexual-assault/rape-culture/)>.

<sup>15</sup> Lois Pineau, "Date Rape: A Feminist Analysis," in *The Philosophy of Sex*, ed. Nicholas Power et al., 6th ed. (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 462.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 470.

woman actually or apparently agreed to intercourse but retracted before the actual act or did not react strongly enough when the suggestion was made by the offender(s).”<sup>17</sup> Lack of consent alone would not be sufficient evidence to prove that a rape had occurred. In many instances, there would need to be overt resistance – for example, evidence of kicking, scratching, or hitting – that would prove to a jury that the sex was unwanted. In addition to finding their way into the courtroom and affecting how the legal system deals with rape, these dangerous misconceptions perpetuated by rape culture about both male and female sexuality are harmful to the ways in which women can express their sexuality.

One such side effect of the persistence of rape culture is “the common belief that many women say no to sex, even when they mean yes, and that their protests are not to be taken seriously.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, there exists the idea that rape gives women “the sexual enjoyment they *really* want, at the same time that it relieves them of the responsibility for admitting to acting upon what they want.”<sup>19</sup> This sexist and unhealthy attitude has even affected the beliefs that women have about their own sexuality. Instead of being able to express themselves freely, many women feel the need to suppress their sexual desires in order to maintain a “pure” reputation. One study published in *The Journal of Sex Research* reveals that 37-39% of women have actually engaged in token resistance to sex, which is the “sexual intent to say no to sexual intercourse while meaning yes.”<sup>20</sup> In these cases, women feel like it would somehow be better for them to deny their desires because they worry about appearing

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<sup>17</sup> Rahko, “Acquaintance Rape and Degrees of Consent,” 2347.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Sprecher et al., “Token Resistance to Sexual Intercourse and Consent to Unwanted Sexual Intercourse: College Students' Dating Experiences in Three Countries,” *Journal of Sex Research* 31, no. 2 (June 1994): 125.

<sup>19</sup> Pineau, “Date Rape,” 469

<sup>20</sup> Sprecher et al., “Token Resistance to Sexual Intercourse,” 125.



promiscuous or they feel that withholding sex is the only way to have power in their relationship. Women who engage in this type of behavior are more likely to subscribe to the destructive patriarchal ideas that it is normal for men to use force to get what they want and that women are expected to find such forceful men attractive.<sup>21</sup>

The negative connotations surrounding overtly sexual women prevent them from being able to explore their sexuality and convince women that they should hide their sexual desires. At the same time, however, many women agree to unwanted sex because of “verbal pressure from their partner, need to conform to peer standards, and desire to maintain the relationship.”<sup>22</sup> Women should be able to turn down sexual advances *and* feel able to express their sexuality without fear of repercussions. In fact, not being able to do these things may pose a threat to a woman’s psychology. In terms of agreeing to unwanted sex, Robin West demonstrates that women who engage in this behavior are more likely to damage their self-assertion, self-possession, autonomy, and integrity. Even if they do not see these negative consequences immediately, these women can face serious damage to their psyche, for as West says, “The more thorough the harm . . . the greater the likelihood that the woman involved will indeed *not* experience these harms as harmful, or as painful.”<sup>23</sup> Although it may not be clear on the surface, the way that rape culture affects our society damages how women can express themselves sexually and the manner with which we address sex as a whole.

Rape culture also promotes the normalization of sexual harassment, which is a further form of male power over women. According to the article “Sexual Harassment and the University” by Robert L. Holmes, sexual harassment is an

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Robin West, “The Harms of Consensual Sex,” in *The Philosophy of Sex*, ed. Nicholas Power et al., 6th ed. (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 389.

expression of sexism that reinforces the power of men over women.<sup>24</sup> In the case of universities, sexual harassment can be seen in both student-on-student and professor-on-student interactions. The sexual harassment of a student by a professor represents a violation of trust that prevents “the enrichment and empowerment of the learner to continue the process of intellectual growth in the ways he or she personally deems best.”<sup>25</sup> Student-on-student harassment is also an “invasion of privacy [that] jeopardizes the conditions under which learning can best take place.”<sup>26</sup> To protect against this type of abuse, “a university’s concern should extend equally to all of its students” by providing council to all students involved in cases of sexual assault.<sup>27</sup>

In extending equal concern to all students in regards to sexual assault, some universities do not treat the accused and the accuser with the same respect. As Emily Bazelon points out in “The Return of the Sex Wars,” Harvard law professor Janet Halley discovered that certain university policies fail to handle cases of sexual assault properly when they fail to provide lawyers to students accused of misconduct who cannot afford them and choose to handle cases internally rather than giving them over to an impartial outside body.<sup>28</sup> These kinds of policies are especially dangerous for students of color, who are more frequently discriminated against. Halley also realized while working with the LGBT community in the early 90s “that both men and women could use power and violence against each other.”<sup>29</sup> Instead of pitting the sexes against each other,

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<sup>24</sup> Robert L. Holmes, “Sexual Harassment and the University,” *An International Quarterly Journal of General Philosophical Inquiry* 79, no. 4 (October 1, 1996): 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Emily Bazelon, “The Return of the Sex Wars,” *The New York Times*, September 10, 2015, 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

the way to reach complete equality is to open the lines of communication. If we can all discuss sexual harassment and abuse, how to avoid it, and how to prevent it from happening, entire communities would benefit. In fact, developing mutual respect and trust within a university campus actually proves to be more “effective in ending sexual harassment than are threats and punishment.”<sup>30</sup> Having an open dialogue is important for a community, but we must also improve communication within our sexual relationships if we are ever to become comfortable discussing the subject publicly.

As I have demonstrated, most legal definitions of consent do not provide adequate protection against assault because they are warped by the pervasiveness of rape culture and lack of open communication about sex. I will continue by presenting a better concept of consent, one that includes the communicative sexuality model. Honest discussions regarding sex and consent with any and all partners is required in order to reduce or possibly eradicate instances of abuse. The first step is altering our perceptions of what consent means. We need to accept that one instance of consent is not sufficient, but that every sexual interaction requires a “reading of whether [your partner] agreed throughout the encounter.”<sup>31</sup> Lois Pineau calls this continuous checking in throughout a sexual experience communicative sexuality. Rather than simply being “concerned with achieving coitus,” those participating in communicative sexuality should be focused on the desires of their partner and the ongoing interpretation of their responses.<sup>32</sup> There also exists a mutual responsibility to “promote the sexual ends of one’s partners” and also to “know what those ends are [and] . . . how those ends are attained.”<sup>33</sup> This requirement of communicative sexuality does not only improve sexual experiences for one and one’s partner, but also helps pinpoint cases of sexual assault. Instead

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<sup>30</sup> Holmes, “Sexual Harassment and the University,” 10-11.

<sup>31</sup> Pineau, “Date Rape,” 471.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 474, 475.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 473-474.

of relying on a victim to prove that he or she “resisted to the utmost,” the communicative sexuality model puts the burden of proof on the accused to prove the existence of ongoing consent.<sup>34</sup> This way of approaching sexual relationships helps women in a few ways that the current approach lacks, as it does not put any emphasis on whether she “was sexually provocative, her reputation, [or] what went on before the sex began. All that matters is the quality of communication with regard to the sex itself.”<sup>35</sup>

But how do we begin using this method of communication? In her essay “Mutual Respect and Sexual Morality: How to Have College Sex Well,” Yolanda Estes discusses how to go about implementing communicative sexuality in a college community. Like philosopher Thomas Mappes, who argues that voluntary and informed consent is necessary for any sexual encounter to be permissible, Estes asserts, “We become familiar with our common human dignity by engaging in interactions with others. . . . Manipulating (with lies or other deceptions) or coercing (with physical or psychological force) another person to perform an action she would not otherwise perform could not promote mutual respect.”<sup>36</sup> Similar to Pineau, Estes champions the idea of reciprocal consent in which each participant in a sexual activity demonstrates clearly that they are freely choosing to engage in that particular sexual activity at that particular moment.<sup>37</sup> The first step is to start discussing our likes and dislikes with our partner before we engage in sexual activity, which decreases the possibility of miscommunication in the bedroom. Estes believes that by doing this we have a much greater chance of understanding our partner’s expressions of

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 477.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 479.

