Cover Image:
Salvador Dali, *The Persistence of Memory* (1931),
The Editor’s Page

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WRITER’S BLOCK. Almost everybody has experienced this. It’s the feeling that one’s prose has turned to mush, that every sentence is coming out flat. Or, worse still, it’s the inability to write anything at all for fear of imperfection (even though everything is imperfect). Such an obstruction often comes with a sinking feeling that one can never satisfactorily complete that paper assignment that keeps hanging menacingly over one’s head. The good news is that such difficulty happens once in a while to every writer, even professional ones. The bad news is that the longer it is allowed to persist, the harder it is to overcome.

What are the causes? All kinds of things. One of them might be a question of timing. Possibly your ideas need to marinate a while longer before you start putting them into written form. Another common problem is the fear of placing one’s thoughts out for others to see and possibly critique. Unless they are for a dairy or a personal journal, your written words are always meant for at least one set of eyes other than your own. And still another common problem, as suggested above, is the desire for everything to be just right before your fingers even touch the keyboard. Perfectionism is not a virtue; in fact, it can be a deadly flaw for a writer.

What to do about it? There’s no single answer. Different things work for different people. Most solutions have to do with getting away from the writing for a while. Consider changing your environment temporarily. Take a break. Go for a walk, shovel the snow, cut the grass, brew some coffee, read a book, listen to music, cook dinner, visit a friend, get out of town, plan a vacation trip, do your Christmas shopping, or anything else that gets your mind off the writing job that is driving you nuts.

What doesn’t work? Anything that sends you even more into a funk. Self-pity is never good for anything. Garbage on TV or the internet only dulls the mind all the more. Procrastination (not the same as taking a therapeutic break) usually digs into an even deeper hole. Reading a ton of essays (like this one) about how to overcome writer’s block probably isn’t the answer either. In short, the issue has to be addressed, not avoided.

If all else fails, is there a last resort? Maybe. That would be to just go ahead and write. It doesn’t have to perfect or even presentable. Let your first draft be crummy; who cares? Anything you do write, if not to your liking, can be fixed later by revising (and good writing IS repeated revising anyway, don’t forget). Further, anybody can write. The greatest difference between good writers
and ordinary ones is that they just do it more—a lot more. If writing becomes a habit in your life, even if it’s just frequent emails or text messages, the process will eventually seem less threatening, more normal, and easier to approach.

Moving on to other business, the following pages feature the articles we have chosen for this year, and thanks to the authors for being willing to submit and agreeing to let us publish their work. This is the seventeenth annual issue of the *History Magazine*. Assuming it will in some way continue next year, then why not be a little brave, take a chance, and submit your own work?

Again I say how much we have appreciated the support of school heads Tom Philip and Molly King, as well as that of our history chairs Kristine Brennan and Kristen Erickson. Also, hats off, as usual, to our superb Tech Office staff. In addition to them, thanks to Steve Mandes for coming to my rescue when my computer knowhow failed me once more. In the production of this magazine over all of those years, Margot Beattie has been the best sidekick ever. There is no way of overstating how valuable she has been to the annual success of this project. I owe her a lot.
Executive Overreach in Times of Crisis:  
The Presidencies of Abraham Lincoln  
and Franklin D. Roosevelt  

by Harper Jones ‘21

Since the foundation of the nation, the United States has glorified the presidency. Despite pitfalls and missteps made by powerful men who have held the office, the position of the president is, for the most part, held in the highest regard. Abraham Lincoln and Franklin D. Roosevelt are heralded as two of the country’s greatest and strongest leaders. Both men, however, overstepped the bounds of power granted to the executive branch in the Constitution during their terms in office and transformed the presidency from a limited office into the center of American government. Actions taken by the both presidents posed a potential threat to the stability and continuity of the Constitution as well as the nation. Both Lincoln and Roosevelt extended their executive powers over both the legislative and judicial branches during times of serious domestic crisis. President Lincoln faced the nation’s first Civil War and used broad executive authority in an attempt to reunite the nation and end the brutal conflict. President Roosevelt faced a devastating nationwide economic depression and used his power to create stabilizing economic reforms. And yet, despite their flagrant extensions of executive powers, Lincoln’s and Roosevelt’s methods proved instrumental in resolving the domestic crises that they faced.

Francis Biddle, the United States Attorney General under President Roosevelt during World War II said, “The Constitution has never greatly bothered any wartime president.” Biddle, like many, saw the Constitution as a framework for the presidency, as well as the legislative and judicial branches of government. However, unlike those who view the Constitution as a definitive document that cannot be questioned, Biddle concluded that the power of the executive takes ultimate precedence in a time of extreme crisis. This belief contradicts that of many of the constitutional framers. Many of them, including James Madison, believed that it was necessary for the document to include protections against a tyrannical or imperial executive power. Madison introduced the idea of “checks and balances” in Federalist No. 51 (1788), expressing that prevention from absolute power within the government should be based on the balancing of power as well as the government’s accountability to the people.

Madison’s, Federalist No. 51, written in favor of ratification of the Constitution, states that “such devices [checks and balances] should be necessary to control the abuses of government. . . . In framing a government . . . you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.” Madison wanted to install a system that would check the
influence of the executive and distribute power evenly among three separate branches. Madison’s system of checks and balances still remains a part of today’s government, but the power of the president and his executive branch has greatly expanded from its original design. Michael Genovese, author of *A Presidential Nation: Causes, Consequences, and Cures*, argues that there are several key factors that have contributed to the growth of the power of the executive branch. Genovese importantly notes “crisis and wars” as a major component in the expansion of presidential power over time, especially in the administrations of Presidents Lincoln and Roosevelt. However, the actions of both presidents bring up certain questions about the viability of the Constitution during times of crisis, the constitutionality of executive branch expansion, and whether or not a powerful, centralized presidency poses a danger to the American constitutional republic.
At the outbreak of the Civil War, Lincoln strained the Constitution and overstepped the legislative branch in his blockading of southern ports and instituting of draft policies. His election in 1860 had already sparked the secession of several southern states, making civil war imminent. The new president, hoping that war, if necessary, would be quick and relatively bloodless, reassured in his First Inaugural Address that the South would have to fire first and that the Union would not. On April 12, 1861, southern forces indeed did begin firing on Fort Sumter, a Union controlled base in the heart of Confederate Charleston Harbor, in South Carolina. After two days of fighting, Fort Sumter fell to Confederate forces and, in response, Lincoln ordered state militias to provide 75,000 men to suppress the growing rebellion. He also called for a blockade of southern ports, stating in a proclamation;

[The] public property of the United States has been seized, the collection of the revenue obstructed, and duly commissioned officers of the United States while engaged in executing the orders of their superiors have been arrested and held in custody as prisoners or have been impeded in the discharge of their official duties without due legal process, by persons claiming to act under authorities of the States of Virginia and North Carolina.

Raising an army, declaring war, and restricting trade are all constitutional powers granted to the legislative branch, but Congress was not in session when the war began. Instead of calling an emergency session, and waiting for it to authorize action, Lincoln acted on his own. Aware of his overstepping of legislative power, he remarked in a letter to Treasury Secretary Salmon Chase, “I will violate the Constitution if necessary to save the Union; and I suspect, Chase, that our Constitution is going to have a rough time of it before we get done with this row.” Lincoln believed it was his presidential duty to save the Union and preserve the American democracy, even if it meant violating the very document it was founded on. He argued that the unprecedented nature of the Civil War enabled him to extend his power beyond the boundaries set by his predecessors, asking, “Must a government of necessity, be too strong for the liberties of its own people, or too weak to maintain its own existence?”

While Lincoln faced war, President Franklin D. Roosevelt faced a domestic crisis of a different kind. In the midst of the Great Depression, President Roosevelt aggressively extended his presidential power over the legislative branch in many ways, including his attempted firing and treatment of Federal Trade Commissioner William Humphrey. The Great Depression lasted from 1929 to 1939 and was the “longest, deepest, and most pervasive depression in American history.” By Roosevelt’s inauguration in 1933, more than 4,500 banks had failed and 15 million Americans found themselves unemployed. Roosevelt knew that he needed to exercise aggressive executive authority from the beginning, remark-
ing in his Inaugural Address;

It is to be hoped that the normal balance of Executive and legislative authority may be wholly adequate to meet the unprecedented task before us. But it may be that an unprecedented demand and need for undelayed action may call for a temporary departure from that normal balance of public procedure…. I shall ask the Congress for one remaining instrument to meet the crisis—broad executive power to wage a war against the emergency, as great as the power that would be given to me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe.

The president knew that he could not execute his plans without broad executive authority. Roosevelt declared the depression a national emergency and did ask Congress for the same powers granted to wartime presidents in the past. He immediately launched the New Deal, a series of programs that worked to promote economic recovery, create jobs, start public works projects, and reshape American society. However, not everyone supported Roosevelt’s policies, most notably, Federal Trade Commission chairman William E. Humphrey. In an attempt to prevent further resistance, the president asked Humphrey to resign, stating, “I do not feel that your mind and my mind go along together on either the policies or the administering of the Federal Trade Commission, and, frankly, I think it best for the people of this country that I should have a full confidence.” Humphrey refused to resign, and Roosevelt fired him, never mind the congressional power to determine the terms and instances of removal from a federal office. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled Roosevelt’s action against Humphrey unconstitutional in the case of Humphrey’s Executor v. United States (1935), in which it decided that the president did not have the authority to remove Humphrey from office, especially for political reasons. Nevertheless, Roosevelt’s broad extension of power over Congress laid the groundwork for a series of actions and policies he took during the Great Depression in hopes of reviving the American economy.
By contrast, Lincoln defied the Supreme Court during the Civil War by ignoring its decision in *Ex Parte Merryman* (1861), having to do with his suspending of the constitutional writ to habeas corpus, the right to be brought before a judge to determine whether or not one’s imprisonment is lawful. Arguing his military actions as supported by his position as “commander-in-chief,” Lincoln claimed he could take any measures necessary to combat the crisis, despite constitutional restrictions. As the war deepened, the president decided that the Union’s procedures for judging disloyalty were lacking, so he decided to let civilians face trial in military courts. This action by the president rather than Congress arguably violated Article 1, Section 9 of the Constitution, which states, “the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus shall not be suspended, unless when in cases of rebellion or invasion the public safety may require it.” Lawyers for John Merryman, a suspected terrorist and Confederate sympathizer, contended that Lincoln held no right to suspend the writ himself and hold Merryman under military arrest. Chief Justice Roger Taney, in the Court’s majority opinion *Ex Parte Merryman*, declared Lincoln’s action unconstitutional on grounds that only Congress, and not the president, could suspend the writ of habeas corpus in cases involving a civilian. Taney, however, held no ability to enforce the writ, and Lincoln went ahead in violation of the Court’s decree.
During the Great Depression, Roosevelt also tried challenging the Supreme Court with his “court-packing plan.” While Roosevelt’s New Deal introduced many social and economic reforms, many were “hastily drawn and weakly administered; some actually contradicted others,” says historian Kathryn Mackay. In response, the Supreme Court had invalidated many significant pieces of the New Deal’s foundation, including the Agricultural Adjustment Act and the National Industrial Recovery Act, both passed in 1933. By 1936, the court had declared nine out of sixteen pieces of New Deal legislation unconstitutional. Roosevelt began to view the court as unresponsive and, following his landslide reelection in 1936, decided to do something about it. On February 5, 1937, he proposed to revolutionize the court by asking Congress to grant him authority to appoint an additional justice to the court for each one then sitting who had not retired within six months after turning seventy. At that time, six of the nine justices on the Supreme Court were already seventy or older, so the bill would have allowed Roosevelt to immediately appoint six new justices. Although Congress refused to pass the bill, Roosevelt had shown himself willing to pack the court in order to suit his own political gain.

There is no doubt that President Lincoln extended his executive power beyond constitutional bounds during the Civil War. But in doing so, he saw the young nation through a civil war, ended slavery, and preserved the Union. Throughout the war, Lincoln maintained that the overreach he exercised was due to the crisis. He invoked “war powers” that gave the president extensive overreach if necessary to defend the Union during time of war but promised to relinquish them after. While some of Lincoln’s actions violated the Constitution, the
American nation that emerged from the war proved stronger than before. As historian James McPherson has remarked, “the United States went to war in 1861 to preserve the Union; it emerged from the war in 1865 having created the nation.” Lincoln’s actions and success as a leader during the war allowed Americans to view their country as truly united.

While Roosevelt, too, aggressively overreached both the legislative and judicial branches, his actions ultimately resuscitated the country from a devastating economic crisis. He was able to pull the nation through the “worst economic crisis since the founding of the American republic,” says historian Richard Menaker. New Deal legislation dealt with banking reform, Social Security, public relief and public works projects, and enabled the government to play new roles in the economy of the nation, as well as contribute to the economic security, health, and well-being of the people it served.

