

# **FCH Annals**

Supplement to Volume 27



## **Florida Conference of Historians**

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Patricia L. Farless, Editor  
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## **FCH Annals: The Journal of the Florida Conference of Historians**

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*Beginning with volume 20, the Florida Conference of Historians has presented the J. Calvitt Clarke III Award for the best undergraduate research paper published in the Annals.*

In 2012, Dr. Clarke, Professor Emeritus at Jacksonville University and a strong supporter of undergraduate research, graciously provided the seed funding for this important award. He is a frequent contributor and the founding editor of the predecessor to the *Annals*, the *Selected Annual Proceedings of the Florida Conference of Historians*.

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## **A Note from the Editor**

In all things there is a beginning. The rich history of the Florida Conference of Historians began in 1962 as the Florida College Teachers of History (FCTH) with a commitment to research and the history classroom. In this vein, a supplement to the FCH Annals: Journal of the Florida Conference of Historians, combining research and teaching and a commitment to the promotion of undergraduate research could not be more fitting. As we continue to dedicate ourselves to the professionalization of the history student, mentoring, guiding and promoting their research is a welcomed honor that further enhances the mission of our team.

The rigorous process of editing and disseminating stellar undergraduate research was first made possible by the Clarke Award Selection Committee—Dr. Michael Epple with the Florida Gulf Coast University, Dr. Sean McMahon with Gateway College, and Dr. Richards Plaveniks with Florida Southern College. The painstaking editorial work was made possible by Dr. Martha Brenckle, Mr. Timothy Dorsch, and Ms. Rachel Williams of the University of Central Florida. Finally, the mentorship of the Senior Editor of the FCH Annals: Journal of the Florida Conference of Historians, Dr. Michael Cole of Florida Gulf Coast, has made it possible for this supplement to contain the same attention to scholarship as the annals.

Patricia L. Farless  
19 February 2021

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# The Influence of the Boston *Pilot* on Irish-Catholic Immigrants During the Civil War

Mariana Kellis

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Irish immigrants in the United States during the Civil War Era faced many difficulties trying to assimilate into a new country. They were often not taken seriously by natives due to their Catholic faith and foreign origins. With their perceived dual loyalties to Ireland and America, along with the popular anti-Catholic sentiment from many of their fellow Americans they received, the Irish struggled to prove their loyalty to America and to support the Union cause consistently. Feeling like outcasts in their new environment, Irish and Catholic newspapers were created to give the Irish a voice and make their opinions heard. An example of these newspapers is the Boston *Pilot*. Founded in 1836 by an Irishman named Patrick Donahoe, the *Pilot* was created based on principles that were “inherently Catholic and Irish.”<sup>1</sup> Before and during the Civil War years, the Boston *Pilot* influenced its Irish-Catholic audience in ways both good and bad. As one of the longest running newspapers in the United States and the leading Irish-Catholic paper of Boston, the *Pilot* influenced Irish opinion of the war based on the treatment of the Irish by Americans.<sup>2</sup> The newspaper sought to properly recognize Irish volunteers for their achievements in the war, as well as published unpopular Irish-Catholic opinions that the native press largely ignored. Doing so paid tribute to the soldiers and encouraged other Irish volunteers to join the Union war effort. Many Irish immigrants were enticed to join the Union Army for various reasons; some joined because of the impressive bounty they would receive from signing up, and others joined to prove their right to be American citizens.<sup>3</sup> While the Boston *Pilot* did not dissuade the Irish immigrants from volunteering for the Union, they did discuss treatment of Irish-Catholics in a way that likely influenced the opinion of their audience against the Union cause. This paper will discuss the ways the Boston *Pilot* shaped the views of Irish soldiers on the Union cause.

Others have written on the perspectives of Irish immigrants during the Civil War years. The *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* published an article written by Francis R. Walsh in 1981 titled “The Boston ‘*Pilot*’ Reports the Civil War,” which gives a brief account of the *Pilot*’s influence over the Irish. Walsh writes the article out of the belief that historical accounts of Civil War press coverage are incomplete without the consideration of immigrant newspapers that are frequently

<sup>1</sup> F. Walsh, “The Boston ‘*Pilot*’ Reports the Civil War,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 9, issue 2 (1998): 5.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas O’Connor, *Boston Catholics: A History of the Church and Its People* (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 1998), 59; Ryan Dennis, *A Journey Through Boston Irish History* (Mount Pleasant: Arcadia Publishing, 1999), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Susannah Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle: Irish American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 225.