<sup>36</sup> Yolanda Estes, “Mutual Respect and Sexual Morality: How to Have College Sex Well,” in *College Sex: Philosophy for Everyone*, ed. Michael Bruce and Robert M. Stewart (West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 210.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

consent and desire. By reading our partner's reactions, we in turn have a better chance for sexual fulfillment, "while also improving our sexual technique and our opportunity for a repeat performance."<sup>38</sup>

Even though this may be a difficult task when pursuing a much more casual relationship, Estes believes that it is not completely impossible to practice communicative sexuality while hooking up with your Tinder date. Instead, she argues, "There's nothing intrinsically morally wrong with casual sexual interactions, but the participants must be morally responsible and honest enough to communicate openly and respond considerately."<sup>39</sup> As long as we are open and respectful with all of our sexual partners, no matter how brief our connection, there is the possibility of responsible, pleasurable, consensual sex. To emphasize just how important communication with your partner is, Estes ends her essay by stating:

If you aren't man or woman enough to communicate about sex and to exert yourself with consenting and eager partners, then you aren't man or woman enough to get laid. If you aren't prepared to be a morally conscientious sexual partner, start a vigorous exercise regimen, become a masturbatory virtuoso, or donate your time to a good charity, but don't muck up something as important as another person's sexual experience.<sup>40</sup>

From exploring the opinions of Pineau and Estes, it is clear that communicative sexuality is the best method for ensuring our partner's (and our own) comfort during every sexual encounter. Seeing as adopting communicative sexuality as the norm would provide a better sexual experience for both men and women, how do we then go about promoting this idea so that it becomes more widely accepted? I believe that an important component to achieving this would be to improve the quality of sex

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-214.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

education for young people and begin having discussions about what a healthy sex life means before people become sexually active.

The next step in becoming more open about sexuality is to be comfortable talking to our children about how to build a healthy sexual relationship. Peggy Orenstein discussed this topic in her NPR interview titled “‘Girls & Sex’ and the Importance of Talking to Young Women about Pleasure.” Nowadays, girls hear mixed messages about how to approach their sexuality – they must not be overtly sexual but at the same time should always be available for male pleasure. When Orenstein spoke with teenagers about this topic, one girl even said, “Usually the opposite of a negative is a positive, but when you're talking about girls and sex, the opposite of slut is prude, both of which are negative. So what are you supposed to do?”<sup>41</sup> Through the difficulty that girls have with navigating between both of these damaging terms, Orenstein sees that they are taught to view sex as a way to please their partners but not themselves.<sup>42</sup> And this problem starts with how we teach girls about their sexuality beginning at a young age. Parents of little girls tend not to even name their daughter’s genitals as they would with their son, as Orenstein realized, “For boys, they'll say, ‘Here's your nose, here's your shoulders, here's your waist, here's your pee pee,’ whatever. But with girls, there's this sort of blank space — it's right from navel to knees, and not naming something makes it quite literally unspeakable.”<sup>43</sup>

This situation does not seem to improve as girls grow up, even within an educational setting. As young people begin puberty and move into middle and high school sex education classes, teachers address the changes that take place in the male and female bodies much differently. Girls are taught about their

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<sup>41</sup> Peggy Orenstein, “‘Girls & Sex’ And The Importance Of Talking To Young Women About Pleasure,” *Fresh Air* Interview (*National Public Radio*, March 29, 2016).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.



internal anatomy with charts and diagrams, about periods and unwanted pregnancies. Boys are taught about erections and the “emergence of a near-unstoppable sex drive.”<sup>44</sup> Orenstein sees an issue with this, posing the question, “When do we address exploration, self-knowledge?”<sup>45</sup> There is no discussion about what a healthy sex life is or how to communicate sexual desires with your partner. Many times the only instruction on safe sex is to abstain from sexual activities all together. This lack of education doesn’t mean that young people still aren’t curious about their bodies. Oftentimes, young girls and boys will turn to pornography to further understand how sexual relationships are supposed to work when they don’t get enough information from their teachers or parents. In Orenstein’s *New York Times* article “When Did Porn Become Sex Ed?” she says, “According to a survey of college students in Britain, 60 percent consult pornography, at least in part, as though it were an instruction manual, even though nearly three-quarters say that they know it is as realistic as pro wrestling.”<sup>46</sup> Young adults who have no real sex education, many armed with abstinence-only teachings and the instruction of pornography, go to college with no idea how real sexual relationships are supposed to work and attempt to navigate their newfound sexual freedom. The lack of a good sex education, one that includes discussion of communicative sexuality, leaves rape culture assumptions unchallenged and perpetuates the negative stereotypes of male and female sexuality.

Because this lack of sex education is so widespread, especially in America, most college-aged people do not understand the nuances of discussing desire, pleasure, and consent with their partner as required in the communicative sexuality model. This tends to lead to dangerous consequences when hookups on college campuses often involve dangerous amounts of alcohol.

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<sup>44</sup> Peggy Orenstein, “When Did Porn Become Sex Ed?” *The New York Times*, March 19, 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Although I have determined that it is possible to have casual sex in combination with a communicative sexuality, the heavy use of alcohol decreases our ability to be good communicators. At colleges across the country, alcohol has become the “No. 1 date drug,” as hookups have become increasingly dependent on the social lubricant.<sup>47</sup> Explanations of the dangers of alcohol are often heavily gendered, which creates further problems. On the one hand, girls are warned to never leave their drinks unattended because someone might slip something into their drink. On the other hand, boys are pressured to drink more to appear more masculine, oftentimes without being aware of the possible repercussions. In most instances, alcohol “reduces a person's ability to read social cues” and reduces inhibitions, which gives boys the courage to commit assaults they might otherwise not commit and makes them more aggressive in general.<sup>48</sup> In addition, alcohol makes boys (and girls) less likely to intervene as bystanders when they see such aggressive behaviors. The lack of knowledge about sex in combination with a lack of understanding about alcohol contributes to the existence of a non-communicative sexuality that frequently leads to instances of sexual assault. These issues relating to college sex show us that we need to be more open as a society about talking about sex. If we were open about sex earlier, then it is more likely that, as a whole, we would practice safer sex. It is a proven fact that the earlier parents, teachers, and doctors start talking to kids about sex “the more likely they are both to delay sexual activity and to behave responsibly and ethically when they do engage in it.”<sup>49</sup> This is what we need if we are going to expect teenagers or even adults to engage in healthy sexual relationships.

The legal, moral, and philosophical issues stemming from sexual assault and consent have deep roots in our societal perceptions about women and sex. Over the course of this

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<sup>47</sup> Orenstein, “Girls & Sex.”

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Orenstein, “When Did Porn Become Sex Ed?”

essay, I have argued that the current legal definitions of consent do not protect against instances of assault because of the existence of rape culture, which damages female sexuality, promotes sexual harassment, and allows for the high rates of sexual assault that occur each year. The way to fix these issues would be to adopt the communicative sexuality model. I believe that if we stopped being afraid to have open and honest discussions with young people about the benefits of communicative sexuality and pleasure instead of constantly focusing on the potential negative consequences, men and women could have healthier sex lives. If we taught boys and girls the same things about pleasure and consent, everyone would respect the right to say no to sex just as much as the right to say yes. If we started these conversations at an early age, to practice communicative sexuality as an adult would become natural. If this were to become the norm, I believe that cases of sexual assault would decrease, and instances where it did occur would be more easily prosecuted and properly punished. Without the harmful effects of a rape culture that assumes that a victim “asked for it,” cases of sexual assault would be based on the idea of ensuring ongoing consent instead of what she was wearing or how much she resisted. In order to change how the law handles sexual assault, we need to change how our culture views sex. In order to change how our culture views sex, we need to educate young people about the benefits, not just the risks, of sexual activity.