Domestic crises like civil wars and economic depressions create unprecedented situations that the Constitution does not always have answers for. The President often has to make decisions based on what seems the best possible option for the best interests of the country, even if their constitutional authority to do so is unclear. Today, Abraham Lincoln and Franklin D. Roosevelt are heralded among the nation’s greatest leaders, alongside George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. As the American nation evolves in the modern world, the presidency has continued to take center stage. Congressional legislation was largely influenced by President Barack Obama and his administration. Obamacare is sometimes regarded as President Obama’s defining legislation, even though it raised constitutional questions. More recently, the fight over a budget compromise between President Donald Trump and Congress, largely due to Trump’s unwillingness to negotiate a budget until he receives funding to build a $5 million wall on the Mexican-American border, complicated the legislative process of Congress once more. Beyond that, Trump’s impeachment and Senate trial in 2019-20 has raised even more momentous issues. While the American nation has witnessed extensive development and change since its founding, the country, its leaders, and their government still struggle to find a balance between following the Constitution strictly and tackling crises and situations that the framers could never have imagined back when the republic was new.

Notes
7 Ibid., 74.
13 Ibid., 104.
14 Ibid., 78.
23 Richard G. Menaker, “FDR’s Court Packing Plan: A Study in Irony,” The

The 1960s was a period of tremendous social upheaval in America, giving rise to a new era focused on the power of ordinary people. Across the nation, younger Americans embraced their right to protest and speak up for their beliefs. They took part in peaceful protests against the Vietnam War and ignited a new Sexual Revolution which allowed both men and women to embrace their sexuality. The first birth control pill, Enovid, was a significant contributor to the creation of this new era as it empowered women to liberate themselves from oppressive societal expectations. Coming onto the market in 1960, the Pill cannot be underestimated in its importance because, for the first time, women had power over their own fertility. Despite opposition from conservatives, by 1965 approximately six million American women were ‘on the Pill.’¹ In the words of anthropologist Ashley Montagu’s May 1968 article, “In its effects, I believe that the Pill ranks in importance with the discovery of fire, the invention of agriculture, the development of scientific medicine, and the release and control of nuclear energy.” The Pill was a progressive discovery which became integral in altering for the better the lives of women and their place in modern America. The discovery and legalization of ‘the Pill’ in the 1960s was a most significant factor in evolving American society, as it contributed to the growing Sexual Revolution and the Women's Rights Movement and enabled a newfound sexual freedom and social emancipation for women.

The discovery and legalization of oral contraception was an arduous battle which culminated in a pill that would forever change the role of women in American society by giving them the freedom to control their bodies. The Pill exists today because of American activist and educator, Margaret Sanger. Sanger opened the first birth control clinic in 1916 and persisted through multiple arrests and prosecutions to keep her clinic open. She was met with considerable pushback from the Catholic Church and other conservative groups, who saw contraception as preventing God’s natural will of procreation. The opposition, led by politician Anthony Comstock, considered contraceptives to be obscenities and “articles of immoral use.”² They persuaded the U.S. Congress to pass the Comstock Act, criminalizing publication about contraception and the distribution, possession, and importation of contraception across state lines under threat of up to five years of imprisonment.³ Sanger was involved in the 1938 case which ended the Comstock Act and thus lifted the federal birth control ban on mechanical contraception such as condoms.
Twenty years later, in 1958, Sanger joined together the efforts of medical philanthropist Katharine Dexter McCormick and biologist Gregory Pincus. McCormick’s pledge of two million dollars funded Pincus’s research and testing of what would become ‘the Pill.’ In 1957, the FDA approved the Pill as a means of regulating women’s cycles and listed preventing pregnancy as a side effect, but it was not legalized as contraception. Women were able to obtain prescriptions by claiming that they experienced irregular menstrual cycles. When the Pill was first released, they immediately recognized its potential as a form of birth control. Though the Pill was legally approved as a means of regulating menstruation, the original packaging did not list this as a use. From this, it can be inferred that using the Pill as birth control was more important to the public than the prevention of menstruation. Only after FDA intervention was the prevention of menstruation listed as a side effect. This suggests the even before being legalized as contraception, the Pill was primarily being used by American women as a means of preventing pregnancy.

It wasn’t until three years later, in 1960, that the FDA approved the Pill to be sold as contraception. It was still illegal, however, for doctors to prescribe the Pill as a contraceptive in some states, such as Connecticut. It took five more years for the Supreme Court to give married couples nationwide the right to birth control in its landmark Griswold v. Connecticut case (1965). In Griswold, the Court refused to uphold Connecticut’s $100 fining of Estelle Griswold and Dr. C. Lee Buxton of Planned Parenthood League of Connecticut for providing mechanical birth control to a married couple. Two years later, in the 1967 case Eisenstadt v. Baird, William Baird, a birth control activist, had been arrested after giving a foam contraceptive to a young unmarried woman. The result of that case was the Su-
preme Court’s extension of the right to oral contraception to every person regardless of marital status. The legalization of the Pill was significant in that women were given control over their bodies for the first time. Unlike mechanical contraception, such as condoms, women were now in complete control of their sex lives and could act without the permission or knowledge of their partner. Previously, in the event that women became impregnated, they were forced to suspend their lives regardless of age or socio-economic status. Abortion was too deadly an option in the mid-twentieth century, as it was illegal, unregulated, and dangerous. With the advent of the Pill, sex changed from a high-risk activity to something women could enjoy without significant repercussions. Thus, the discovery and legalization of the Pill was crucial in the fight to give American women control over their sexual and reproductive lives.

Packaged birth control pills.

The Pill’s role in altering American society to be more supportive of Women Health Rights and sexual freedom is debated by historians. Some consider the Counterculture Revolution to be the more impactful instigator of change during this era. The Counterculture Revolution refers to period in the 1960s when societal norms began to break down as a result of young people becoming active in political movements such as peaceful protests in favor of Civil Rights and against U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. They moved away from the mainstream and created their own values. The Sexual Revolution was an example of a change in ethics, as young people were challenging social taboos and following their own impulses on sexual freedom.

The Counterculture Revolution also inspired women and men to support the Women’s Rights Movement. A contributor to the women’s rights efforts during the 1960s was President John F. Kennedy’s “President’s Commission on
the Status of Women,” established in December of 1961 and terminated in Octo-
ber of 1963. Chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, the commission reviewed employ-
ment policies for women in the workforce. Their goal was to improve laws to
benefit women who were being discriminated against. However, the only notable
direct effect of the committee was the Peterson Report, which only made recom-
mendations to improve workplace conditions. The resulting state commissions
were important in the future promotion of workplace equality for women. The
camaraderie of young people in challenging the status quo during the 1960s,
known as the Counterculture Revolution, could be credited with the increase of
activist support for women’s rights and sexual freedom, but the availability (and
legalization) of the Pill made it possible for people to actually participate in the
Sexual Revolution.

The legalization of Enovid in 1960 stimulated a Sexual Revolution in
which, free from the risk of unwanted pregnancy, many women gained new-
found self-determined sexual liberation. Before the legalization of the Pill,
women were less inclined to participate in intercourse due to the fear of becom-
ing pregnant. The Pill made it safe for men and women to pursue the core idea
of the Sexual Revolution: that sex is for love and pleasure and not just reproduc-
tion. The Sexual Revolution took place during the 1960s through the early 1970s,
when young adults more often exercised this change in attitudes toward sex.
This, in turn, stimulated a change in women’s attitudes toward sex and men’s
perceptions of women who were sexually liberated. Anthropologist Ashley Mon-
tagau recognized this dissipation of the male/female double standard and articu-
lated her ideas on equality in the education journal *The Phi Delta Kappan*: 

Women’s Movement demonstrators, late 1960s.
The double standard, which has had so damaging an effect upon both sexes and upon our society, will make way for a healthier view of sex and of the relations between the sexes. It will become possible for the first time for the sexes genuinely to complement each other, and to live and love together on a basis of full equality.” (May 1968)

In this quotation, Montagu foreshadowed the results of the Sexual Revolution and the Women's Rights Movement of the 1960s. The Pill had created a more level playing field in which women were no longer forced to ask permission from men to engage in protected sex and could live without fear of unwanted pregnancy. In the words of Professor Leo Joch, The Pill was a “weapon that was being put to use with verve, with joy, with excitement, trepidation, passion.” Women forged a new path of sexual freedom for themselves without fear of repercussions. Prior to the legalization of the Pill in the 1950s, six out of ten women in America were virgins at marriage, and 87 percent of American women were against premarital sex even with one’s fiancé. By approximately 1960, two out of ten women were virgins at marriage, and 50 percent of unmarried 19-year-olds had lost their virginity. By late 1980s, two-thirds of American girls had sex before their 18th birthday. Between ages 18 and 19, percentages which showed the difference between female and male teen sexual experience dropped from 50 percentage points to single digits. The massive shift in behavior indicated that previous sexual prudence was driven by fear of consequences rather than lack of desire. The notorious publisher of the men’s entertainment magazine Playboy, Hugh Hefner, argued in favor of the Pill and the Sexual Revolution: “I remember . . . when it became legal. It made a big impression on me at the time. I recognized the importance of it. . . . I recognized it as exactly what it was: a powerful weapon.”

The Pill transformed the Women’s Rights Movement by including empowerment through education as an essential facet of the growing feminist mentality, as it was a means of establishing women’s independence. More than a medication, the Pill was now a movement with a strong message of unity for women. By 1967, radical feminists began to form their own organization which focused on gender equality, sexuality, and reproductive rights. The 1960s saw the introduction of a new wave of radical feminism established by new-age feminists who helped absorb women’s health rights as part of the feminist platform. They tied legalization of birth control to the social justice for women, therefore giving it a strong base and platform of support. Women bonded together to fight for access to contraception and abortion. They believed in increasing education so that women could make their own informed decisions, forging their own opinions rather than listening solely to the majority-male doctors who treated them. Activist women formed self-help groups and clinics within their communities. Some even became involved in lobbying and litigation for women’s health
More specifically, during childbirth, some women were now rejecting forceps delivery, preventing doctors from inducing labor, choosing not to anesthetize during delivery, and preventing unnecessary hysterectomies and Cesarean births. Women took back control over their own bodies and in doing so gained the rights they should have had for decades. They formed advocacy groups which fought to increase access to services and evidence-based education concerning the safety of contraceptives, drugs, and devices used for female health care.

As the Pill freed women from the constraints of painful menstruation and hormone imbalances, anthropologists were compelled to reexamine how female biology gave rise to negative social perceptions of women and became the foundation of prescribed gender roles. For centuries, women had suffered due to painful menstruation. The Pill emancipated women who experienced severe cramping or intense hormone imbalances, which negatively affected their daily life as a result. Women were no longer constrained by their biology, and they could now fully participate in society regardless of their menstruation irregularities. With menstruation came the sexist social perception that women were “too emotional,” “weak” and “hysterical” and thus biologically inferior to men. The Pill meant the end of these biological binds for women and led anthropologists to ask whether the differences between men and women was biological or a socially created concept. The Pill prevented monthly hormone floods and gave anthropologists the opportunity to examine the concept of gender separate from menstruation. In May 1968, anthropologist Ashley Montagu shared her findings: “It is only in recent years that we have learned that what we have always taken for granted as biologically determined, namely masculinity and femininity, are in fact genders which are virtually wholly culturally determined.” The 1960s thus introduced the idea that gender is a socially created concept. This idea was reinforced by the Pill. Without the factor of menstruation, the similarities between women and men were brought more into the spotlight. Activists had long been attempting to dispel the myth that a women’s biological place was in the kitchen, and the Pill helped to establish their claim that women were not less intelligent or incapable of achieving to the same levels as men.

The Pill also gave women the choice to remain sexually active while delaying motherhood, instead prioritizing higher education and pursuing careers. Before the Pill, there existed a significant deficit of women compared to men seeking higher education, as women were forced to choose between marriage/sex and education. Society propelled them toward the former, and female ambition suffered as a result. In 1960, 40 percent of white men completed high school; during the same year, 43 percent of white women completed high school. The higher percentage of women who completed high school suggests that women did not lack the intelligence for higher education. Yet the percentage of women who completed four years of college that same year was lower than...
the percentage of men; in 1960, 10 percent of white men and 6 percent of white women completed 4 years of college. From these statistics, it can be inferred that intelligence was not the driving factor in the deficit of women’s accomplishments compared to men’s. Instead, women were choosing to get married and start families in their late teens and early twenties. Women, even those who could afford it, did not see a need for higher education because their expected role in American society was in the home.

Over time, the Pill helped to change this perception and gave women new opportunities. In a comparison of the period 1940-1960 and 1960-1980, there was a 700 percent increase of women who completed four years of college after the legalization of the Pill in 1960. With that event, women could seek higher education while remaining sexually active with their husbands. Harvard Economists Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz studied the significance of the Pill on the workforce: “the Pill lowered the cost of pursuing a career through its direct effect on the cost of having sex and its indirect effects of increasing the age at first marriage generally.” The days when women had to choose between sex and education were over. This newfound control over their intellectual future extended to working women. In 1950, the rate of women’s participation in the workforce was at 33.9 percent, increasing to 37.7 percent in 1960. As the Pill entered the market, women embraced their opportunities and entered the workforce more and more. By 1970, 43.3 percent of women were part of the labor force, and the number continued to increase rapidly. In 1980 the number jumped to 51.5 percent, and only ten years later the U.S. saw the highest participation of women in the workplace at 60 percent. This increase could be attributed, in part, to the Oil Shock of 1973 which lead to a decrease in home income, causing more women to join the workforce to supplement their husband’s income. Before that crash, however, there was already a change occurring in how society viewed women in the workplace. As more women entered the workplace, the idea of working women became normalized and had gained increased social acceptance from American society.