forgotten. Walsh argues that the *Pilot* allowed for Irish immigrants to prove and defend their American patriotism. In their minds, Irishmen viewed themselves as true patriotic Americans; he claims that *Pilot* editors viewed abolitionists as disloyal to the Union by going against its laws and traditions and that the Irish-Catholics believed that their stance on abolition could also prove their loyalty to the Union. Walsh states that the *Pilot* was fully supportive of the Union cause until the summer of 1862 when talk of emancipation grew in popularity. They strove to remain supportive of the Union cause throughout the entirety of the war, but they shifted opinions of Lincoln, governmental policy, and slavery. The paper focused on treatment of Irish volunteers, and whether it improved or worsened.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, *The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865* by Susannah Ural Bruce, describes the experiences faced by Irish immigrants in the Northeast during the 1800s leading up to and during the Civil War and during the Civil War, but instead focuses on the struggles of the Irish volunteers. Published in 2006, this book is an extension of Ural Bruce's doctoral dissertation.<sup>5</sup> While *The Harp and the Eagle* mainly discusses the perspectives of Irish-Catholic immigrants, which made up most Irish immigrants, it also includes views of the minority Irish-Protestants. The thesis of this book is that the dual loyalties of the Irish-Catholic Union volunteers to both Ireland and the United States influenced their actions and beliefs throughout the Civil War.<sup>6</sup>

The Irish immigrated to America for various reasons; some migrated due to the Irish Potato Famine of 1845-1855, and others traveled to escape being under tyrannical British rule.<sup>7</sup> At the start of the war, the Irish were excited to join the Union cause and believed the war brought hope and the potential to improve their position in American society.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, many Irish immigrants were unskilled laborers who were unable to hold stable jobs to provide for their families. So, the idea of having regular payment as well as the benefits of being a Union soldier made enlistment attractive.<sup>9</sup> Others felt that the Civil War was an opportunity to become trained as a soldier, so they could take their wartime experience with them to fight for Irish independence from Britain, following the end of the United States Civil War.<sup>10</sup> Anti-Catholic and anti-Irish discrimination caused a loss of motivation as the war continued. Despite this, many continued to feel that their goals and those of the Union were tied.<sup>11</sup> The Emancipation Proclamation proved a turning point in the Civil War that caused many Irish-Catholics to terminate their support

<sup>4</sup> Walsh, "The Boston Pilot Reports the Civil War," 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, ix.

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

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

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, 55.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

for the Union cause. They felt that freed slaves would become equals with them and take what little job opportunities they had.<sup>12</sup>

Daniel M. Callaghan's *Thomas Francis Meagher and the Irish Brigade in the Civil War* stresses that though the Irish Brigade is commonly known for its General Meagher, it is the bravery and valor of the soldiers that gave the Brigade a reason for the public to praise them and even forget their doubts that Meagher was a questionable leader.<sup>13</sup> This idea supports an underlying theme of Ural-Bruce's *The Harp and the Eagle*, which asserted that the Irish soldiers themselves were responsible for their victories, rather than giving full credit to the leader. For instance, the Irish Brigade continued to fight vigorously throughout the First Battle of Bull Run, even after Meagher collapsed from his horse in a drunken state of unconsciousness.<sup>14</sup> This book aims to provide a balanced account of the Irish Brigade as a whole.

Correspondingly, Ryan Keating's *Shades of Green: Irish Regiments, American Soldiers, and Local Communities in the Civil War Era* focuses on the unique situations and perspectives of Irish volunteers. He emphasizes that though there are similarities in the situations of the Irish soldiers, their differing experiences are too complicated for their legacy to be generalized. His goal is to move the historical debate away from not only discussing Irish-American identity on the national level but also analyzing how the relationships of Irishmen with their local communities affected their perceptions on the war as well.<sup>15</sup>