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# ANNE CARSON: SHAPING THE SELF AND SHIFTING UNDER THE READER'S GAZE

Margaret Shelton

Two bodies outlined on a bed, the eye (“I”) of one rising up and feeling the distance between conscious choice and compulsion of the soul. Two desks, one placed at each extremity of the writerly self as its owner fights to define and to escape definition. Thirteen still images of the self in stop-motion, and one subject shifting in thirteen frames. Covering such topics as loss of love and search for self, “The Glass Essay” floats between essay and poem, borrowing from each genre, liminal like the space in which poet, scholar, and literary critic Anne Carson seats the self, edges alternately blurring and sharp like a shard of glass. In this piece and in interviews, Carson works to move toward a self that she can understand and accept—one that she can define. Yet Carson’s drive to create a shared meaning battles with her joy in being the only one to know all of the secret selves within her. Carson in literature and in life prizes both crisp lines and elusiveness, which shows in the contrast between her precise language and shadowed meanings, loving the liminal, craving connection as well as the ability to craft a self purely her own.

Writer and literary critic Vivian Gornick in *The Situation and the Story* addresses the presence and necessity of the self in writing, emphasizing the importance of the stability of the self. According to Gornick, “the way the narrator—or persona—” or self “sees things is, to the largest degree, the thing being seen,” especially in non-fiction writing.<sup>1</sup> Gornick explains that “[t]he

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<sup>1</sup> Vivian Gornick, *The Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 7.

situation is the context or circumstance, sometimes the plot; the story is the emotional experience that preoccupies the writer: the insight, the wisdom, the thing one has come to say,” but to take her claim one step further, to consider what preoccupies the reader, it is the discovery of self, both the author’s self and the reader’s, that motivates the reading.<sup>2</sup> The situation is the background, the story is the fuel for the writer, but as a reader, I come to non-fiction for connection, a sense that in writing her story the author has woven into it something of mine, something of me. The setting and the action are essential but essentially disparate things; the self strings the reader along and makes the narrative cohesive.

The creation of a self fascinates Gornick, especially when she thinks in terms of persona, which allows the writer to draw her own lines around the sections of self that she wants to present. Gornick’s ideal persona can be defined by, or rather is, one attribute. She explains after rereading a diary that she had written earlier:

With relief I thought, I’m not losing myself. Suddenly I realized there was no myself to lose. I had a narrator on the page strong enough to do battle for me. The narrator was the me who could not leave her mother because she had become her mother. She was not intimidated by “alone again.” Nor, come to think of it, was she much influenced by the me who was a walker in the city, or a divorced middle-aged feminist, or a financially insecure writer. She was apparently, only her solid, limited self—and she was in control.<sup>3</sup>

The beauty of this self for Gornick is that it allows her to isolate one element of her personality, of her life, and to communicate that alone to the reader. The ability to section off the self allows the author to ensure that the reader sees the written self from a certain angle because the persona like Gornick’s only presents

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

one angle. In contrast, Anne Carson sees the multiplicities inside herself and connects to the reader by shattering the self to see inside and offering the pieces for the reader to put back together to make something meaningful.

While the self runs through the piece like a thread, stringing together seemingly disparate sections, the complexity of its weave keeps the self from ever being fully exposed or understood. Rather than showing her self to the reader in neat even stitches, Carson brings the self to the top of the poetic pattern only to let it sink again into the background, giving the reader images of the speaker in the Nudes and letting the self speak through the words of others like Emily Brontë, but never quite saying, “Here I am.” Carson examines the self from several different angles in “The Glass Essay,” but the self that she illustrates is distanced, fluid, fleeing.

Carson’s ability to situate this fluid self within a clearly structured form is what makes “The Glass Essay” a complex study. The piece consists of nine distinct subtitled sections, each of which comprises several three- or four-lined stanzas. The sturdiness of this structure allows Carson to establish on the page a liminal self as well as a written piece seated in the liminal space where two genres touch—poetry and non-fiction. As critic Ian Rae points out in his article on Carson’s narrative technique in the poem, Carson has been criticized by some American critics as writing “‘chopped prose’ . . . positioning it as the exemplary case of a hybrid and increasingly prominent genre, the lyric essay.”<sup>4</sup> Carson published “The Glass Essay” in her book of poetry *Glass, Irony, and God*, but she labels it “essay” from the start. Poetry allows for embellishment, but essay suggests reality. This straddling of genres prepares the reader for the vivid, often enigmatic imagery that the idea of poetry connotes, but it also looks forward to the detail- and fact-oriented prose through which Carson communicates.

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<sup>4</sup> Ian Rae, “Verglas: Narrative Technique In Anne Carson's ‘The Glass Essay,’” *English Studies In Canada* 37, no. 3-4 (2011): 164.

Rae further explores the duality between the studied and the secret self that runs through Carson's work, looking especially at the significance of her title, "The Glass Essay." He writes that "Carson employs the logic of the lyric essay to produce an extended, bilingual pun on the multiple senses of the English 'glass' (transparent material, magnifying lens, mirror) and the French *glace* (ice, mirror)."<sup>5</sup> Carson brings into play the idea of glass as a mirror in the first section of the poem when she writes, "My face in the bathroom mirror / has white streaks down it. / I rinse the face and return to bed. / Tomorrow I am going to visit my mother."<sup>6</sup> This scene gestures toward philosopher Jacques Lacan's work on the Mirror Stage, which he describes as "*an identification . . . namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [assume] an image*"—which, in this case, Carson creates of and for herself in the poem—and comes to view the individual pieces of the whole gestalt that is the self.<sup>7</sup> This section holds the first indication of the division between Carson's selves that reappears throughout the piece in her choice to use a dissociative article, "the face," instead of claiming "my face" a second time. It is when Carson looks into the mirror and confronts her own image that she starts to view herself from a distance.

Carson speaks about the process of placing these distinct images next to one another in an interview with Rae for the *Paris Review*, explaining that "particular images begin the thinking or the work. For example, 'The Glass Essay' began with staring at a frozen ditch near my mother's house, which I think actually occurs in the poem somewhere. So some phenomenological thing gives rise to the idea."<sup>8</sup> Rae asserts that the author's continued reexaminations of the "phenomenologi-

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Anne Carson, "The Glass Essay," in *Glass, Irony, and God* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1995), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 76.

<sup>8</sup> Rae, "Verglas," 170.

cal thing” stack up to form the poem and that “[the] evolving glass/*glace* motif thereby serves to cluster percepts, affects, and memories in a constant state of becoming.”<sup>9</sup> The self acts in the same way in “The Glass Essay,” evolving and changing, fracturing further with each section.

Carson narrates the splitting of the self, this “becoming” during her final encounter with Law, her ex-lover in section four of the piece, titled “Whacher.” The speaker notes that Law will not meet her eyes when he tells her that there was “not enough spin on . . . our five years of love,” and she “[feels her] heart snap into two pieces / which floated apart.”<sup>10</sup> This signals the initial break in Carson, the duality that she establishes throughout this section between body and mind, between “soul” (love’s “necessities”) and “I” (conscious choice).<sup>11</sup> After removing her clothes, the speaker describes herself not as naked but as “nude.”<sup>12</sup> The term “nude” here echoes the Nudes, the metaphorical paintings in terms of which the speaker thinks of herself. As “nude” is a term used typically to describe art that Carson here uses in reference to the self, it furthers the point that the speaker feels that she is in ownership of her body, like an artist in technical terms owns a painting that she creates, but that her body is operating outside of her control like a painting that has meaning not necessarily in connection to the artist but in itself. When disconnected from the consciousness attached to it, the speaker’s body, like a painting, betrays her and determines its own meaning.

She becomes a consciousness living in a body that rebels against her, distinguishing between the two in a pronoun change, “I turned *my* back because he likes *the* back” (emphasis mine).<sup>13</sup> She possesses the body but is distanced from it; owns it but does not control it. The body is drawn to “a man who no

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Carson, “The Glass Essay,” 11.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

longer cherished me” and runs through the empty motions of something that used to have meaning, but the “I,” the self, is only unwillingly dragged along:

There was no area of my mind  
not appalled by this action, no part of my body  
that could have done otherwise.<sup>14</sup>

The speaker then complicates further the distinction between the body and the “I” attached to it when she writes:

But to talk of mind and body begs the question.  
Soul is the place,  
stretched like a surface of millstone grit between body  
and mind,  
where such necessity grinds itself out.  
Soul is what I kept watch on all that night.<sup>15</sup>

Not only are “I” and body separating, but the speaker now tries to separate soul and self-awareness in the form of “I.” The thinking and rational “I” watches over “soul,” symbolic of love, in two senses—watching over as in caring for something and watching over as in guarding against something—seemingly both to preserve the love with Law that occurred in the soul and to protect the speaker from feeling it. When Law and the speaker grow closer, physically and emotionally, the speaker’s consciousness, the “I,” ejects itself from the body in what seems an attempt at defending and removing itself from the potentially destructive emotions of the situation. “I” floats “high up near the ceiling looking down / on the two souls clasped there on the bed / with their mortal boundaries [bodies] / visible around them like lines on a map.”<sup>16</sup> While the speaker stays through the souls’ division, “I” takes itself away.