The Pill was impactful, not only as a means of allowing women to sexually liberate themselves while pursuing careers but also in helping to safeguard married women against unwanted pregnancy, thus improving their quality of family life. It could be used to aid economically struggling families. At the beginning of the 1960s, the nuclear family concept was coming to an end. This regular family had consisted of two parents of the opposite sex, with the mothers often young and undereducated, the fathers the household head and breadwinner. After the release of the Pill, society realized that contraception could be used as a means of family planning. Parents could choose to have children at a time in their lives when they were economically stable and could limit their number of children. President Lyndon B. Johnson provided funds for public family planning clinics as part of his War on Poverty program in 1964. The National Academy of Sciences released a 1965 report which called for “a far-reaching birth control
program to extend the basic human right of family planning to all.”36 The following year, President Johnson listed family planning among his top four most urgent American health care problems and promised to “increase government involvement in contraceptive services.”37 The Pill’s recognition from the President aided in dispelling the social stigma against it and formally introduced the additional benefits to society which it offered. Later that year, The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare announced a series of conferences with the intention of growing the number of family planning programs in order to “remove a barrier of silence” around contraception that prevented medical and social advances that would benefit American society.38 Women were struggling around the world to raise their children, so much so that some wrote to medical journals, begging for help:

“I’m about 30 years old [and] have six children… we have tried to be careful and tried this and that, but I get pregnant anyway. When I read this article I couldn’t help but cry, for I thought this is my ray of hope. As of yet can these anti-pregnancy pills be purchased? Where—How can I get them? Please help me. . . . I beg you please help if you can.” – Indianapolis woman.39

“I absolutely need your help, I do not think that I am fitted to raise 10 or more children—it costs too much and my husband is not giving me much help to educate my [here she had crossed out “our”] children. . . . Please help me!” – Canadian woman pregnant with her 5th child.40

These women’s experiences were far from unique, and the Pill’s success in alleviating such pain is no small feat. The Pill offered discretion, and as women often handled the home finances, they could take it without the knowledge of men who might disapprove. It also allowed married women to take control of their families thus emancipating them from unwanted pregnancy, which would often cause suffering as resources were spread thin. The Pill thus gave rise to a new era of social emancipation for married women who, for the first time, had control over their families by limiting the number of children and creating a more manageable and economically stable environment for their existing family.

It would be an understatement to regard the Pill as anything less than both integral and revolutionary; it was the most important factor in creating the Sexual Revolution and empowering the Women’s Rights Movement to challenge society’s expectations of women. The Pill gave women a new invisible power: the ability to regulate their own bodies. Women no longer repressed their sexuality, and it was with this power that they entered a new era of ownership over their lives. The Pill, moreover, had a revolutionary effect on the lives of all types of women, including young unmarried ones who sought sexual freedom and educa-
tion, married ones who wanted to prioritize their careers over motherhood, and mothers with families who could not afford more children. Today, American women and men do not enjoy full equality; however, conditions have improved dramatically from the time before the invention of the Pill. A U.S. government survey, conducted between 2006 and 2010, names the Pill as the contraceptive of choice for 27.4 percent of women. The age of the Pill is immortalized as a time in which American women empowered one another, creating an era of ownership over their lives and leading to newfound social emancipation for millions in decades to come.

Notes

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4 Ibid., 183.
5 Ibid., 183.
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12 Cohen, Delirium, 12.
13 Ibid., 20.
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22 Ibid., 180.
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29 Ibid., 79.
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31 Cohen, Delirium, 2.
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36 Ibid., 182.
37 Ibid., 182.
38 Ibid., 183.
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40 Ibid., 264.
The European Roots of Early Twentieth Century American Surrealist Painting

by Bo Hopkins ‘21

America’s early 1900s expression of surrealism in art reflected an intense dissatisfaction of some artists with the time in which they lived, one of jarring World Wars as well as the Great Depression. An American surrealist movement began in the late 1920s and progressed throughout the 1930s, following the exhibition of the first European surrealist art in the United States. A unique style of avant-garde expression, surrealism quickly took over the American art scene with its contemporary aura of eeriness and perturbation that enraptured its viewers. The movement had originally emerged in France after World War I and was championed by French writer André Breton, who described the art form as “pure psychic automatism.” Breton publicized his avant-garde ideas in the 1920s in his pre-war Surrealist Manifestos. He drew especially heavily from Dadaism, the movement which introduced the artistic rejection of common rationality and propriety as a method of expressing discontent with modern society.

While other preexisting art forms like cubism pioneered this step away from reality, surrealism’s aim of exploring the potential of the subconscious mind was entirely revolutionary. American artists grew fascinated with surrealism following several noted exhibitions in New York in the early 1930s. Using European surrealist methods, they expressed disappointment with their own society and its problems after World War I—a general disillusionment that would continue to be a prevalent theme for American intellectuals throughout the first half of the century and beyond. In particular, American surrealist painters of the 1930s emulated a variety of foreign surrealist visual strategies.

In its earliest stages, European surrealism, too, had been taken as critical of modern society. In 1932, Spanish artist Salvador Dalí’s *The Persistence of Memory* (Figure 1), first exhibited at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York City, would become perhaps the most celebrated—and influential—surrealist work in history. Epitomizing the surrealist style, it set a precedent for the Americans to follow. An issue of the New York-based magazine *Art News* published in the late 1930s declared that “to most Americans, Dalí represents surrealism in all its horror and fascination.” In *The Persistence of Memory*, we see Dalí’s trademark juxtaposition of dissonant images from his dreams and the subconscious visions that he often claimed to experience. While the exact meaning of clocks melting over a grotesque, twisted self-portrait of Dalí set before an empty landscape remains almost entirely subjective, the painting as a whole unnerves the viewer. The association of such images presents a potent and entirely purposeful element
of constant questioning and mystery. Dalí himself stated that while even he did not know the true meaning of the painting, he did have the intention of undermining the common edicts of rationality that presumably govern society.⁶

Some American artists were enamored with Dalí’s painting and wished to invoke a similar feeling of questioning, demonstrate their desire to escape from reality, and liberate themselves from restriction to harsh absolutes. The Julien Levy Gallery in New York City, widely regarded as the most prominent and celebrated venue for surrealist art in the first half of the twentieth century, gave Dalí four more solo exhibitions following his first in 1932, just one year after he completed The Persistence of Memory. His overwhelming popularity also resulted in his works being displayed at several Wadsworth Atheneum shows in Hartford, Connecticut.⁷ Following these exhibitions, the popularity of American surrealist artists, galleries, films, and writing all skyrocketed. The growing public support for the movement gave way to more and more artists deciding to explore and experiment with surrealism.

Where American artists and Dalí differ is in their reasons for undermining conformity. Dalí’s motivations are unclear, but the timing of the emergence of the surrealist movement in America gives a strong indication as to why Americans were so enthusiastic about the art form. Disillusionment with society in America, tied to disastrous economic conditions and the rise of radical political belief, found expression in surrealism’s exhaustion with the bleakness of the conscious world. The influence of Dalí immediately appeared in almost all American surrealism. For example, Gertrude Abercrombie’s Night Arrives (Figure 2) bears a striking similarity to Dalí’s painting in both style and discernible intention. Even at first glance, Abercrombie’s painting has the same evocative atmosphere. The staging of the images is instantly suggestive of Dalí. The woman in the red dress serves as a significant indicator of the painter’s intentions. As in The Persistence of Memory, the artist provides a representation of herself. While this element in Night Arrives it is more direct, Dalí also included an illustration of himself but in a more surreal manner. In the center of Dalí’s piece, the folded, light pink figure serves as a potential medium of exchange between the artist and the viewer. A closed eye can be seen towards its left end. In Abercrombie’s piece, the woman is closing her eyes, too, in a very similar and almost serene manner. It is evident that Abercrombie was inspired by this visual tactic of Dalí’s and wanted to mimic it to achieve the same visual effect.

James Harold Noecker’s painting The Genius? (Figure 3) is remarkably similar to both Abercrombie’s work and Dalí’s. It features a similar vast landscape behind obviously subconscious-inspired or dreamlike imagery, with a human figure as the centerpiece of the painting. More noteworthy, however, is the same shielding of the viewer from direct exchange with the artist’s self-portrayal. Again, the eyes of the artist are hidden, in this instance by a shadow. This com-
mon theme in American surrealist art is meant to give the viewer the eerie sense that something is being concealed, that there is some element to the art that they are missing. This choice by the artist is intended to force viewers to find meaning by letting go of their rationality and exploring their subconscious. While certainly very abstract, works like *The Genius?* are nonetheless effective in degrading the disappointing reality of the time. The surrealist quality of uncertainty is especially powerful in this piece. Even the title of the piece poses a question. Surrealists often used the perturbing nature of their work to express anxieties caused by the unsettling conditions of the 1930s and early 1940s, particularly the rise of facism in Europe and on the political fringes of the United States. Politically, surrealism was most commonly associated with the far left, both in Europe and in America.

Another example of an American surrealist work that uses its unsettling, enigmatic nature to reflect anxieties and to reject conformity and rationality is John Wilde’s *Untitled* piece of 1941 (Figure 4). Once again, the artist purposefully included a depiction of himself without directly exchanging with the viewer. The moustached man towards the bottom of the fantastical scene has his eyes closed in a similar manner to the figures in the paintings of Dalí and Abercrombie, hinting at Wilde’s similar intent. As in most surrealist artwork, in searching for meaning, the details of every bizarre and miniscule scene are less important than the style of the painting as a whole. One can only guess what Wilde was attempting to convey with his levitating eye over the dead fish, but his use of the juxtaposition, landscaping, and obstructed exchange with the narrative is most certainly Dalí-inspired and similarly motivated. In both cases the artist wished to subvert their viewer’s conscious mind.

Other European visual styles influenced American surrealists as well. During the 1920s, Germany saw the emergence of a new art form called “Neue Sachlichkeit,” or New Objectivity, a reaction against the rise of expressionism in Europe. It soon interwove with surrealism to create a method of expressing German post World War I social anxieties. A prominent example of this is Otto Dix’s *Dr. Mayer-Hermann* (Figure 5). The sharp and exact realism of the various objects surrounding the sitting doctor clashes with the satirical proportions of his body and the round mirror behind him. These elements, combined with the doctor’s blank gaze, create a very disconcerting atmosphere. The anxiety that the viewer feels is intended to reflect that of Germans under the burden of the war reparations that the Allies had imposed upon Germany after World War I. José Clemente Orozco provided a an example of how American surrealism similarly reflected disquieting social experience. Orozco, a Mexican painter and caricaturist who primarily painted and published in America, often tackled controversial political and social issues in his work. In a number of murals, he experimented with heavy surrealist elements spearheaded earlier by Dix. In *Gods of the Modern World* (Figure 6), a panel of a fresco-style mural painted for the Baker Library at
Dartmouth College, Orozco crafts a disturbing and purposeful surrealist scene. A skeleton in a scholarly gown delivers other stillborn skeletons from yet another skeleton lying atop a pile of books. In this piece, the artist begins to step more into the territory of social realism, an art form that in a more specific way than surrealism aims to call attention to social conditions and provide commentary on them. But here, the use of unsettling imagery to create a feeling of anxiety in the viewer is undeniably evident in Orozco’s captivating commentary on the continued teaching and veneration of so-called “dead knowledge.”

In their incorporating of social realism into the American surrealist movement, artists often depicted nameless laborers and (less commonly) celebrities of the time as gallant representations of the common man’s might in the face of oppression. The political aim was to call attention to the worsening conditions of the impoverished and middle classes and to hold the political and social systems of America fully responsible. James Guy’s 1937 painting *On the Waterfront* (Figure 7) presents a perfect example. Guy was a strong advocate for the rights of the laborer. He was an active member of the John Reed Club, which had firm communist affiliations. He also once painted a mural free of charge for the 13th Street Communist Worker’s School. While never declaring himself an outright communist, Guy’s political views clearly did not align with anyone of power or wealth in America during the 1930s. His painting greets the viewer with the conflicting and somewhat fantastical imagery that characterized almost all American surrealist paintings. Guy’s imitation of Dalí is also immediately evident. He admired Orozco and had previously gone to watch him work at Dartmouth. The passenger cruise sinking in the storm on the left side of *On the Waterfront* is juxtaposed with the sunny, calm, and auspicious weather on the right. Meanwhile, what appears to be a politician lifts money from Uncle Sam’s pocket as he collects the tickets of pompous-looking individuals, representing America’s wealthy elite, while standing with his back to a pile of skulls. This fascinating amalgamation of surrealism and social realism caught the attention of the most prominent figures in American art. The director of the WPA’s federal art program, Holger Cahill, was quoted on the progression of the surrealist movement, saying: “It is evident that the social content artists have been making headway . . . in their endeavor to express with dramatic power the social ideas and social movements of our time. . . . In this endeavor they have been helped to a certain extent by Surrealist methods of daring and fantastic juxtapositions which reveal the unfamiliar, the strange, and the disturbing in the recesses of familiar fact.”