Despite its popularity among Irish-Catholics in the North, not everyone thought highly of the *Boston Pilot* because of some of its views on the war. While they were often referred to as the "Irishman's Bible" by their readers, a rival newspaper, the *Courier*, felt that this was far from the truth.<sup>16</sup> Editor of the *Courier*, Jerome Bayon wrote, "we deny that the *Pilot*, or any other paper is the organ of the Irish-Catholics for . . . any purpose whatever, either political or religious."<sup>17</sup> Another Northern newspaper, the *Rochester Democrat*, opposed views of the *Pilot* as well as any other Irish targeted newspaper, asserting "wherever you find a particularly virulent [Copperhead] journal . . . you may be sure an Irishman is at work upon it."<sup>18</sup> This notion was a sharp insult, considering that Copperheads were known for being anti-Lincoln, Confederate sympathizers and "rebels" of the Union cause.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Callaghan, *Thomas Francis Meagher and the Irish Brigade* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2006), "Preface," [https://books.google.com/books?id=sjWRxLYAw-cC&printsec=frontcover&dq=thomas+francis+meagher+and+the+irish+brigade&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjNkZ7ik\\_XdAhWRq1MKHUJaBoUQ6AEIjzAA#v=onepage&q=thomas%20francis%20meagher%20and%20the%20irish%20brigade&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=sjWRxLYAw-cC&printsec=frontcover&dq=thomas+francis+meagher+and+the+irish+brigade&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjNkZ7ik_XdAhWRq1MKHUJaBoUQ6AEIjzAA#v=onepage&q=thomas%20francis%20meagher%20and%20the%20irish%20brigade&f=false).

<sup>14</sup> Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 90.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on the relationships between Irishmen and their local communities, see Ryan Keating, *Shades of Green: Irish Regiments, American Soldiers, and Local Communities in the Civil War Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Walsh, "The Boston *Pilot* Reports the Civil War," 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Courier de la Louisiane*, (New Orleans), Nov. 29, 1844.

<sup>18</sup> *Pilot*, (Boston), Sept. 3, 1864.

<sup>19</sup> Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 150.

In September of 1864, the *Pilot* published a newspaper clipping from the *Rochester Democrat* that sought to brand many Irish-led papers as Copperhead sources. Editor of the *Rochester Democrat*, Robert Carter, remarked,

it is a curious fact that the Copperhead press in this country has fallen mainly into Irish hands. We do not mean to say that a majority of the editors of newspapers of that persuasion are Irishmen . . . what we do mean to say is that the most ultra, the most rancorous of the Copperhead presses, those which give tone and character to the party . . . are edited and controlled by Irishmen.<sup>20</sup>

They went even further to state that most of the Irishmen involved in editing Copperhead papers were “very young Irishmen fresh from the Emerald Isle.”<sup>21</sup> In defense of all Irish papers, the *Pilot* rebutted that, “Mr. Carter means, we suppose, by ‘Copperhead press,’ all journals that are opposed to Mr. Lincoln. Does he mean different from that, or does he mean nothing more than to find an occasion for a fling against Irishmen?”<sup>22</sup> The *Pilot* also took flattery upon the notion that most supposed Copperhead press editors were new to American soil, and commented, “our young countrymen, ‘fresh from the Green Isle,’ who, it seems, have only to step upon our shores before they are called to the responsible and arduous position of conductors of the American press, displacing . . . the thousands of educated young Americans who are to be found everywhere.”<sup>23</sup> The *Pilot* as a newspaper merely reported the discontent among their fellow Irish-Americans and was a defense against the mistreatment they received. They were staunchly loyal to the Democratic Party and opposed Abraham Lincoln and his Republican ideologies, as well as rejected the abolitionist efforts of the Northern Republicans. These traits combined caused many rival newspapers to accuse them of being Copperheads. While the *Pilot* may have disagreed with aspects of the Union cause, they were by no means a Copperhead paper and frequently supported Irish enlistment to the Union. Unfortunately, the stereotype of Irishmen being Copperheads significantly undermined the efforts of Irish soldiers that were loyal to the Union.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, the *Pilot* did not act as a voice for Irish-Protestants, who far more aligned in their ideology with the Union. Irish-Protestants such as Andrew Greenlees, were openly vocal about their position on the abolition movement, proclaiming “if success had followed our arms all along we would not have had the emancipation message . . . then when things looked dark came the proclamation of freedom purely as a war measure . . . beneficial to us and injurious to the rebels.”<sup>25</sup> Not surprisingly, the *Liberator* (an abolitionist newspaper that frequently published

<sup>20</sup> Robert Carter, “The Irish Element in American Politics,” *Rochester Democrat* (n.d.) reprinted in the *Pilot*, (Boston), 3 Sept. 1864.

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

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

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

<sup>24</sup> Keating, *Shades of Green*, 11.