Carson’s syntax and diction in this section reinforce this idea of a flight from emotion. When describing the develop-

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

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

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



ment of the encounter with Law, Carson uses heavily descriptive and figurative language, describing the night as “a night that centred Heaven and Hell,” “as if it weren’t really a night of sleep and time.”<sup>17</sup> The religious language of Heaven and Hell gives the impression that the two of them—the speaker and Law—are in the middle of their own private apocalypse, a final coming together and a final falling away with their universes swirling around them. The night is suspended outside of time, spanning forever and an instant, but the speaker is also out of time in the sense that she feels her relationship with Law expiring, its final minutes ticking away. Yet after “I” rises up, rises away from body and soul, separating consciousness from carnal impulse, after Law and the speaker become just “two souls clasped there on the bed,” caged in by two bodies, Carson’s language becomes more factual and terse:

I saw the lines harden.  
He left in the morning.  
It is very cold  
walking into the long scraped April wind.  
At this time of year there is no sunset  
just some movements inside the light and then a sinking  
away.<sup>18</sup>

For the speaker, this final interaction with Law is like the sunset; it lacks closure. There is no finality to their relationship, just one shared night and the slow sink of two “I’s” back into body and soul, away from each other and into their separate selves. The lines that divide Law and the speaker harden.

In an interview with John D’Agata, Carson addresses this blurring and redrawing of lines: “I just remember writing in second grade every Friday afternoon. It was such a pleasure. We’d draw a picture then write on it and tell what it was.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> John D’Agata and Anne Carson, “A \_\_\_\_\_ with Anne Carson,” *The Iowa Review* 27, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 1997): 9.

When D'Agata asks, "Why was that pleasurable?" Carson responds, "How could it not be pleasurable?"<sup>20</sup> Even as a child in grade school, Carson enjoyed condensing entities into images into the written word, illustration, and description working both to share and to shroud. Carson shows her love of translating lines into letters in her final images of "The Glass Essay" and explores the division within the self in the sections of "The Glass Essay" entitled "Liberty" and "Thou" when she describes herself as a set of paintings—Nudes No. 1 through No. 13. The speaker explains that these Nudes came to her when she meditated in the mornings as "nude glimpse[s] of my lone soul," the same self in thirteen iterations, from thirteen angles, shifting and fracturing like light through glass.<sup>21</sup> She writes that the nudes are "as clear in my mind / as pieces of laundry that froze on the clothesline overnight."<sup>22</sup> Frozen suggests ice, which suggests fragility. Though these Nudes are the clothing in which the speaker dresses herself, the images are not enduring; they capture the self in one instant and are apt to shatter in the next, like ice, like glass.

These images act as crystals, freezing a moment of herself so that she can turn it around in her mind and use it as a lens through which to look out at her life. When the speaker tells her therapist about the Nudes, her therapist asks her, "When you see these horrible images why do you stay with them? . . . Why not go away?" the speaker responds, "I was amazed. / Go away where? I said."<sup>23</sup> Her response suggests that to escape the Nudes, the variations of self that manifest to her, would be impossible. Not only do these Nudes contain something of her; they are contained in her. These nude portraits are on display in the gallery of her body: "Woman caught in a cage of thorns . . . unable to stand upright," "woman with a single great thorn implanted in her forehead . . . endeavouring to wrench it out,"

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Carson, "The Glass Essay," 17.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 18.

“woman on a blasted landscape / backlit in red like Hieronymus Bosch.”<sup>24</sup> She is aware that they are not her but pictures of her. Yet to quote David Shields, quoting Orson Welles, quoting Elmyr de Hory, whose quote is so far removed from its author that it has taken on an existence independent of him, “If my forgeries are hung long enough in the museum, they become real.”<sup>25</sup>

Foucault muses over this disconnect between the object pictured and the picture-object itself in René Magritte’s painting “The Treachery of Images,” in which Magritte places the painted image of a pipe above the words, written in “a steady, painstaking, artificial script,” “Ceci n’est pas une pipe”—this is not a pipe. Foucault also discusses a second iteration of the image, in which Magritte depicts the original painting “set within a frame” on an easel on a floor, above which floats “a pipe exactly like the one in the picture, but much larger.”<sup>26</sup> Foucault muses over the piece, wondering if it is more accurate to say that there are “two pipes” or “two drawings of the same pipe.”<sup>27</sup> The reader can ask the same question of Carson’s nudes. They are separate paintings; no two images are the same. Yet while none of the nudes are identical, they represent the same subject and attempt to convey the same idea in different scenes—the same self from different angles. Foucault explains that while the individual elements of the picture are identifiable as pipe, easel, floor, the piece lacks the cohesion necessary to convey a clear meaning. The larger, unframed pipe “lacks coordinates” and floats suspended in space, and the easel’s legs are uneven, foretelling collapse.<sup>28</sup> Both artists paint their images with a specificity of detail that

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>25</sup> David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 34.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, ed. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1983), 15.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

suggests that they know the secret meaning. Yet Carson, like Magritte, presents the viewers with the materials that make up the art but disguise the process, leaving the discovery of means and the creation of meaning to the reader.

Carson calls back to these artistic elements of “The Glass Essay” in a later interview for *The Paris Review* with fellow writer Will Aitken, elucidating her choice to incorporate the Nudes as a sort of mock-ekphrastic exercise, writing them as paintings and not simply incorporating them into the poem as frameless images:

[Aitken:] “There’s too much self in my writing.” Is the range of work that you do—poetry, essays, opera, academic work, teaching—is that a way of trying to punch windows in the walls of the self?

[Carson:] No. I would say it’s more like a way to avoid having a self by moving from one definition of it to another. To avoid being captured in one persona by doing a lot of different things.<sup>29</sup>

This quote suggests a possible reading that she approached each Nude as a potential angle for the self but intended that the combination would lack the coherence necessary to allow the self to be pinned down. Carson remarks at one point during the interview that one of her books “is like architecture because the poem, the original ancient poem which does exist, is in the center.”<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the core of the speaker in “The Glass Essay,” that self, exists at the center of the poem; the reader can feel the words winding around her. Carson goes on to say though that there was “no adequate representation of it I could give, so I made up all these angles for it . . . so there are ways of moving into and out of a room from other rooms in the building, but really what I want to show is glimpses of that

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<sup>29</sup> Will Aitken, “Anne Carson: The Art of Poetry No. 88,” *The Paris Review* 171 (Fall 2004).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

main room in the center.”<sup>31</sup> Carson moves the reader through the house of herself, offering views through keyholes and cracks in the wall, but she never opens the door for the reader to see her self in its entirety. If this is the case, the essential quality of the self that Carson presents in the poem is its desire to understand itself but to remain undefined.

Carson elaborates on this struggle between self-determination and disguise in her interview with D’Agata in a discussion of the two writing desks in her home. D’Agata explains that he understands Carson to have two separate writing desks, one for writing poetry and one for academic writing. Carson confirms the assertion. She then comments that after she wrote *Eros the Bittersweet*, which D’Agata described as both a critical examination of and a lyrical meditation on Sappho’s writings, “It was possibly the last time that I got those two impulses to move in the same stream—the academic and the other. After that, I think I realized I couldn’t do it again.”<sup>32</sup> D’Agata then argues with Carson, trying to convince her that “some people would say you’re still doing it . . . [t]hat there’s no suggestion of two desks at work,” but Carson refuses to let herself be pinned down or outlined by others.<sup>33</sup> The two desk method seems a way of splitting, not only her written self but her writing self, into the Carson who writes academically and the Carson who writes (and is) “other.” “No,” she says. “No?” he asks. Silence.<sup>34</sup> She knows the answer. She knows herself. She eludes.