The oddities and dreamlike aura of surrealism have an undoubtedly off-putting nature, which is a purposeful choice made by the artists to rebel against rationality. The experiences of the surrealists era can often give implications as to why they felt weary towards realism. This is what makes their art a generally reliable illustration of how some Americans felt about the world around them. While, the American surrealist movement provides a fascinating perspective on the first half of the 20th century, its popularity waned toward the 1970s, and ab-
stract representations of disillusionment with the American experience grew less and less prevalent until they became essentially nonexistent.14 When the movement was in full force, however, American artists borrowed from artistic devices that European surrealist pioneers had used and did so to give voice to a feeling of disillusionment with the American experience.

Notes
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9 “Automatism – Art Term.”
10 “American Surrealism and Modern Dialect.”
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12 Ibid.
13 Michele Greet, Beyond National Identity Pictorial Indigenism as a Modernist Strategy in Andean Art, 1920-1960 (University Park, PA, 2009), 133.
14 Leila Heller Gallery, “EXILIC PLEASURES: SURREALISM REFUGED IN AMERICA.”
(Figure 1) Salvador Dalí, *The Persistence of Memory* (1931), The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

(Figure 2) Gertrude Abercrombie, *Night Arrives* (1948), John and Susan Horseman, Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio.
(Figure 3) James Harold Noecker, *The Genius?* (1942-3). John and Susan Horsemam, Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio.

(Figure 4) John Wilde, *Untitled* (1941), John and Susan Horsemam, Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio.
(Figure 5) Otto Dix, *Dr. Mayer-Hermann* (1926), Museum of Modern Art, New York.

(Figure 6) José Clemente Orozco, *Gods of the Modern World* (1932), Baker-Berry Library, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire.
(Figure 7) James Guy, *On the Waterfront* (1937), John and Susan Horseman, Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio.
The Jewish Community in Vilnius and its Strength to Resist the Unthinkable

by Kathy Mintchev ‘22

As a result of its Jewish population of nearly 100,000 before World War II, the Lithuanian capital city of Vilnius was widely recognized as “The Jerusalem of Lithuania.” Although it took hundreds of years for Vilnius’s Jewish community to distinguish its culture from others, the community eventually became known as a European hub for Jewish cultural growth and artistic expression, home to acclaimed thinkers such as the Vilna Gaon and Abba Kovner. This achievement, however, was hindered by opposing forces such as the Nazis who attempted to destroy Vilnius’s Jewish culture during World War II by systematically murdering the community and forcing the remainder of its population into ghettos. Nonetheless, Vilnius was uniquely able to resist the Nazis during World War II. The city did so by fortifying conditions within the ghettos and forming covert resistance organizations made possible by its extensive history of united resistance against oppression by external forces.

The autonomous, religiously-centered community of Jews in Vilnius helped to develop a cultural identity in the city strong enough to withstand threats to its religious values from outside. When Germanic Jews first arrived in Lithuania in the 1450s, Vilnius’s Jewish population rose to around 3,000 by the mid-1600s and constituted a quarter of the city. As its numbers grew, the Jewish community “began functioning in an organized manner” by instating crucial political roles that unified its people. Importantly, the kahal, or community board, passed legislation to solve community issues, while the Rabash, or rabbi assembly, served as the chief authority. Another notable authority, the Tzedakah Gedolah or “Great Charity Fund,” provided resources to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Passover and maintained the Great Synagogue of Vilnius, a hub for Jewish religious life in the city. With the formation of these religiously affiliated institutions, Jews became unified both culturally and politically. In addition, religious leaders like Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, known as the Vilna Gaon or Elijah of Vilna, pulled Jews together against opposing cultures by acting as a “beacon” of intellect and political influence. Throughout his solitary life in the 1700s, one of the Gaon’s most important influences was in quelling the Hasidism movement, an offshoot of standard Jewish practice which traditionalists viewed as a threatening “sect from true Judaism.” In response, the Gaon declared a three-decade-long “organized struggle” on the movement and “created a need for all religious Jews to form a common front” against Hasidism. Due to the Gaon’s influence in Vilnius, the majority of Jews in the city remained traditionalists and bonded over the common effort to “[avail] themselves of coercive and punitive measures to . . . eradicate the [Hasidism] movement.”
Beginning in the nineteenth century, Vilnius’s Jewish community protected itself from hostility from the Russians and Poles and from non-Jews within Vilnius by persisting in its autonomous cultural growth and functioning as a united body. When the Russian Empire acquired Lithuania in the Polish Partition of 1795, the strong infrastructure of Vilnius’s Jewish community suffered. The Russian government, for example, outlawed the *kahal* in 1844 which hampered the community’s ability to pass legislation.\(^6\) Beyond that, antagonism toward Jews due to suspicions of Jewish influence in Tsar Alexander II’s 1881 assassination contributed to years of Russian-inflicted pogroms and other anti-Semitic actions in Vilnius.\(^7\) Despite these obstacles, Vilnius expanded its Jewish population with countless “modernization efforts,” including telephone networks in 1886 and municipal sewage systems in 1899, which brought an “influx of Jews” to the city. As the population increased, the cultural growth spurred by modernization highlighted the Jewish community’s persisting autonomy and strength despite persecution. This “enlightenment” contributed to important developments such as the *Yidisher Vishneshaflekher Institut*, or YIVO Institute for “further . . . study of the Yiddish language” in 1925. The YIVO collected Jewish documents for safekeeping and resulted in the formation of groups such as the “Yung-Vilne” in 1929.\(^8\) This organization consisted of writers, poets, and artists who sought to “revolutionize Yiddish literature” by publishing Jewish art and literature in newspapers and “promot[ing] cultural and linguistic pride.”\(^9\) Further,
the increased population led to a “lively cultural scene of painters,” an increased number of research facilities and libraries, and emerging music and sports clubs in Vilnius.\textsuperscript{10} These advances encouraged Jews to express their political opinions and united them against foreign control, almost the same way that the earlier Jewish struggle against Hasidism had brought the community together.

Despite the Nazi 1940s Ponary massacre of some 100,000 people, mostly Jews, Russians, and Poles, and their confinement of Jews in the Vilna ghettos, Vilnius’s Jewish community preserved its independent government and rich culture by forming an autonomous public health system. Beginning in June 1941, the massacre “purged” 5,000-10,000 of Vilnius’s Jews in the first three days and reduced the Jewish population into two ghettos, designated as Vilna Ghettos I and II.\textsuperscript{11} Horrified, Vilnius’s political groups, including the “Jewish Pioneer Youth Group,” rallied Jews to “reply to the enemy” by “resist[ing] . . . to the last breath” and presenting a unified front against the Nazis.\textsuperscript{12} One way they did so was by gathering groups of doctors to plan a new public health system weeks before the anticipated massacre. This careful planning was so successful that “within the first days of the ghetto[s] [the Jewish community] created an organized system of public health, the pillars of which were prophylaxis, healing, and child care.” After the massacre, the \textit{Judenrat} or “Jewish council” within the ghettos governed daily life and worked to find solutions to the poor living conditions. The lack of clean water led to the establishment of six “teahouses” for critical purposes such as cooking and cleaning. To combat starvation and sickness, the \textit{Judenrat} organized children-led “foodsmuggling campaigns” and installed “sanitation commissions” to limit the distribution of “questionable food” and administer vitamins that the Nazis had declared illegal. Additionally, the \textit{Judenrat} took advantage of the Germans’ fear of typhus and decided that all the ghettos’ inhabitants from 14-60 years of age needed be vaccinated against communicable diseases, which led to the vaccination of nearly 22,000 people and prevented diseases such as typhoid from becoming epidemic.\textsuperscript{13} Once again, the city’s historically inseparable Jewish community had united against foreign control.

The influence of a “Paper Brigade” to prevent the plunder of Jewish literature further demonstrated the drastic measures that Vilnius’s Jewish community took to preserve its rich culture and resist the Nazis. When the enemy decided to loot the Jews’ literary trove to gain further control over the ghettos, they realized that the masses of information stored at centers like YIVO would require large scale systems of plunder. Therefore, a “processing center” was opened in the YIVO building and forty skilled scholars, including members of the Yung-Vilne, were tasked with surrendering the most valuable thirty percent of books to the Nazis while selecting the remaining books for destruction.\textsuperscript{14} This group, called the “Paper Brigade,” could not bring themselves to destroy the literature they were devoted to celebrating and viewed this selection as an “eerie literary counterpart to the horrors being perpetrated on millions of Jews in
nearby death camps.” This psychological connection between Jewish murder and the plunder of books emphasizes that Jewish art and literature were essential aspects of the community’s identity. So, the Paper Brigade went to extreme lengths to prevent the “literary counterpart” of the “death camps” and preserve their community in any way possible.\(^{15}\) It retaliated against the Nazi overseers by smuggling “\textit{really valuable book[s]}” in their clothing to non-Jewish friends, hiding them in secret underground bunkers and even stashing books in the YIVO’s attic.\(^{16}\) Even after the members of the Paper Brigade were executed during the ghettos’ liquidation in 1943, several tons of Jewish literature “turned up on a platform at a nearby mill” and were ultimately saved by Dr. Anatas Ulpis, a Lithuanian-Soviet librarian who kept the books in his subterranean book chamber for more than forty years.\(^{17}\) The Paper Brigade’s efforts, which helped salvage thousands of priceless works from writers such as Leo Tolstoy and the Vilna Gaon is notable because it highlights the community’s rich culture and represents the community’s united effort to conserve its autonomy and culture under Nazi oppression.\(^{18}\)

An execution pit at Ponary.

Beyond all that, the United Partisans Organization’s relentless battle for the Vilna ghettos’ liberation under poet Abba Kovner demonstrates how the community’s uniquely strong cultural bond enabled Vilna ghettos’ united resistance. Abba Kovner was an influential poet who gained respect by leading the Vilna ghettos’ branch of the widespread \textit{Ha-Shomer-ha-Za’ir} youth movement, which responded to the Ponary massacre by sneaking out of the ghettos to carry
out sabotage missions, manufacturing bombs, training resistance fighters, and collecting weapons to be smuggled into the ghettos in false-bottomed coffins.\textsuperscript{19} In 1941, Kovner founded the United Partisans Organization (FPO) which he commanded and trained underground.\textsuperscript{20} The FPO’s resistance methods were similar to the \textit{Ha-Shomer-ha-Za’ir}, but the FPO was unique in its ambitious efforts to unite the ghetto resistance and in the way it was formed. Due to the importance of political art and literature in Vilnius’s culture, poets such as Abba Kovner were uniquely capable of using their art to galvanize the divided factions of the Vilna ghettos.\textsuperscript{21} With this power, Abba Kovner exerted his literary talent in a “stirring manifesto” that “urged Jews to rise up” and join the FPO.\textsuperscript{22} Furthermore, the FPO’s official anthem “\textit{Zog nit keynmol},” or “Never Say,” was written by an influential Jewish poet from Vilnius named Hirsh Glick and became a symbol of the FPO’s “spirit of defiance and determination.”\textsuperscript{23} Although the majority of the FPO was murdered in the Rudniki forest when the ghettos were liquidated in 1943, the members who escaped to neighboring countries later sang this song in remembrance of the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{24}

After liberation of the Vilna ghettos in 1944, the extensive restoration efforts included a revival of Vilnius’s Jewish population and a new awareness that Nazi forces had failed to destroy Vilnius’s Jewish community because of its rich culture. Prior to World War II, the Jewish population of Vilnius numbered
around 100,000, or forty-five percent of the city’s total population, and there were 105 synagogues in the city. According to the Jewish Virtual Library, the “post-war numbers are horrifying: Only 24,000 Jews survived.” Vilnius’s Jewish population today is about 5,000, only five percent of what it was before. Today, just one synagogue in Vilnius remains. Despite the staggering human cost of World War II, Vilnius’s Jewish culture still lives, thanks to those who survived the city’s liquidation and stood up to Nazi tyranny.25 As Dr. Shimon Alperovitch, former chairman of the Jewish Community of Lithuania and former citizen of Vilnius stated in an interview with the Yiddish Book Center, Jews “always spoke Yiddish” in Vilna and the language was a “very important” aspect of the culture. Therefore, Jews “weren’t afraid to speak Yiddish on the street openly . . . in Vilna” after the war, which Alperovitch noted did not happen elsewhere in the whole postwar Soviet Union, because “in Russia people were afraid.”26 Although Yiddish is no longer the main language of Vilnius’s Jewish community, the reappearance of such an important component of the community’s identity after the Holocaust signifies the strength of Jewish culture there.