Carson translates the desire for an elusive literary self into the self that inhabits her physical body through an expression of gender fluidity. According to gender theorist Judith Butler, “Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*” which

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> D’Agata and Carson, “A \_\_\_\_\_ with Anne Carson,” 9.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 11.

“constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.”<sup>35</sup> For Butler, gender is self-determined. It is “stylized,” something performed and constructed by each individual and not tied to the body that the individual inhabits. In the interview with Aitken, Carson’s speech parallels Butler’s idea of gender as performance and illusion, saying, “I guess I’ve never felt entirely female, but then probably lots of people don’t. But I think that at different times in my life I located myself in different places on the gender spectrum.”<sup>36</sup> Her active voice attests to the elective aspect of Carson’s gender. She does not say, “I’ve found myself in different places,” or even “I’ve been in different places,” but “I have located myself in different places.”

Carson also varies the way in which she performs gender, just as she varies the literary genres in which she writes, conscious that while she works toward self-expression, she must also work against the literary and social constructs that would confine her to a certain definition of genre or gender. Speaking to her desire to live in a liminal gender space, or a space altogether un-gendered, Carson equates her experience to “a problem of extended adolescence: You don’t know how to be yourself as part of a category, so you just have to be yourself as a completely strange individual and fight off any attempt others make to define you.”<sup>37</sup> Carson struggles to make what society would have marked as a phase in adolescence into a place in which she can fully inhabit herself; rather than assimilate society’s truth she can create her own.

Or she can let her own truth radiate out from within her. The last nude in her series of self-iterations, “Nude #13 arrived when I was not watching for it”—“a human body / trying to stand” against winds that tear away the flesh, “cleansing the

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<sup>35</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 179.

<sup>36</sup> D’Agata and Carson, “A \_\_\_\_\_ with Anne Carson,” 8.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.



bone,” “and there was no pain.”<sup>38</sup> Speaker and I and the outside world write and whittle away at an idea of the self, and then Carson steps out from the midst of them. In the image of the 13<sup>th</sup> Nude, Carson is the source of speaker; she is the “I” and the words and the wind “so terrible that the flesh was blowing away from the bone.”<sup>39</sup> The craft and the chaos of Nudes and selves clings as dust to the heels of her feet, and then Carson is the pillar of bone, “[standing] forth silver and necessary.”<sup>40</sup> Maintaining eye contact, she blows away the dust.

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<sup>38</sup> Carson, “The Glass Essay,” 38.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

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# **A BETTER PASTURE: EXCELLENT SHEEP, *AMOUR-PROPRE*, AND THE SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS**

**Nathan Thompson**

*“It is a hundred times easier to be happy than to  
appear to be happy.”*

*-Jean Jacques Rousseau*

*“Of course I’m miserable, but were I not miserable,  
I wouldn’t be at Yale.”*

*-William Deresiewicz*

A double major, a sport, a musical instrument, a couple of foreign languages, service work in distant corners of the globe, and, of course, a few hobbies thrown in for good measure, each mastered with effortlessness and a serene self-assurance. This is the stuff of 21<sup>st</sup>-century super-achievers, those students at elite schools who appear cheerfully competent at everything. If that sounds anything like you, your friends, or what you aspire to be, this paper is for you. If the names Deerfield, Williams, Harvard, or Stanford mean anything to you, this paper is for you. Most importantly, if you’re tired of running laps on the well-worn treadmill of success, this paper is for you.

In his *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*, William Deresiewicz unapologetically exposes the aspirations and deep-rooted anxieties of the “best and brightest” filing into the top universities in the United States. He introduces the reader to the formidable combination of brains, ambition, and fear of failure residing in many young people and their families. These

students' capacity to consume, analyze, and regurgitate information is breathtaking, be it every member of a class memorizing and reciting 100 lines of Shakespeare without a single error or a high school student conducting cancer research. Assign them a school task, and it will be completed with ruthless efficiency. Every "i" will be dotted. Every "t" will be crossed. Curiously, however, closer examination reveals so many similarities between these high achievers that their individual identities appear stripped away. One might even go so far as to call them sheep. Of course, they are not average sheep—they roam around together, eating AP courses for breakfast, spending summers working prestigious internships, and traveling the world for cultural enrichment. They are *excellent*.

These kinds of students, however, are no longer simply the product of the meritocracy for which America is famed. They do not come from just anywhere, nor do they embody time-honored American examples of how hard work, long hours, and a little bit of luck can take children of poverty and turn them into something exceptional. Quite the opposite. In the clear, compelling, and frightening three hundred pages of his *Coming Apart: The State of White America 1960-2010*, Charles Murray demonstrates that, for the first time, America is seeing both the drawing and hardening of class lines: a real upper class, a real lower class, and everyone in the middle moving in one direction or the other.<sup>1</sup> However, this divergence is not only a monetary one. It is also one of values, habits, education, and geographic location—and make no mistake: while a few stragglers are welcomed into the fold, Deresiewicz's sheep are the children of this new upper class.

These excellent sheep, populating the Ivies (or their neighbors who rank highly in *U.S. News and World Report*) and prestigious financial and consulting institutions after graduation, are the product of several important inputs: top-flight

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (New York: Crown Forum, 2012), 23-126.

education, high family income, stability at home, parents with advanced degrees, and geographic isolation from those not sharing similar characteristics. Together, these factors have begun limiting the capacity of traditional American meritocracy to generate social and economic mobility. These students are exceptionally competent, analytical, intelligent, and hard-working, but it would be dishonest to say that their smarts are the sole cause of their material success in life. Success nowadays is primarily, if not exclusively, the result of a system. It is a system caught somewhere between being hereditary and meritocratic—generally speaking, circumstances of birth are important but may not be enough to succeed anymore without the brains to match and vice versa—and its products are peerless. It is a system Deresiewicz describes as the laundering of privilege.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this system's effectiveness, the excellence it produces comes at costs much greater than a few missed parties and a handful of all-nighters. These costs are perhaps known and felt in the deepest corners of the heart and mind but go otherwise unarticulated: insecurity, fear of failure, a deep-rooted unhappiness, and the atrophy of the soul. Recognizing such costs might reasonably lead one to challenge and look for alternatives to an excellent sheep's notion of success, and because these potential costs are too great to ignore, the remainder of the paper will attempt to give them proper attention.

In order to understand these creatures of success, it is first necessary to explore the origin of their excellence. As Deresiewicz and others observe, one does not have to look long or far to see what creates this crop of high achievers. It begins in the home, where a suffocating amount of pressure is applied to achieve success from a young age. It does not even have to be intentional. But as Deresiewicz writes, the business of

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<sup>2</sup> William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life* (New York: Free Press, 2014), 211.

“determining the exact hierarchy of status within the upper middle class itself” is a serious one, and most, if not all, of a family’s resources tend to be directed towards building the pressure cooker that will spit out diamonds bearing Ivy League credentials.<sup>3</sup>

The lesson is learned from an early age that in life “there is no middle ground; if you’re not the best, you’re a ‘loser.’ If you’re not brilliant, you’re worthless.”<sup>4</sup> Students may find themselves identifying with the pressures that Deresiewicz claims converge at home: “status competition within extended families; peer pressure within communities; the desire to measure up to your own parents, or to best them.”<sup>5</sup> The list of achievements attained by kids trying to relieve those pressures include the usual suspects of a perfect GPA, president of a club, captain of a team, or first chair in the orchestra, but in the end, each is simply a tool with which to measure outperforming one’s peers.

As one might imagine, family relationships based on the expectation of a child excelling above and beyond his or her peers, even if unspoken, easily become conditional. Deresiewicz writes that what is “expected by many parents in affluent communities is not a personal best but the absolute best,” so even if all little Johnny can manage in his 10<sup>th</sup> grade English class is a B+, that will not cut it at home.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, the “production of measurable virtue in children” is the goal towards which Mom and Dad direct life. As Deresiewicz aptly notes, though, measureable here means “capable of showing up on a college application.”<sup>7</sup> Spending time “hanging out” or hiking local trails on the weekend are not items that frequent most resumes; learning a second language or tutoring under-resourced kids are.

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<sup>3</sup> Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep*, 41.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.



Given the enormous expectations faced by students to be the very best, it is no wonder that their identities are found in “measurable” achievement. However, such identity is not only *given* to Deresiewicz’s sheep. They also consume, perpetuate, and preach it. The currency of this identity is Ivy League acceptances, perfect SAT scores, and Instagram photos from exotic trips. These are the symbols of status and accomplishment one can quietly slip into conversation with just enough of an “aw, shucks” attitude to draw the verbal affirmation of one’s peers while, one hopes, also making them jealous.

A deep, addictive satisfaction comes from such recognition. If one possesses enough of this currency, one becomes entitled to his or her peers’ praise. And these excellent sheep will do just about anything to strike it rich—or avoid coming up empty. The purpose of life “becomes the accumulation of gold stars,” and what constitutes a valid life becomes “affluence, credentials, and prestige” rather than pursuing one’s passions.<sup>8</sup> Professions that do not ultimately land six-figure salaries and luxurious homes are not worth our time. Credentials that are not instantaneously recognizable are without value. The pursuit of meaning beyond a strong resume is nonsensical. Deresiewicz imagines those deep-seated concerns with failure in the form of a series of potent questions:

How can I become a teacher, or a minister, or a carpenter? Wouldn’t that be a waste of my fancy education? What would my parents think? What would my friends think? How would I face my classmates at our twentieth reunion, when they’re all rich doctors or important people in New York? And the question that exists behind them all: isn’t it beneath me?<sup>9</sup>

These questions strike at the heart of the matter: everyone is afraid of failing in front of parents and peers, showing any sign of weakness, or having to show up at the reunion as a

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

non-profit worker because neither McKinsey nor Bain nor Goldman ever came calling. As a result, one must be able to do everything and do everything well. The cost of falling short in this respect becomes “not merely practical, but existential.”<sup>10</sup> To not ultimately land at an Ivy League or one of its neighbors on the way to a successful career in finance, consulting, law, or medicine is the same as being worthless. And so we develop all the necessary abilities for this kind of life—not how to think but rather those “analytical and rhetorical skills that are necessary for success in business and the professions.”<sup>11</sup>

Ross Douthat memorably relates from his four years at Harvard how he was taught to get away with doing as little as possible. For him it was hard work to “get into Harvard,” to compete for “offices and honors with thousands of brilliant and driven young people,” and to fight for “law school slots and I-banking jobs as college wound to a close.”<sup>12</sup> The academics, though, were not hard work. They were “the easy part.”<sup>13</sup> As a result, it was a rare sheep indeed that invested more time in true learning than in making connections or crafting the perfect resume. Deresiewicz is no kinder, suggesting that what “Ivy League-caliber schools like Yale or Columbia teach their students is how to pretend, and how to do it well.”<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, we build an identity around accomplishments that can pad a resume, and we hope those resumes are strong enough to shore up our self-esteem in the event of a calamitous development such as criticism or failure.

Interestingly, the question *why?* is rarely asked—*why* it matters so much that our SAT scores clear 1500 instead of 1400, *why* our BA must come from Princeton instead of Rutgers, or *why* our first job has to be with J.P Morgan instead

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>12</sup> Ross Douthat, *Privilege: Harvard the Education of the Ruling Class* (New York: Hyperion, 2005), 140.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>14</sup> Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep*, 104.

of a non-profit. Dwight Macdonald once remarked upon the great curiosity that “we think it odd that a man should devote his life to writing poems . . . but natural that he should devote it to inducing children to breakfast on Crunchies instead of Krispies.”<sup>15</sup> There is a depressing humor in Macdonald’s observation, for who on the path to hard-earned success would not recognize a well-paid marketing position with Kellogg as a post more enviable than that of a high school English teacher?

Furthermore, there is a premise underlying this notion of success that is similarly left in the shadows: that “what makes for a happy life and a good society [is] simply self-evident, . . . as if in either case the exclusive answer [is] more money.”<sup>16</sup> It is a premise, though, that is accepted by a majority of students. In 1971, only 37% of incoming college freshmen said it was essential or very important to be “very well-off financially” compared to 73% who said it was similarly important to “develop a meaningful philosophy of life.”<sup>17</sup> In 2011, “the numbers were almost reversed,” with 80% believing that being very well off is essential versus only 47% emphasizing the importance of developing a meaningful philosophy of life.<sup>18</sup>

However, even those who achieve their goal of success, as has already been noted, do not do so without cost. In fact, there is a great deal of research and anecdotal evidence pointing to a deep-seated unhappiness within the hearts and minds of the high achievers among us. Deresiewicz writes that preteens and teens from affluent and well-educated families experience “among the highest rates of depression, substance abuse, anxiety disorders, somatic complaints, and unhappiness of any group of children” in the United States, with “as many as 22 percent of adolescent girls from financially comfortable families” suffering from clinical depression.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

The disastrous effects of the pressure placed on teens in upper-middle class homes is heartbreakingly documented by Madeline Levine in her New York Times Bestseller, *The Price of Privilege*. Her stories are similar and numerous, covering a host of problems from drug abuse to binge drinking to anxiety and depression to anorexia. Levine writes that “as many as 30 to 40 percent of twelve- to eighteen-year olds from affluent homes are experiencing troubling psychological symptoms,” which do nothing to lower the frequency of harmful behaviors and the intensity of the pressure to succeed that is felt.<sup>20</sup> The backdrop to each of her stories of young men and women abusing drugs and alcohol, cutting, contemplating suicide, and reporting remarkable unhappiness is almost universally a combination of a crushing pressure to succeed, a crippling fear of failure, and a misguided belief that pressing on might somehow lead to happiness. These are the stories of excellent sheep, and they are a wakeup call to those of us who either tacitly or expressly endorse an environment of high-pressure perfectionism.

When coupled with a deep unhappiness, this constant pursuit of “success” is exhausting. And yet, we continue to trap ourselves in this vicious cycle. The pursuit of status, success, and high achievement at the cost of sleep, relationships, true learning, and even happiness becomes a race with no finish line. So why do we keep running? Simply stated, we are slaves to the opinions of others. Students are “trained to depend” upon the “drug of praise.”<sup>21</sup> We become presidents of clubs, captains of teams, and students with perfect GPAs and SAT scores not because we genuinely enjoy them but because those are the things that ensure we will receive the most praise. These symbols of achievement “signify not just your fate, but your

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<sup>20</sup> Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids* (New York: Harper, 2006), 19.

<sup>21</sup> Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep*, 51.

identity; not just your identity, but your value. They are who you are, and what you're worth."<sup>22</sup>

Self-worth becomes comparative in nature. If we don't score as well as other students on standardized tests, attend the same elite schools as our peers, or land the same prestigious jobs after graduation, we must suffer the low opinion of our parents, our friends, and our professors—an unacceptable prospect. The problem with self-worth based on a relative sentiment like opinion is that it engenders a severe internal uncertainty and instability. Under such circumstances, there can be little confidence of place or of one's own value as an individual. In turn, such uncertainty demands the herculean efforts exhibited by those excellent sheep climbing ever higher on the ladder of success.

Unfortunately for those sheep, though, there is no rooftop to reach, so the climbing never ends. When chasing after status and the high regard of others, one finds very quickly that “status doesn't get you much except the knowledge that you have it.” Given its endless nature, this pursuit “doesn't just not make you happy: it makes you actively unhappy” precisely because it is “comparative, and competitive, by its very nature.” Deresiewicz shares the sorry experience of those students who get to places like Yale thinking they've arrived, “only to discover that there are still other places to arrive at” and that there always will be. Clearly, contentment and the pursuit of status do not mix.<sup>23</sup>

It should come as no surprise that a life spent running a race that has no finish line would be both exhausting and deeply unsatisfying, yet it would appear that many of us remain committed to the enterprise of chasing down success. This commitment is inextricably linked to a conception of self-love that is comparative. Our worth is bolstered when we compare ourselves to others and find that we are achieving just as much as or more than our peers, that we have at least the same or,

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

better yet, higher GPAs than our fellow students, or that we got the internship commensurate to our elite education.