By retaliating against Nazi forces during World War II and implementing historically successful governing tactics of autonomy and the cultivation of culture, Vilnius’s Jewish community ultimately preserved its extensive history and sense of community. Although tested multiple times throughout its history, the community persevered because of its common political views, indomitable religion, and a distinct appreciation for the arts which repeatedly empowered it against foreign discrimination and control.

Notes
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Pamphlets and Silenced Priests: 
How the Nazis Used Religion and Media 
to Popularize Eugenics

by Felipe Leao ’22

When Adolf Hitler came into power in 1933, he was full with ambitions and plans for Germany, chief among them racial purification and eugenics. Hitler dreamed of a race of pure-blooded Aryans without any genetic deficiencies, such as blindness, deafness, and “retardation.” To craft his race, however, Hitler would need the unwavering support of his people. Brute force alone could not achieve the sterilization of millions and the complete ban on all abortions needed to achieve such a goal, even in a totalitarian state like Nazi Germany. Therefore, Hitler needed to shift the public perception on eugenics from one of immoral pseudoscience to a practice imperative for the survival of the nation. But how could Hitler and the Nazis completely flip the public opinion about eugenics to build his master race? The answer is simple: by systematically silencing religious dissent and through massive disinformation campaigns.

This religious battle was already half won in 1933. Germany was almost completely Christian, split approximately between 52 percent Protestant and 33 percent Catholic. Christian dogma expressly forbade abortion and sterilization of all kinds. Therefore, when the Nazis stringently enforced their ban on abortions, by arresting, pushing out of Germany, or force-retiring abortionists, as well as arresting anyone who advertised contraceptives, they actually garnered support from German Catholic bishops and Protestant authorities.

Hitler had a special trick up his sleeve for silencing Catholic religious officials. During the Nazi rise to power, many Catholics, including German priests and the Vatican in Rome, worried that the new government would be extremely hostile toward Catholicism. Alfred Rosenberg, a prominent Nazi and an instrumental force in the Nazi victory, was a complete and outspoken anti-Catholic. Additionally, the Catholic Centre Party during the Weimar Republic had made itself a known enemy of the Nazis by siding with the Social Democrats and the German Democratic Party, as well as by joining the leftist Weimar Coalition. Catholics feared they would be persecuted under Nazi rule.

Instead, Hitler signed the Reichskonkordat—an agreement between the Vatican and the Nazis—in July of 1933. In that bargain, German Catholics were promised freedom to practice their faith and guaranteed their rights within Germany. This concordat greatly lessened the growing tension between Germany and the Vatican, as well as assuring all German Catholics that they had nothing to fear.

When Hitler’s new sterilization policies went into effect in January 1934,
Adolf Hitler, mid-1930s.

Catholic bishops across Germany were suddenly thrust into an impossible situation. On the one hand, sterilizations, consensual or not, were forbidden in Catholicism. However, any such objections to these sterilizations could potentially lose Catholics the new rights they had been granted in the July concordat. Furthermore, Catholic welfare institutions could potentially face bankruptcy if Catholics fought back in any way. Elisabeth Zillken, the chairman of the Board for Catholic Charity for Women, Girls, and Children, worried that the National Socialist Bureau of Welfare would assign the Catholic Charity only “hopeless” cases if Catholics did not comply. These “hopeless” cases would greatly strain the Charity’s resources, a result carrying the potential of closing of the institution.

Because of all these pressures, Catholic German bishops settled into a posture of silent dissent. While many head Catholic officials vehemently opposed eugenics on theological grounds, their disapproval rarely reached the ears of their parishioners. When Catholics asked their priests and bishops what to think about eugenics, they wanted “strong guidance” from their religious leaders. They received instead, says historian Claudia Koonz, “the same sort of equivocal statements the church gave out on the issue of divorced persons’ right to remarry.” Through a deal with the Vatican and fear of persecution, Hitler successfully had ensured that he would receive no resistance from Catholics as he pushed forward with his eugenics program.

In stark contrast with the Catholics’ case, rallying support for eugenics
from Protestants was easy. Unlike the Catholic Church, many Protestant churches had been in close cooperation with the German state for centuries, dating all the way back to Germany’s ancestor state, Prussia. In addition, many of the main proponents of eugenics, like Hans Harmsen, were Protestant. In fact, the Nazis actually invited notorious Protestant eugenicists, like Harmsen, to help draft their 1933 sterilization law. Protestant hospitals, unlike their Catholic counterparts, enthusiastically applied for eugenic operation licenses. The Protestant Committee on Sexual Ethics operated very closely with the Nazis and bolstered overall support. However, it is worth noting that many Protestants who supported eugenics did not share Hitler’s dream of a master race. They instead believed they were using science to lessen suffering in the world and halting the degradation of society by not allowing “genetically deficient” people to be born. Nevertheless, the outcome was the same: the Nazis would not encounter much Protestant dissent as they crafted their master race.

Propaganda for Nazi Germany’s Euthanasia Program: “This person suffering from hereditary defects costs the community 60,000 Reichsmarks during his lifetime. Fellow German, that is your money, too.” From the Office of Racial Policy

With all possible religious leaders sufficiently silenced or eagerly onboard, the Nazis now had to convince the masses to partake in their eugenics program. With Hitler’s unlimited control over all aspects of German media and life, the Nazis could bombard his message at any and every demographic. In
school, teenagers had to memorize the “10 Commandments for Selecting a Mate,” which included rules such as “If you are genetically healthy, you shall not remain unmarried,” “As a German, select only someone of Nordic blood as a mate,” and “Hope for as many children as possible.” Every year, the Nazis distributed over half a million calendars which supported racial purity. Before movies at the theaters, pro-eugenics propaganda pieces were always shown. When two certified-healthy Germans got married, the state presented them with a copy of *Mein Kampf*, as well as a pamphlet on how to “maintain good racial stock.” In any medical facility nationwide, pamphlets and charts on the benefits of eugenics could be found.

All these assorted propaganda pieces, combined with the aforementioned disapproval of abortion, were targeted primarily at increasing Germany’s birth rate, which had slowly been declining. Where the Nazi propaganda also concentrated, however, was in ways that it justified the sterilization of the ill and the dehumanization of people with hereditary diseases. Walter Gross, the director of the Office of Racial Policy, committed himself to the systematic dehumanization of the “unfit.” His most powerful speech, delivered in October 1934 to a crowd of German women, is a perfect example on how the Nazis were masters of language, using easy-to-understand, emotionally driven arguments to infect the public mind with their schemes. One passage from Gross’s speech, for example, reads as follows:

There was a winter in which children in Bavaria did not even have wooden shoes to wear as they walked through the snow on their way to school. They had to walk for hours bare-footed. At the same time, the government made sure that those unfortunate souls in a large institution had fresh bananas twice a week so that they got the necessary vitamins. But these vitamins could not give them joy or strength or health. . . . At the same time, there was a case where a single mentally ill Negro of English citizenship lived for 16 years in an institution in Berlin, costing 26,000 Marks. Money that was thrown away on a life that had no meaning. This 26,000 Marks could have been used to prepare a dozen strong, healthy, and gifted children for life and a job.
Here, Gross tricks the listener into believing the state has committed a great injustice: that thousands of marks were spent on a mentally ill patient while the money could have been better spent on non-mentally ill children elsewhere. The reason this argument is so persuasive is because, at first glance, it looks reasonable. After all, one might argue that non-mentally ill children are a better investment for the money. But the argument only works if one lets oneself believe what the Nazis called Lebensunwertes Leben—life unworthy of life. That is the idea that some of the living intrinsically have more value than others, consonant with the eugenics movement on grounds of doing what is best for the “fit” population and reducing the “unfit” population. Most of the time, a single speech is not enough to overturn a lifetime’s worth of morality. But the Nazis made sure that their propaganda seeped into every aspect of the Germans’ lives. With such messages repeated nonstop, the average German could easily become a eugenicist.

Indeed, these tactics worked with remarkable success. As Koonz has noted, “[a]fter three years of Nazi power, a population that had previously displayed considerable hostilities towards eugenic measures was saturated by a propaganda campaign to purify the blood.” According to some estimates, as many as 400,000 people were sterilized in Nazi Germany, while between 1933 and 1939 (when World War II began, and millions of young men were shipped off to war) Germany’s birth rate rose significantly, in stark contrast to the half century of birth rate stagnation and decline that preceded it.

The Nazis acted with precision, intent, and terrifying effectiveness in warping the German people’s beliefs into their own. When faced with zealous Catholic leadership unwilling to accept eugenics on theological grounds, the Nazis played off preexisting fears to ensure Catholic compliance. When faced with zealous Protestants who may have found eugenics unbearable, the Nazis used their deep-seated connections with Protestant institutions to bolster support. And finally, when faced with a population who did not share Hitler’s dream of the master race, the Nazis used emotional arguments and nonstop propaganda to wire the minds of the German populace. The lessons of the Nazis stand with great value for us today. Their crafty subversion of religious officials and their program of unrelenting propaganda demonstrate, with great clarity, why we must always question who gives us our information and what their motives may be.

Notes
3 Claudia Koonz, “Ethical Dilemmas and Nazi Eugenics: Single-Issue Dissent in

4 Ibid., 22.


7 Koonz, 23.

8 Ibid., 26.

9 Ibid., 26-27.

10 Ibid., 26-27.


12 Koonz, 15.

13 Childers, 340.

14 Koonz, 15.


16 Koonz, 16.


18 Koonz, 14.


20 “GapMinder Bubbles.”

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“The Silence that Hurt Me the Most”:
White Supremacy and Female African American Hair Styles
by Clodagh McEvoy-Johnston ‘21

“I remember feeling the disgust, confusion, and curiosity of why I would ever wear my hair like that,” recalls Nina Hanlon, a Greenwich Academy administrator. Hanlon remembers a time in her life when her peers, who were mostly white, reacted so negatively to her hair that she felt the need grow it out and use chemical relaxers in order to better fit in. Unfortunately, Mrs. Hanlon was not alone in her desire to use chemicals and hair straighteners. A great many African American women across the country use damaging hair styling products in order to achieve Western beauty standards perpetrated by white supremacists. White standards have influenced the previously rich African American hair culture in order to better control the black female body, leading to an internalized racism amongst black women who make an effort to achieve “white” or “good” hair that conforms to a European beauty standard. As Hanlon puts it, however, a “sort of national revolution is going” in which many African American women are wearing their hair more for their own families and communities and adopting styles that provide more ease and comfort for themselves.

Prior to enslavement, many African tribes had complex rituals surrounding their hair, and many African women based their self-value on the beauty of it. As a way to dehumanize and control these women, white imperialists and slave traders tried to eliminate any possible way for this part of African culture to flourish. On the African continent, hair was an intrinsic part of culture. Hair styles were specific to different tribes. Various curl patterns and braiding styles proved unique to certain cultural groups and could be used to identify the nationality of an African person. In many cultures, the specific shape, texture, and style of one’s hair represented one’s position in society. In one example, the Nok tribe of Nigeria, dating from around 500 BCE to 200 CE, documented elaborate hairstyles in their sculptures,1 revealing the importance of hair to a person’s image, as in Figure 1.2 Intricate patterns of hair could symbolize whether a women was...
ready for marriage, already married, pregnant, or looking for a suitor. The specific texture of many black women’s hair allowed for various different stylings. According to Sally-Ann Ashton, in her *Origins of the Afro Comb: 6,000 Years of Culture, Politics and Identity*, “African hair type can be described as hair that ranges from tight to wavy/straight in curl pattern. The shape of the natural curl and variations found in the hair type are influenced by genetics, social migration and location of birth.”

Different textures of hair contributed to the styles that African women wore. These included intricate braiding, plaiting, and leaving the hair to grow naturally. Because these hair styles were so complex and intricate, it took many painstaking hours for them to be accomplished. For this reason, hairstylists were valued members of many African communities. They spent innumerable hours mastering their crafts.

Women were able to confide in and come to trust their hairstylists through the large amounts of time spent together. Those occasions also provided a way for African women to decompress and relax. Going to get one’s hair done could be a cathartic experience, as well. One tool that many hairstylists used was the long toothed comb. These combs, known today as Afro combs and highly valued as objects, detangled curls effortlessly and without pain. Further, the widespread use of the Afro comb signaled how regional identities in Africa unified and connected people on a national scale. Similar in design and revered in African cultures across the continent, the Afro combs (see Figure 2) kept hair healthy and knot free, while enabling many of the intricate hair patterns that African women wore.