This is a picture that many of us might recognize within ourselves. It is this kind of self love—a relative, comparative, and dangerous sentiment—that deserves further exploration, for to comprehend our unwavering commitments to success and status first requires an understanding of our own yardstick of self-worth. The comparative nature of our self-love is not unique to 21<sup>st</sup>-century high-achievers; it has long been the companion of humankind. Because this is the case, wisdom would demand that we examine what those who came before us have thought and written about our tendency to compare.

When one explores the works of the world's great thinkers, it does not take long to realize that many have identified and analyzed this very issue. Of all those who have written about it, though, there is one that stands out. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an 18<sup>th</sup>-century political philosopher, presents an articulation and analysis of *amour-propre*, or vanity—our tendency to value ourselves based on how we compare to those around us—that is unrivaled in its clarity, frankness, and forcefulness of argument.

To read Rousseau is to view the human soul with an X-ray. He exposes, as only he can, the many masks of benevolence, humility, and selflessness we wear to cover the ambition, ill will towards others, and selfishness we harbor. However, what makes Rousseau's analysis of the problem of comparative self-love the best of its kind (and so helpful for our excellent sheep) is that he traces its development from cradle to full-fledged adulthood. According to Rousseau, we are not born as hateful, vain, or callous individuals but rather as people who *learn* to be just so. To more fully understand the quandary of Deresiewicz's excellent sheep, joining Rousseau at man's beginning is a helpful place to start, before tracing the progression to the final product—namely, an individual who bases his or her value on the opinions and judgments of others.

For Rousseau, natural man begins as a blank slate, removed from any and all “artificial faculties he could only have acquired by prolonged progress,” such as language, tools,



buildings, or farming.<sup>24</sup> In this state, Rousseau finds a man “sating his hunger beneath an oak, slaking his thirst at the first stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that supplied his meal, and with that his needs are satisfied.”<sup>25</sup> This is a person in simplest form, needing nothing more than food, water, and shelter. When deprived of every sort of enlightenment, the only goods known to natural man are “food, a female, and rest,” and natural man does not even possess the “knowledge of death and its terrors.”<sup>26</sup> In fact, so blind is natural man to anything past the present that “his projects, as limited as his views, hardly extend to the close of day.”<sup>27</sup>

Part of the utter simplicity of natural man is tied to a desire for self-preservation. Rousseau writes that man’s “first care” was “that for his preservation,” a driving force that leads a person to seek only the most basic needs.<sup>28</sup> This kind of desire is described by Rousseau as “self-love—a primitive, innate passion, which is anterior to every other.”<sup>29</sup> It is not hateful or desiring of the approval of others. To Rousseau, “self-love, which regards only ourselves, is contented when our true needs are satisfied.”<sup>30</sup>

However, the trouble begins when we leave a solitary life and interact with other human beings. By virtue of seeing another person, one observes the differences that exist between one’s self and the other. In fact, Rousseau argues that the very act of thinking—something unique to the human race—requires

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<sup>24</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men *or* Second Discourse,” in *Rousseau: The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 134.

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

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

that we make distinctions and identify what makes each object and person unique. For instance, Rousseau challenges his reader to try and outline the image of a tree without specifics but goes on to argue that such a task is impossible. He writes that “in spite of yourself, [the tree] will have to be seen as small or large, bare or leafy, light or dark . . . you cannot help making its lines perceptible or its surface colored.”<sup>31</sup> It is impossible to see things generally—we view the world in specifics. Ultimately, thinking amounts to distinguishing between various objects and ideas, so when one person comes in contact with another, specific comparison is inevitable.

As Rousseau states, “The first glance [man] casts on his fellows leads him to compare himself with them.”<sup>32</sup> Even if no malevolence is intended, we gauge who is taller, who is faster, or who is stronger. Rousseau notes that “the relations which we express by the words great, small, strong, weak, fast, slow, fearful, bold, and other such ideas, compared as need required and almost without thinking about it, finally produced in him some sort of reflection, or rather a mechanical prudence that suggested to him the precautions most necessary for his safety.”<sup>33</sup>

It is not long, though, before elementary comparisons develop into a habit of comparing more than height, speed, or strength. Rousseau notes that while man was “scarcely able to discriminate ranks, . . . he was from afar preparing to claim first rank as an individual.”<sup>34</sup> From this first point of comparison, the long fall from innocence begins. Rousseau’s description is worth quoting at length:

Everyone began to look at everyone else and to wish to be looked at himself, and public esteem acquired a price. The one who sang or danced best; the handsomest, the

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

strongest, the most skillful, or the most eloquent came to be the most highly regarded, and this was the first step at once toward inequality and vice: from these first preferences arose vanity and contempt on the one hand, shame and envy on the other; and the fermentation caused by these new leavens eventually produced compounds fatal to happiness and innocence.<sup>35</sup>

Thus is born *amour-propre*, or vanity. It is “a relative sentiment, factitious, and born in society, which inclines every individual to set greater store by himself than by anyone else.”<sup>36</sup> Not only that, it also “demands others to prefer us to themselves, which is impossible.”<sup>37</sup> For Rousseau, it is inescapable. It is not just that we became vain and envious, though. *Amour-propre*, a sentiment of vanity and comparison, has a distinct character, one of “consuming ambition” that “instills in all men a black inclination to harm one another, a secret jealousy that is all the more dangerous as it often assumes the mask of benevolence in order to strike its blow in greater safety.”<sup>38</sup>

Rousseau’s analysis clearly identifies what the mental processes behind *amour-propre* actually are. After all, how often do we wear masks of benevolence in order to ensure that we are ultimately viewed as better than our peers? How often do we feign humility or generosity or kindness simply for the sake of being thought of as humble, generous, or kind? How many times have we cared far more about how others viewed us than about the morality or character of our actions? Not as immediately clear, though, are the consequences of this kind of self-love, and this is where Rousseau’s articulation of the deepest impact of *amour-propre* is so compelling.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>37</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, trans. Alan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 214.

<sup>38</sup> Rousseau, “Second Discourse,” 171.

The nature of *amour-propre* is such that it takes an individual content with a simple life and teaches him or her to depend upon the opinion of others for value and meaning. The effect is one of deep unhappiness because a self-love based upon comparisons made with others is never assured of stability or fulfillment. In other words, we can always find something with which to compare ourselves and in which to find ourselves lacking.

Rousseau relates the story of a young man, who, seeing another young man “better dressed than himself,” secretly complains “about his parents’ avarice.”<sup>39</sup> However, if this same young man finds himself “more adorned than another,” he is “pained to see this other outshine him by birth or wit, and to see all his gilding humiliated in the presence of a simple cloth suit.”<sup>40</sup> If nothing else, Rousseau teaches us that there are innumerable ways to find one’s self inferior to others and that this leads to a profound unhappiness. Much like the young people Deresiewicz and Levine describe as suffering from tremendous pressure to succeed (and the resulting assortment of consequences), Rousseau’s young man is an example of the deep insecurity and unhappiness resulting from dependence on a feeling of relative success among one’s peers.

Of course, there is an assumption necessarily made preceding an individual’s dependence on his or her standing in the eyes of others, which is that status, praise, and money are actually valuable in and of themselves. Rousseau writes that “in order to see the purpose of so many cares . . . *power* and *reputation* would have to have some sort of meaning in [a man’s] mind.” There is a critical lesson learned, namely that “there is a sort of men who count how they are looked upon by the rest of the universe for something, who can be happy and satisfied with themselves on the testimony of others rather than on their own.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Rousseau, *Emile*, 228.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

There is much of ourselves to be recognized in these 18<sup>th</sup>-century writings—a frantic habit of comparison, of looking in the mirror to ensure everything appears just right, of assigning great weight to unquantifiable concepts of status or reputation—and Rousseau forcefully accounts for how we arrive at such a position. From that first glance at another human being right up to the birth of that dark inclination to see harm done to those around us, the path is well worn. But if in fact the tendency to compare to others to the point of exhaustion and unhappiness is not just a tendency but also an intractable plague, is there anything to be done?