Because of the multitude of complex hairstyles that African women employed, many established their personal identity in the detail, type, and style of their hair. It often symbolized an African woman’s social positioning. In addition, hair was used as a way to express oneself. The time and effort put into one’s hair styling reflected not only a woman’s status, but how she wanted herself to be seen in other’s eyes, as evidenced in Figure 3. Many cultures intertwined the elusive concept of beauty with the more tangible reality of the style and texture of an individual’s hair. The beautiful complexity of an African woman's hair in many cases functioned to attract suitors and the public notice for other
reasons. Conversely, unkempt or unclean hair could be taken as a negative reflection, sometimes signifying that a woman was mentally ill or for some other reason lacked the capability care for herself. In other cultures, unkempt hair could mean that someone is in mourning: a wife told to wait before washing or styling her hair until a certain period after her husband died. This was a sign of respect because hair appeal and cleanliness was so highly sought after. The cultural value surrounding woman’s hair also led to a stigma against having a shaved head, with that kind of appearance becoming a way to dishonor a woman—and another expression of male control.

In order to impose their dominance on African women, white slave traders would shave the heads of the enslaved African women, a white supremacist act to strip them of their former culture. That simple act of cutting off hair disconnected the enslaved from their nationality and culture, which included the long history that associated their beauty with their hair. The complex braids and time-consuming styles that once denoted a women’s social status, nationality, and self-value thus were unceremoniously removed, and the shaved heads came to represent the emotional pain that white slavers had the power to inflict. In addition, African women thus victimized could no longer recognize who came from a similar background as themselves, thus further reducing the danger of revolt. As Brenda A. Randle writes, in I Am Not My Hair: African American Women and Their Struggles Embracing Natural Hair, “that was only the beginning of the process of wiping out [their] culture and identity to break their spirit to make it easier to control [them].” Shaving the heads of enslaved women amounted to a kind of cultural genocide.

Enslavement, moreover, provided no possible time or space for the elaborate rituals of hair care that took place on the African continent. After all, the primary reason for Africans to be enslaved was for them to labor involuntarily under brutal conditions on white-controlled New World plantations where little time remained for themselves. In addition, field labor created a necessity for women to cover their hair in order to protect themselves from the elements. But another reason why enslaved women covered their heads was to hide them because of the traditional shame of showing matted hair, short hair, or their lack of hair altogether. Not only was the lack of the Afro comb detrimental to enslaved women’s hair, but also to the common cultural identity that had necessitated that kind of hair utensil. Because of the lack of proper hair care tools, many enslaved women turned to combing their hair with horse or wool cards during the minimal time they could devote to their appearance. These cards had rough steel prongs that often cut into the scalp, but this seemed a bearable factor for enslaved African American women if it meant they could return to some shred of the hair culture that slavery had stripped from them.

Similarly to the treatment by Atlantic slave traders, white slave masters sometimes punished female slaves by shaving their heads—a further expression
of white supremacist dehumanization. Often enough, however, white slave masters purchased enslaved women precisely because of the beauty of their hair as emblematic of sexual appeal and the potential to rear children. Not only did masters view these women as objects of desire, some habitually carried out the sexual operation themselves, routinely raping them to expand the population of slaves. The beauty of their hair thus could not protect slave women from the cruelties of slavery and could even worsen them. Sometimes, the wives of white slave masters, resentful of their husbands’ or sons’ sexual desire for the black female slaves, insisted on having slave women’s hair removed in order to devalue them in the eyes of white males. In one such case, according to Shane White and Graham White, in *Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, “the young slave Hannah had ‘her Hair… lately cut in a very irregular Manner, as a Punishment for Offences.’”

Because slavery forcibly separated black women from their original hair customs, many turned to Western beauty standards in order to have “good” or “white” hair. During and after slavery, white people, especially white women, began to denigrate the texture and styles of African American women’s hair. One way white people did this was by calling enslaved people’s hair “wool” and forcing their slaves to refer to their own hair that way. In an example of this from *Slave Hair and African American Culture*, “One former slave, whose father was the plantation owner’s oldest son, told how ‘Mistress ask me what that was I had on my head and I would tell her, ‘hair’ and she said, ‘No, that ain’t hair, that’s wool.’ . . . I had straight hair and my mistress would say, ‘Don't say hair, say wool.’” This enslaved person's experience reflects the ways a white-dominated society routinely told black women that they were not only sub-human but also animal-like. Many African American women then internalized what those in a white supremacist society told them and reacted as they had to in order to conform.

Black women mimicked Western beauty standards in a variety of ways. One was through hair straightening. Many enslaved women straightened their hair using grease or animal fat. This method is similar to a method used by women on the African continent. Women would first grease their hair, then press it flat against their head, and finally wrap it using bits of scrap cloth. When the hair dried and was removed from the wrap, it would achieve a straightened effect similar to that of many white women’s hair. Black women often went through the laborious process because certain privileges came with assimilation to white beauty standards, enhancing the long-lasting idea that straight hair equates with success. The concept of specific African American women receiving privileges is manifested in the contrast between the “house Negro” and the “field Negro.” “Field Negroes” probably hated their masters the most because of the atrocious conditions they were subjected to, working tirelessly without any sort of benefit in return. By contrast, the “house Negro,” working and living in the master’s
house, received all of the amenities that came thereby, including desirable clothing, plenty of food, and a good place to sleep. Additionally, many “house Negroes” escaped the brutal punishments that slave masters administered in order to establish fear in their slaves. “House Negroes” did not receive their role by chance but rather were appointed based on the masters’ judgment of who was most reputable. Frequently, that would be the ones who assimilated most to white beauty and cultural standards. Many enslaved black women therefore assumed in that making themselves more “presentable,” or in other words straightening their hair and anything else that made them more “House”-worthy, would increase their chances at success in a white-dominated society. In doing so, however, they not only conformed to Eurocentric beauty standards but also internalized racism perpetrated by white supremacists.

Today, some African American women still believe that having straightened hair will lead to a path of easier success in a white-dominated society. Apart from being stigmatized, Afros or natural styles such as dreadlocks have become symbolic of radicalism within the black community, reflecting the Rastafarian and Black Panther movements. The Black Panthers, a radical, generally African American political group, reached their height of enrollment in the 1960s and 1970s. The Black Panthers, classified as radical because of their more eccentric beliefs, such as black men being exempt from military service and that all black people should be released from jails and prisons. The afro hair style, natural and therefore radical, also helped to define the Black Panther movement. Rastafarianism is an Afrocentric movement also aiming to move black people away from oppressive social structures. Many Rastafarians wear dreadlocks as a symbol of resistance and unification. According to Shane White and Graham White, “Afro hairstyles of the 1960s and 1970s were easily decipherable statements of black pride, bold challenges to a white aesthetic that had long made curly and kinky hair a symbol of inferiority.” Association with such groups or radical ideals often has seemed a poor choice for African American women, however, because it might further ostracize them from society and success. Therefore, many women in the African American community have continued to associate success with straight hair.

The recent case of EEOC v. Catastrophe Management Solutions is a primary example of how black women’s hair has affected their mobility and success in the workplace under white domination. Chastity Jones, an African American woman living in Alabama, was offered a job by the Catastrophe Management Solutions Company in the city of Mobile in 2010. However, Jones wore her hair in dreadlocks, which proved to be detrimental to her position in the company. Shortly after Jones began working, a Human Resources representative told her that she must cut her hair or be dismissed from the company. Jones refused to do so and her job was taken away from her. Jones then brought the company to court. While Chastity Jones took action against white supremacists, some African American women still see this court case as a deterrent from leaving their hair in its natural state. The belief that natural hair blocks African American women
from advancing in their careers and being successful in a white-dominated society has led many African American women to chemically straighten their locks.

In order to achieve the hair that European beauty standards have deemed “good,” African American women still go to extreme lengths. An industry surrounding black hair “care” has emerged and expanded. White-owned styling-product industries for European hair have realized this budding market and potential for sales. One of these hair straightening products is called a relaxer which contains high amounts of chemicals and other agents that are extremely harmful for hair. Women leave the relaxer in their hair, the chemicals causing the natural curls to disappear. Another product used to straighten hair is the hot comb. A hot comb involves a metal comb or brush being heated up to high temperatures and then passed through hair to eliminate unwanted curl or bounce. Both of these widely used methods are extremely damaging and often break the natural curl pattern and strength of women’s hair. However, many black women still feel the need to use them in order to succeed in a white-dominated society. As Brenda A. Randle has written, in *I Am Not My Hair: African American Women and Their Struggles Embracing Natural Hair*, “racialized beauty standards combined with the color complex make hair texture and length an essential part of Black female identity.”

Ironically, as the use of hair relaxers and straightening methods becomes more commonplace, a disconnect between white supremacy and straightened hair is beginning to occur. This separation is the reason why some African American women are straightening their hair not as a means to assimilate to white culture but to connect more with their own community. Gloria Jean Watkins, better known by her pen name “bell hooks,” discusses the African American community and her experiences with hair in her piece *Straightening Our Hair*. She writes about how as a child, she did not realize the ways in which the process of black women straightening their hair intertwined with white supremacy. She viewed the process as a catalyst for unification amongst women in the black community, fondly recalling moments where the members of her family and others in the black community came together and de-stressed while using various methods to straighten their hair. This affectionate recollection of straightening her hair and going to the beauty salon is not singular to her. Because many black women are beginning to associate the process of straightening their hair with sentimental memories of their childhood and community, there is now a movement away from the feeling that they have to straighten their hair for the sake white dominated society.

This movement can be seen through interviews of three African American women in the Greenwich Academy community. Though the sample size is relatively small, the three women come from differing backgrounds and provide different insight to the experience of black women in a white-dominated world.
One black Greenwich Academy student was asked to recall her earliest memory with her hair. Similar to bell hooks, she affectionately recalled “sitting with my mom—she’s sitting above me—and her pulling at my hair with a comb, or a flat iron, or a blow dryer.” Remembering a time in her life when she was reliant on her mother to do her hair reveals a break from the urge to assimilate to white culture through hair straightening. Instead, the student’s mother straightening her hair is a cherished memory. The student does not, and did not, wear her hair straightened because she wanted to look more like her white peers but rather because the hairstyle made it easy to take care of, and the time consuming process allowed her to spend time with her mother.

Another African American woman, a music teacher at Greenwich Academy named Erica McCants, recounts how her feelings about her own hair have changed: “As I’ve gotten older, I’ve become much more comfortable with it and I’ve learned how to manage it and also—firstly—to become more comfortable and proud of it. I tend to wear it straight just because it is easier for me to manage.” Even though McCants chooses to wear her hair straightened, it is obvious that she feels comfortable with her hair, and her choice to keep it straight is mainly for ease of styling. McCants feels connected with her family through her journey with straightening her hair. Her paternal grandmother was a beautician, and McCants learned how to style her hair from her grandmother. She too has fond memories of learning about her hair, suggesting how far African American women have come from the stigmatization of unstraightened hair.

It is further evident that a movement is really occurring, as Nina Hanlon says, that some African American women are beginning to reclaim the sense of empowerment that existed for black women on the African continent. Hanlon, who “remembered feeling the disgust, confusion, and curiosity of why I would ever wear my hair like that,” also recollected that after high school, she never used chemical relaxers again. While she chooses not to straighten her hair, Hanlon feels that she is beginning to see “more and more girls are starting to wear their hair naturally and I love seeing it because I’m like that’s them embracing who they are and being happy with what they have.” In addition, Hanlon states, “I think there is sort of a national revolution going on with black hair. I think there is something on the outside that’s starting to shift.” Whether that shift is black women wearing their hair naturally or just embracing their hair when it is straightened or not, there is evidently a change happening. Hanlon embodies the beginnings of the movement amongst African American women to reclaim the beauty that once existed in Africa, as she wears her hair naturally and, further, because she herself has gone through a journey with her hair, having it once straightened using chemicals, much like other African American women as they reject Eurocentric beauty standards.

White supremacy has separated African American women from the hair culture that existed for black women in Africa. This happened so that whites
could better control the African female body and subject black slave women to gruesome labor on white-owned plantations. In that process, enslaved Africans lost all the resources they had to style their hair traditionally. In addition to depriving black women of their ability to achieve the intricate hair patterns that they enjoyed in Africa, white supremacists also began to pathologize African American women’s hair. Because of this, many black women began to define themselves by Eurocentric beauty standards. This served as only detrimental to African American women because many then undertook harmful practices of hair straightening in order to conform. Some black women also believed that in order to be successful in a white-dominated society, they needed to straighten their hair. A revolution, however, has begun in the female African American community, a shift occurring among black female youth towards natural hair or the straightening of hair for their own liking and not that of white beauty standards. Nina Hanlon remembers going back to school with her natural hair and “not a single person said anything.” “It was the silence that hurt me the most,” she recalls. What will be the catalyst that finally and completely breaks the stigma against black women after centuries of their conforming to the beauty standards of white supremacists?

Notes

3 Ibid., 1.
4 Ibid., 2.
7 Ibid., 7.
11 Ibid., 7.
13 Ibid., 5.

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The Cold War’s Hot Impact in American Schools:
Fitness and S.T.E.M. Education

by Lindsay Westerfield ‘21

During the Cold War, U.S. policymakers sought to advance educational standards in an effort to gain supremacy over the Soviet Union. Underinvestment during the Great Depression of the 1930s had weakened the American educational system, which by the end of World War II had fallen years behind its Soviet and Western European rivals. Following World War II, studies showed mediocre physical fitness and poor levels of science and mathematics training among American students. Beginning in the 1950s, federal overhaul of the American education system was driven by the fear that American student shortcomings might show weakness or even lead to defeat at the hands of the Soviets.¹ Cold War competition and the United States’ desire to demonstrate superiority over the USSR led to a concerted effort to advance physical education training and to improve science, mathematics, and foreign language teaching.

Physical development became a priority when it was determined that foreign students were more physically fit than American youth. In December 1953, Dr. Hans Kraus and Bonnie Prudden published their first study, “Muscular Fitness and Health,” revealing how childhood physical education was in a state of crisis in America.² In 1954, they published a follow-up study called “Minimum Muscular Fitness Tests in School Children,” where they presented solutions to remedy the failing physicality of American youth by looking at the fitness of European nations’ children. This study revealed that 57.9 percent of American youth compared to only 8.7 percent of European children fell below minimum health standards for muscular fitness and physical agility.³ These publications awakened a fear among Americans that the country was falling behind the Soviet Union in

Bonnie Prudden.
the fitness of the next generation. The United States federal government responded with a new program to increase school-based physical education. On July 16, 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, with Executive order 10673, established the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports (PCPFS), aimed at developing healthy American children. Efforts began by establishing “The President’s Challenge,” a school-based incentive for youth to better their physical fitness by rewarding those who were able to achieve benchmark activity levels. It created physical standardized tests, including dashes of various yard-lengths, as well as sit-ups and pull-ups.

President John F. Kennedy continued and furthered Eisenhower’s work on American fitness. In 1960, before his inauguration, Kennedy wrote “The Soft American,” an article in *Sports Illustrated* in which he stated that if Americans overlooked their physical health, the United States would fade as a global imperial power. He stated that American soldiers must have “bodies which have been conditioned by a lifetime of participation in sports and interest in physical activity . . . . [The] stamina and strength which the defense of liberty requires are not the product of a few weeks’ basic training or a month’s conditioning. . . . Thus, in a very real and immediate sense, our growing softness, our increasing lack of physical fitness, is a menace to our security.” By relating improved physical health to U.S. domestic security and the defense of the nation against threats from foreign powers, President Kennedy motivated many Americans to support the development of a P.E. curriculum in the public school system.

During his presidency, Kennedy devised a plan to improve the physical health of American youth. In this plan, the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare and the Secretary of the Interior joined to create the White House Committee on Health and Fitness. Kennedy’s plan required the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to research ways to work with local and state governments to reverse the poor state of physical fitness of American youth. The plan also included a requirement that every state governor attend an annual meeting to determine the progress of their local communities and come up with ideas for improvement for the coming year. Kennedy’s plan insured that physical education would be added permanently to each local public school’s curriculum, and his council also developed and promoted a sample fitness curriculum with
input from influential educational and medical organizations. Approximately a quarter of a million children from six states participated in this pilot curriculum during 1961-1962, and 50 percent more students passed the physical fitness test at the end of that school year.  

While Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy launched new policies, one might think, wrongly, that World War II was the true spark of a long-term physical education curriculum in the United States. In the 1940s, P.E. curricula on college campuses escalated and became training programs that prepared college students for the physical demands of battlefields in Germany and Asia. This was to “add to the strength and endurance of the students and defense workers so that they will be able to meet ‘whatever is required of them’ by the government,” reported the New York Times in 1941. During this time physical education programs emphasized swimming and gymnastics while building muscular strength and stamina. However, fitness standards declined right after the end of World War II, when the U.S. government no longer needed to train troops for war. In a 1951 Yale University study, 51 percent of incoming freshmen passed the P.E. test, but by 1956, that level had plummeted to 43 percent. By 1960, the percentage of students passing P.E. requirements fell further to 38 percent. The idea that World War II caused a long term physical education revaluation is not supported by the fact that only six years after the war, and afterward, college freshmen students started to show declining physical fitness. Thus, it was the Cold War that promoted—or restored—the higher fitness standards of wartime.

The Cold War also prompted changes in math, science, and language education. The landmark event for that was the Soviet launch of Sputnik, marking the start of the space race. This successful Russian satellite caused national American reflection that eventually encouraged the development of S.T.E.M curricula in schools and increased enrollment in second language courses, enabling more students to converse internationally. That was something new for Americans who, historically, had been more isolationist. After the launch of Sputnik on October 4, 1957, the American press and public criticized President Eisenhower for not giving more attention to space exploration. In response,
Eisenhower initiated a space program under the new National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). However, NASA alone would not be enough, as a successful program would demand new engineers and scientists from universities in years to come, hence the origin of America’s S.T.E.M curriculum (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). This need for more well-trained engineers led the Eisenhower White House to seek congressional support for school science and mathematics curricula in order to meet the needs of national defense and the federal government. In 1958, Congress funded the Eisenhower education plan, approving $800 million dollars for the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). The legislation provided loans to college students preparing to be teachers, financial aid to students who excelled in S.T.E.M. subjects as well as languages, and gave fellowships for doctoral students. It bolstered public school science and mathematics curricula and funded foreign language classes, particularly those designated as vital to national security, such as Mandarin Chinese and Russian.

The Federal government took several other remarkable steps to improve the nation's S.T.E.M. education. The Eisenhower White House created a position entitled “Presidential Science Advisor,” who provided analysis and solutions regarding S.T.E.M matters in the United States workforce and school system. Additionally, Congress reorganized committee structures to emphasize science policy, and Congress tripled the funding for the National Science Foundation. As a result, local schools began to change. They focused on the special developmental needs of exceedingly talented students by placing these students into upper-level courses and starting matching funds for science, math, and various foreign languages. Educational tools also improved. Language labs were equipped with headphones and microphones, second language courses were implemented at the elementary school level, and lab kits and projectors were added to science classrooms.

For all of that, it is still tempting to argue that the Cold War left no long-term legacy on S.T.E.M. education because, according to the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), American students today score
poorly in math and sciences compared to their other subjects. Many science educators believe that the 2001 “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) program is the root of this post-Cold War decline because it pushed the sciences out of the classroom in favor of reading and mathematics.\textsuperscript{24} In any event, according to the NAEP, between 1973 and 2012, based on testing of more than 50,000 public and private school students, mathematics scores of 9-year-olds still increased almost 12 percent, and those of 13-year-olds increased over 7 percent.\textsuperscript{25}

American motivation to demonstrate superiority and dominance over the USSR elevated the standards of courses and improved students’ competencies in math, sciences, language study, and physical fitness. Called to action by two Cold War Presidents, Eisenhower and Kennedy, the United States government established programs for citizens to improve physical fitness, especially in public schools, by implementing new P.E. standards and invested in the development and expansion of math, science and foreign language curricula. In short, Cold War competition between the United States and the Soviet Union had the effect of dramatically improving the American education system.

Notes
1 Spencer C. J. Gregg, “Crisis in Education—The Effect of the Cold War on the American Education System,” Young Historians Conference, PDXScholar, pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1104&context=younghistorians (accessed 19 Apr. 2019).
3 Ibid.
4 Gregg, “Crisis in Education.”
6 Gregg, “Crisis in Education.”
8 Gregg, “Crisis in Education.”
9 “The Federal Government Takes on Physical Fitness.”
10 Gregg, “Crisis in Education.”
11 “The Federal Government Takes on Physical Fitness.”
14 Conner and Bohan. “The Second World War’s impact on the progressive educational movement.”
15 Gregg, “Crisis in Education.”
17 Gregg, “Crisis in Education.”
19 Gregg, “Crisis in Education.”
20 Ibid.
22 Gregg, “Crisis in Education.”

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The Cos Cob Railroad System and Its Impact on Suburbanization and the Regional Economy

by Alex Morgan ’20

The Cos Cob Railroad Station, located along the New Haven Railroad Line in Greenwich and symbolic of an earlier era, allowed for the transportation of people between the suburbs of Connecticut to the large economic center of New York City.1 The station first opened on December 25, 1848, with four different tracks: two express lines, one going toward New York, another heading into northeast Connecticut, and two main lines, following the same pattern.2 As the locomotive network in New York City expanded during the early 1900s, the massive increase in smoke created by the steam locomotives of that day hindered the visibility of railroad engineers, leading to a major accident in 1903 and calling for passage of the Kaufman Act in the New York State Assembly (1923).3 That landmark legislation required that all railroads in New York City be made electric by January 1st, 1926.4 Connecticut was among the first to adapt to this requirement, building the Cos Cob Power Plant in 1907 for the electrification of the New Haven Railroad. This plant was one of the most advanced of its time, able to power trains on both the high-speed main line and the low-speed New York City lines, electrically.5 Soon after the railroad’s implementation, the town of Stamford quickly blossomed into the City of Stamford and experienced an unprecedented degree of economic prosperity.6 Without this advanced railroad system, this dramatic growth of the City of Stamford, the development of Greenwich as a suburb, and the expansion of the economy of New York City would not have been possible.

Suburbanization in America first started around the beginning of the 19th century with the increasing scale of businesses and enterprises, which separated the workplace from residences.7 As people became wealthier and began to crave a higher quality of life, they sought more living space for themselves, which the densely packed urban area of a city could no longer provide. In New York City, the immigration of foreigners through Ellis Island, from 1842 through 1954, and the migration of impoverished people from the southern United States caused the city to be more crowded.8 These new residents of the city typically accepted low-income jobs, due to their limited educational levels, and could not afford to live outside the city.9 But wealthier urban residents could relocate to escape the increasingly cramped living conditions of the city, which now pressured sweeping changes in the demographics of wealth. An increasing number of affluent people resided outside the city, in suburbs, while the number of impoverished remaining in the city center also exploded.10 In addition, business expansion and population growth caused the housing within cities to become increasingly expensive in the late 19th century. The cost of commuting regularly into and out the city became compellingly less than that of remaining there,11 espe-
cially so in the days of primitive automobiles and long before the building of major highways, including the interstate ones created under the Federal Highway Act of 1956.\textsuperscript{12}

The railroad’s electrical power plant, in Cos Cob Connecticut.

So, the only available mode of efficient transportation was by rail. Railroads were quickly built in the rural areas around the city, which later developed into suburbs, surrounding New York. The founder of the \textit{Stamford Sentinel}, William H. Holly, reported on the first trial run of the new locomotive system in 1848: “The train had to remain at Cos Cob Bridge some three hours for the last rails to be laid over it and the delay gave ample opportunity to the people to come and witness the wonderful feat. The general impression among them seemed to be, that the first train that attempted to cross this pass would also be the last.”\textsuperscript{13} The new transportation system stunned everyone, many believing it was a novelty witnessed only once in a lifetime. The noise alarmed some people, however. As described by Edgar Hoyt, an editor of the \textit{Stamford Advocate}: “The citizens of the village as well as the horses, cattle, etc., were nearly frightened out of their propriety . . . by such a horrible scream.”\textsuperscript{14} Yet the new means of transportation would become a vital part of the lives of many. Rural areas, too, became more populated with the building of railroads, as towns sprawled out from every railroad depot. Just as every other train station, that of Cos Cob drew people toward it, converting this quaint rural area into a more densely populated suburb, tied to Greenwich and, ultimately, the big city.

Where the Cos Cob Station differed from the other railway terminals, however, is its location: precisely in between New York City and Stamford.\textsuperscript{15} The
latter was not a heavily populated area before the railway was built; however, its construction fostered Stamford’s popularity as a location for wealthy New York residents who wanted to purchase waterfront homes. Stamford continued to expand, and it eventually turned into a fledgling urban area. But instead of large financial businesses of today, it had a lot of manufacturing industry. By the early 1900s, the suburban areas like Greenwich also became attractive to the urban residents of Stamford. Greenwich featured a convenient location between two major cities, giving the location significant appeal and accounting largely for the future concentration of wealth in Greenwich. After 1900, the population of Greenwich tripled from ten-thousand residents to thirty-thousand residents within thirty years. This population growth, and the gathering of wealth that went with it, allowed Greenwich to fund the creation of the Cos Cob Power Plant, the key installation for the electrifying of the New Haven Railroad Line.

Passengers awaiting the train at the Cos Cob Station, 1950s.

After the Kaufman Act, the Cos Cob Power Plant had become necessary to reduce the locomotive-generated smoke that covered the routes into New York City. Ironically, the plant used a coal-fired steam engine to create electricity yet, for its time, was extremely advanced because of its use of both direct current and alternating current. Up until this point, the low-voltage direct current system had been the standard for railway systems, but it was inefficient for long-distance, high speed, and large payload transportation. Working with Baldwin-Westinghouse, and his Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company of Pennsylvania, the New Haven Railroad engineers installed high-voltage overhead wires from Woodlawn, New York, into northeast Connecticut, going through Stamford and ending in Danbury. The Cos Cob Power Plant would then be
employed to power all of these wires, which were used by the trains. When the first electrified train traveled from the Grand Central Terminal in New York City to the Cos Cob Station on July 24th, 1907, a scientific advancement had been confirmed. The combination of direct current and alternating current allowed the rail network to efficiently access the cities as well as the surrounding suburbs. In addition to eliminating smoke, the new electric-powered railway was far faster than the conventional steam-powered, decreasing commuting times and making suburbs all the more alluring.