Reading Rousseau’s assessment of our character is both a powerful and—if one takes his claims about human nature seriously—disconcerting experience. His analysis unceremoniously strips away our masks of benevolence and sincerity, revealing the jealousy, unsympathizing ambition, and paralyzing fear that we seek to hide. But does it do us any good only to know that day in and day out, we ask others to value us above themselves? That the recognition and status we inevitably pursue only makes us vain and insecure people? That the moment we meet others, we begin making comparisons that can only end in enmity? While recognizing a problem can be a helpful step, to end on such a note given the reality of *amour-propre* does little to address Rousseau’s predicament or offer solace to Deresiewicz’s sheep. Thus, an exploration of Rousseau’s conception of a life without *amour-propre*—a life of true happiness—becomes necessary.

Rousseau claims that “it is a hundred times easier to be happy than to appear to be happy,” and this serves as an outstanding introduction to his notion of happiness.<sup>42</sup> This thought demands that we ask ourselves a question, and it is one that Deresiewicz is quick to point out that many high achieving college students either do not know or are too afraid to ask. This question, surprising as it may be, is not “what will make me the most successful in life?” or “what will earn me the most

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 354.

money in life?” Instead the question is “what makes me happy?” As much of a cliché as it is, this remains an important question for a society that so readily surrenders its happiness and self-worth to the opinions of other people. Rousseau’s insight calls for reflection on what we are doing to appear happy to *others* and what we might change so that *we* are actually happy.

Rousseau’s answer to this question, perhaps not surprisingly, has little to do with obtaining an Ivy League degree, working for a prestigious consulting firm, or owning a nice house. In fact, it begins with simplicity, a virtue with which many at the top of the food chain may be unfamiliar. This becomes clear in a number of his writings, particularly his “Second Discourse,” “Book IV” of *Emile*, and his *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. Rousseau describes the experience of a wealthy man who owns a palace but finds no use for all the rooms because he cannot occupy each one. In the end, it becomes a gilded cage, promising luxury but delivering an experience of imprisonment.<sup>43</sup> The great flaw of *amour-propre*’s relative nature is that it spurs the accumulation of excess (money, clothes, land, titles, reputation), which only gives people more and more ways to compare what they do or do not possess. As Rousseau writes, “Sociable man, always outside himself, is capable of living only in the opinion of others and, so to speak, derives the sentiment of his own existence solely from their judgment.”<sup>44</sup> To Rousseau, the first and proper response to the comparative tendencies of *amour-propre* is to make an effort to return to simplicity.

An example of what this kind of simplicity looks like for Rousseau is captured in his Fifth Walk of the Solitary Walker, during which he describes his days spent on a nearly deserted island in the middle of a Swiss lake. This sort of abandonment of society may strike the modern observer as decidedly odd. After all, Rousseau does not have an iPhone or laptop on his

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>44</sup> Rousseau, “Second Discourse,” 187.



person, so there will be no way to share with others what he sees; he has only his memory to capture everything around him. The scene before Rousseau is one where “there is more natural greenery, more meadows, grove-shaded retreats, more frequent contrasts, and more variety in the terrain” than on the mainland.<sup>45</sup> Life on the island forbids “any kind of communication with the mainland so that being unaware of all that went on in the world I might forget its existence and that it might also forget mine.”<sup>46</sup> On Rousseau’s island, no filtered (or #nofilter) Instagram posts reach the rest of society. No Facebook statuses describing the “incredible” or “awesome” or “breathtaking” sights of this island reach the newsfeeds of others, and none of their communications reach Rousseau. Pleasure is taken from nothing other than a short walk. Hours are spent observing the beauty of a single flower. Reward is drawn from an afternoon paddling around the lake.

Another aspect of this simplicity is its decided lack of orientation towards a set of tasks or goals. Rousseau’s days are spent “without having any well-determined or constant object,” a concept that also might fail to compute for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century achiever.<sup>47</sup> Somehow, though, this kind of simplicity is what brings Rousseau the most happiness, and he calls these aimless days “a hundred times preferable to the sweetest things I had found in what are called the pleasures of life.”<sup>48</sup>

Simplicity is only the beginning of happiness for Rousseau, though, because the value of a simple life rests on the bedrock of a more important idea, that true contentment is found in the sentiment of one’s existence—that the fact of being alive is enough for one to always be satisfied with life. One may argue that it is impossible to live a contented and

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<sup>45</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, in *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, ed. Christopher Kelly (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), 41.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

fulfilled life by merely appreciating one's existence, but Rousseau makes a compelling case that demands a serious response.

In his *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, Rousseau describes the experience of awakening to how unnecessarily he was weighed down by the opinions of others. He first believed others viewed him as “the horror of the human race,” observing that “the only greeting passersby would give [him] would be to spit” on him.<sup>49</sup> This caused great agitation, indignation, and a tendency to struggle “without cleverness, without craft . . . without prudence.”<sup>50</sup> However, after realizing that such inner-conflict only ever resulted in an endless struggle over what cannot be controlled (the opinions of others), he took the only remaining course, namely “submitting to [his] fate without railing against necessity any longer.”<sup>51</sup> Rousseau recognized how much stock he set by the expectations and opinions of others and, understanding he could not control either one, finally decided to refrain from assigning them value. No longer chained to what others think or say about him, Rousseau is able to find ultimate meaning and value in his own life.

For Rousseau, the sentiment of existence possesses beauty and mystery. In his Fifth Walk, he says it is a sentiment “stripped of any other emotion, is in itself a precious sentiment of contentment and of peace which alone would suffice to make this existence dear and sweet to anyone able to spurn all the sensual and earthly impressions which incessantly come to distract us from it and to trouble its sweetness here-below.”<sup>52</sup> The appeal of the argument for a happiness not derived from earthly pleasures and the comparisons it leads us to make is that it is dependent on no person other than one's self. It is not by God's help that we become truly content. It is not by the help of our neighbor. Rather, we become “like God,” Rousseau claims,

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

when we are content in our own environment and with our own existence; by remaining in this state, “we are sufficient unto ourselves.”<sup>53</sup>

One can contest Rousseau’s claim of the ultimate source of this contentment, but his articulation of the truest expression of happiness is compelling for two reasons. First, it speaks to a longing for freedom from the social upkeep to which many feel chained, and second, there is a profound appeal found in a life committed to simplicity. In the end, Rousseau’s solution for a vain and comparing people is to attack the problem of *amour-propre* at its source: the more simply we live, the fewer points of reference we have with which to compare. Stated most succinctly, Rousseau’s conception of happiness is a simple life drawn from the deeper well of our own self-sufficiency and contentment with existence.

One may observe that no excellent sheep is an island, but even still, a serious reading of Rousseau’s assessment of *amour-propre* and his solution to the problem demands sober reflection on our habit of comparison to others and what might be done about it. To Rousseau, *amour-propre* is deeply entrenched. Worse still for us, we are unable to retreat from society in quite the same way Rousseau does in his *Reveries*. Nevertheless, we can still ask the questions of ourselves that his analysis raises—what do we do because we enjoy the praise it earns us? What do we do for fear of not measuring up if we do not? What do we refuse to do for fear of failure? How often do we find ourselves quite literally looking at another person and considering the ways in which we think he or she is better or worse than us?

These are questions that, if asked seriously, should illuminate the places where we are most enslaved to the opinions of others; as such, asking these questions can be a risk, for to examine the parts of ourselves that are dependent on others is to acknowledge vulnerabilities we may wish to remain unexposed. Despite this risk, though, a willingness to search for substantive

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

answers to the questions of why we burn the midnight oil, join ten clubs, and cast every part of life in terms of success or failure is, in my estimation, the first step towards freedom from the opinion of others.

Deresiewicz and Rousseau both articulate the pervasive problem of a life spent worrying about what others think of you. For them, such a life is an exercise in exhaustion and unhappiness. It is a treadmill of accomplishments, empty accolades, stress, and, most importantly, constant comparison, and it leaves those stuck running on it with no purpose other than to keep from falling off. Rousseau offers a solution to this problem, and it is one of radical contentment with the simple fact of one's own existence. One may find such an existence to be deeply unsatisfying or impractical. However, by proposing such a remedy, Rousseau moves the conversation forward, and in doing so, he raises the question that any excellent sheep should be keen to address: if a life spent on the treadmill of success leads to unhappiness, how do we step off?

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