Despite the large number of people leaving for suburban areas, the population of cities continued to increase as well. Businesses grew rapidly in cities, quickly developing the need for the structural delegation of different jobs. The first companies with this type of “big business” structure were those of the fastest growing industry of the late 1800s: railroad companies. Of these, the largest in northeast America was the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad Company, owned by the storied financier J.P. Morgan. This company monopolized the railroads around New York City and into Connecticut, funding the creation of the Cos Cob Railroad Station and its power plant. The large monopoly the company enjoyed gave rise to its “big business” structure, later influencing many other large corporations, including John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil Company in 1863.

The rapid development of corporations led to an age of vertical expansion, as many skyscrapers were built to accommodate these large businesses in the early 1900s. These skyscrapers were almost exclusively used for commercial purposes, and rarely for residences, unlike their current usage. This meant that the amount of residential space did not increase so much, further driving suburbanization. In general, the quality of city housing declined while the population density increased. The large number of poor immigrants and migrants searched for cheap dwelling places, often in dank tenements close to their places of employment within the cities. With the boom in the number of jobs, general wealth increased in New York City and a heightened number of people could afford the suburban lifestyle. New York would hold a quarter of the nation’s wealth in 1920 due to this expansion. In Greenwich, the Cos Cob Railroad Station continued to stimulate the growth of the town, and by 1960 over fifty-thousand people resided there.

With the growth of business, the concentration of wealth in Greenwich intensified because the town provided a high-quality lifestyle, first inspired by the progressive Cos Cob Power Plant. Without the plant, the efficient electric-powered high-speed rail transportation, which was also far quieter and did not disrupt residents as much as steam-powered locomotives, would not have been possible. All the suburban settlers might have been driven towards other locations with similar geographical advantages to Greenwich but featuring a higher-
An electrically powered train on the Metro-North line, circa 1950s.

quality of living, towns such as Rye, New Rochelle, or White Plains on the eastern side of New York.31

The Cos Cob Railroad Station, aided by the advanced Cos Cob Power Plant, nourished the growth of suburban Greenwich, while also expanding the economies of nearby cities—New York and Stamford—all because of the expansive railroad system created by the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad Company. All of these effects have been long-lasting and can be observed today. Greenwich has remained one of the wealthiest towns in Connecticut and one of the top twenty wealthiest towns in the nation.32 The Cos Cob Railroad Station still currently functions and continues to transport suburban residents into New York City. According to the January 2007 Visual Inspection Report of the Cos Cob Train Station and the 1988 National Park Service images, it remains in good condition due to its recent restoration.33 Although the train station remains, the Cos Cob Power Plant was less fortunate and was decommissioned in 1986, later to be demolished in 2001, because of its now outdated technology.34 Even so, without the Cos Cob Railroad System, the history of Greenwich would be drastically different, and much of the economic success we observe today might not have occurred.

Notes
3 Cos Cob (Metro-North Station), ipfs.io/ipfs/QmXoypizjW3WknFijnKLwHCnL72vedxjQkDDP1mXWo6uco/wiki/
Cos_Cob_(Metro-North_station).html.

4 Kaufman Electrification Act, New York State Assembly, 1923.

5 “Cos Cob Power Plant Records.”


9 Ibid.


14 Holly and Hoyt, “First Train to Stamford.”

15 “New York and New Haven Railroad.”

16 Stamford Historical Society, “A Condensed History of Stamford, CT.”

17 Ibid.

18 “New York and New Haven Railroad.”


20 “Cos Cob Power Plant Records.”

21 Ibid.

22 Holly and Hoyt, “First Train to Stamford.”

23 “Cos Cob Power Plant Records.”


28 Ibid.

29 “Over Time: Greenwich’s Historical Population.”


31 “New York and New Haven Railroad.”

32 Alfred Branch, “Pair Of Greenwich Zip Codes Among Nation's Wealthiest: New Report,” Greenwich, CT Patch, patch.com/connecticut/greenwich/pair-
greenwich-zip-codes-among-nations-wealthiest-new-report.


34“Cos Cob Power Plant Records.”
Whenever the Merritt Parkway is mentioned, it is usually in conjunction with I-95 and generally as a means of traveling through Connecticut. Yet the Merritt is more than a venue for transportation. It is a study in the political, economic, and social circumstances of the times in which it was conceived and built.

The need for a new road in Connecticut had become a serious problem by the mid-1920s. At the start of that decade, over 1,000 cars had been registered in both Connecticut and New York, yet many homes did not have telephone service, indoor bathrooms, running water, or central heat. On many weekends, New Yorkers travelled through Connecticut on the Post Road, also known as Route 1, to attend sports events at Yale or to travel to Boston. In Greenwich, watching cars travel on Putnam Avenue, the local name for the Post Road, had become a spectator sport in and of itself. But the end product of this heavy traffic was too many cars and trucks on a two-lane road and, along with that, many severe accidents.

From 1923 to 1931, the Connecticut Highway Department embarked upon a series of projects in an attempt to improve the traffic problems on Route 1 and its intersecting roads. Some of the improvements included traffic lights,
which resulted in additional congestion on the Post Road. Segments of the road between New York and New Haven were widened to four lanes, and in some cases, rerouted around towns, but this did not alleviate the massive vehicle overcrowding that was plaguing Connecticut. During this period, both highway commissioner Charles Bennett and his successor John Macdonald each began studies of traffic on the Post Road. Macdonald is credited with most of the thought process behind the building of the Merritt Parkway. A Democrat appointed by Democratic Governor Wilbur Cross, he was kept on in his role by Republican Governor Raymond Baldwin. Macdonald studied the possibility of a trade route parallel to the Post Road, but abandoned the proposal because he did not believe that businesses would relocate from the Post Road. Further, the cost of the new route in the shoreline area would be prohibitive. He presented to the Fairfield County Planning Association (FCPA) a proposal for a route that ran parallel to Route 1 but farther north, where its value might be more picturesque than commercial. Accordingly, in 1924, the FCPA, headquartered in the Bridgeport Chamber of Commerce, was tasked with the building of a road that would “preserve the particular look and feel of Fairfield County.”

Financial setbacks, real estate tangles, and land purchase issues crippled the construction of the parkway for years. One of the first main stumbling blocks was who was going to pay for the road. One question was whether the state as a whole should pay for a road that seemed to benefit only one small part. Republican Congressman Schuyler Merritt pressured the General Assembly to allow Fairfield County to issue $15 million in bonds, which would gradually be used through the highway commissions fund. The state allocated an additional $6 million. The federal government contributed nothing.

Aside from the funding issue, in order to create the parkway the road would have to go through land owners’ properties. Macdonald decided to not use eminent domain and instead he hired a state land purchaser named G. Leroy Kemp, a Republican from Darien. Kemp was allowed to share the information about the parkway proposal with two other realtors, Thomas H. Cooke of Greenwich, and Samuel H. Silberman of Westport. Their job was to propose offers to landowners and negotiate sales with the state. The realtors arranged deals whereby the state paid extremely high prices, and they split their commission money evenly with Kemp. After six years, their scheme was uncovered by Warren Creamer, a parkway project engineer, who exposed that their practices were inflating the parkway’s cost. Soon after, on March 18, 1938, Kemp, Cook, and Silberman were indicted by a grand jury for conspiracy to illegally divide the real estate commissions. Although Commissioner Macdonald was not personally indicted, the scandal, including investigation and trials, occurred while he was in charge. Governor Cross called for Macdonald’s resignation, which Macdonald delivered on April 29, 1938, just as the first stretch of the Merritt Parkway was opening.
In addition to all this, disagreements arose over the naming of the roadway. Most of the Connecticut state legislators agreed that the roadway should be named after Schuyler Merritt, but differed as to whether it should be named a highway, boulevard, or parkway. Commissioner Macdonald objected to the road’s being named a boulevard, stating that “The time before the Merritt Boulevard is a fact [that] would be shortened if Fairfield County people would stop calling it a boulevard.” Macdonald knew that in other parts of Connecticut, communities would begin to ask for a boulevard too. In the end, Macdonald and the rest of the Republicans decided on calling the Merritt a parkway.

Traffic on the Merritt, circa 1940s.

In spite of these challenges, much good came as a result of the building of the Merritt. The construction began on July, 1, 1934, during the Great Depression and provided employment opportunities to both skilled and unskilled workers. Macdonald recognized this opportunity and ordered scheduled highway work to be “moved forward as rapidly as the department could formulate plans and specs for the construction,” with intentions of “aiding the jobless.” The parkway was not only an impending relief for major traffic in Connecticut, but it was also an important source of jobs during the Great Depression. The Highway Department estimated that the construction of the parkway would employ up to 2,000 men for up to two years. Apart from the jobs created directly in construction, the project stimulated jobs in all sectors of the state’s building industry.
One thing that was never disagreed upon was that the landscape must reflect the beauty of the land along the parkway’s route. A. Earl Wood, engineer for roadside development, and landscape architect Weld Thayer Chase both wanted to preserve the natural scenery of the Merritt. During the process, they planted 22,000 trees and 40,000 shrubs. They also worked to preserve and protect any native trees that stood in the way of the road. Shortly after the parkway opened in 1940, it was common for families and people to have picnics along the side of the Merritt. Horses, buggies, bicycles, pedestrians, billboards, and U-turns were allowed for a short amount of time until they were all banned by the Merritt Parkway Advisory Committee due to the safety issues.

Aside from the natural beauty that came from the landscaping, the bridges played a large role in the design of the parkway. Architect George Dunkelberger took the job of designing of all 69 bridges on the Merritt Parkway. He worked with a sculptor named Edward Ferrari. Although Dunkelberger’s bridges were made mainly of reinforced concrete or with steel frames, many people preferred that they should be made of stone. Dunkelberger’s bridges on the Merritt were all unique—no two of them alike. Dunkelberger got his inspiration for the design of the bridges from the nature, culture, and history of the land around the Merritt Parkway and of Connecticut. He did this largely by in-
corporating sculptures into his bridge designs. For example, on the Comstock Hill Road overpass in Norwalk, Dunkelberger included sculptures to represent Native Americans and Pilgrims. On the Burr Street overpass in Fairfield, Dunkelberger honored the engineers who built the Merritt by including a sculpture of them at work. He included decorative work representing the beauty of nature all around the Merritt during its construction. He combined ironwork railings featuring butterflies trapped in spiderwebs along with larger concrete ones, as seen perched on the abutments of the Merwin’s Lane bridge.

One of the most beautiful parts of the Merritt can also be one of its greatest dangers. The tree line that follows the parkway on both sides has become more of a threat to safety than an aesthetic feature. The trees grow old and are weakened by storms, making it easy for large branches or even the tree itself to fall on the road. Over the years, the rising safety issue over trees has created a lot of uneasiness, causing accidents and occasionally the deaths of unlucky motorists. In Westport, a seventy foot tall tree fell on the road in 2007, killing two people. According to the Department of Transportation spokesman Kevin Nursick, between 2007 and 2011, 10 of every 17 fatal accidents on the Merritt involved a vehicle crashing into a tree off the roadway. As Nursick put it, “If it comes down to aesthetic issues versus personal safety issues, we need to protect the public.” Although the Merritt Parkway is known for its beauty and aesthetic features, when it comes to safety issues, those will outweigh the history and beauty put into the Merritt.

The Merritt Parkway continues as a statement of political, economic, and social concerns of its time. Shortly after its completion, the road accommodated 50,000 cars per day, but that figure was drastically reduced to 6,500 during WWII. A 2009 New York Times article found that nearly 70,000 traveled over it each day by then. After the Huntington Turnpike overpass was demolished and replaced, a movement began to preserve and protect all the remaining bridges and overpasses, and they were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991. The Merritt was also named one of America’s Most Endangered Historic Places in 2010. Rising costs of maintaining Connecticut’s highways have raised the crucial issue of financing the upkeep of the Merritt, which averages $8 million per mile. Democratic Governor Ned Lamont has proposed a plan to resurrect tolls on Connecticut’s major roadways, including the Merritt. This has become a source of vigorous debate between political parties and residents of the state. The Connecticut Department of Transportation has done studies regarding the safety of driving on the Merritt, finding improvements needed to make it safer while at the same time maintaining its unique characteristics. Battles rage on, but none can deny the beauty of traveling along its tree-lined expanse, preserving as much of Connecticut's history that cost and safety will allow. The Merritt went from a traffic solution to a road that invited tourists to the roadside beauties of Fairfield County, and most people in Connecticut apparently favor
preserving the nature and history that the road represents. Through the highs and lows of its story, the Merritt has become, and continues to be, the backbone and front entrance to a special place.

Notes
2Laurie Heiss and Fill Smyth, “The Merritt Parkway,” The Road That Shaped a Region (Charleston, SC, 2014), 16, 18, 19, 64, 149.
5Bruce Radde, The Merritt Parkway (New Haven, CT., 1993), 5-6, 18, 20, 34.