<sup>25</sup> Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 138.

and critiqued columns of the *Pilot*), was another newspaper that was highly against the anti-abolitionist ideals preached in the *Pilot*. It understood the *Pilot's* power over Irish public opinion, writing “the *Pilot*, because it reaches the great bulk of the Irish-Catholic population of the land, carries that population with it.”<sup>26</sup>

The *Pilot* rejected the abolitionist movement for its perceived Northern hypocrisy. Editors of the paper felt that abolitionists were only focusing their attention and concern on the mistreatment of slaves in the South, while completely ignoring the harsh working conditions and lives of immigrant industrial workers of the North. They wrote, “there are one thousand Stowes weeping over the woes of an imaginary Uncle Tom, to one who looked after the real Uncle Tom.”<sup>27</sup> The *Pilot* described abolitionist groups such as the New England Anti-Slavery Society as “comfortably [succeeding] in making themselves believe that they were effectively laboring for the welfare of others.”<sup>28</sup> Many Irish immigrants were supportive of slavery. From their perspective, freed slaves would become competition when seeking employment.<sup>29</sup> Most Catholics did not see a problem with slavery, and those that did were not compelled to join the abolition movement because they considered slavery to be Biblically justified. According to Francis Hueston, author of *The Catholic Press and Nativism, 1840-1860*, many Irish-Catholics felt that leaders were put into power by the will of God and that citizens would be going against God’s will by rebelling over civil issues that were not explicitly against Biblical rule.<sup>30</sup> Before the Civil War, they argued that Catholics in America would be more willing to support the abolition movement if they were treated fairly by natives, affirming, “the Catholic church sets her face against slavery . . . and abolished it in all countries where her voice was respected.”<sup>31</sup> As the pressure to end slavery grew in the 1860s, the *Pilot* firmly held that “the Catholic Church alone has the mission to emancipate the slaves of the South, and it will be a very long time before that task is fulfilled.”<sup>32</sup>

Despite their opposition, as the war dragged on into 1863, abolition talk was on the rise and the *Pilot* complained, “we find ourselves after nearly two years . . . engaged in an abolition war.”<sup>33</sup> The Irish were feeling that the growing emphasis on abolition by the Union was against their best interest and felt that the only way to end the war was to abandon the Emancipation cause altogether.<sup>34</sup> The Irish did not believe the freedom of slaves was worth losing their own lives. The paper was wary of any efforts of Abraham Lincoln to try and tamper with the allowance of slavery granted by the Constitution. They stated that “because [the Irish] desire

<sup>26</sup> *Liberator*, (Boston), 24 Oct. 1863.

<sup>27</sup> *Pilot*, (Boston), 18 June 1853.

<sup>28</sup> *Liberator*, (Boston), 11 June 1858.

<sup>29</sup> Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 138.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Francis Hueston, *The Catholic Press and Nativism, 1840-1860* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 206.

<sup>31</sup> *Pilot*, (Boston), 22 July 1854.

<sup>32</sup> *Liberator*, (Boston), 24 Oct. 1863.

<sup>33</sup> *Pilot*, (Boston), 10 Jan. 1863.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 Jan. 1863.

to see the Union re-established, peace and prosperity return to bless the land once more, and the Constitution to be restored over all,” they did not feel that Lincoln was an adequate candidate for the upcoming fall election of 1864.<sup>35</sup> The *Pilot* begged, “may the Lord save the nation from the able rebels, and from the incompetent, fanatic, radical administration of Abraham Lincoln!”<sup>36</sup> These issues both reflected and shaped the views of Irish soldiers.<sup>37</sup>

Irish-Catholic immigrants were typically not supporters of Lincoln and his Republican administration. Many of them were faithful Democrats and believed that the Democratic Party better served their interests. Irishmen felt a sense of loyalty to the Democrats because they were the only political party that helped them in the years leading up to the Civil War. One case worth mentioning is when the Democrats of New York's city council put aside \$6,000,000 for the Irish poor of New York City.<sup>38</sup> The *Pilot* held that “a naturalized citizen who would vote for a party who proscribes his race . . . does not deserve the rights of citizenship.”<sup>39</sup> The Democratic ideology during the Civil War era consisted of keeping the status quo as it was; they were against the abolitionist movement and any efforts to “radically alter the racial structuring of American society,” stressed individual rights, and favored local government over national.<sup>40</sup> Many of the Democratic ideals aligned with those of the Irish-Catholics. Also, members of the Democratic Party were generally not supporters of the Temperance Movement of the 1850s and 1860s. One of the movement's goals was to enforce legislation that prohibited the sale of alcohol on Sundays, which Irish and German immigrants viewed as a personal attack on the leisurely pleasures and traditions of the foreign poor.<sup>41</sup> Consumption of alcohol was acceptable throughout American society during this period, though disorderly conduct as a consequence of over-indulgence became stereotypical behavior of Irish soldiers.<sup>42</sup>

Discrimination against Catholics was common practice during the Civil War era, primarily due to the success of the Know Nothing Party, a nativist party that appeared during the mid-1850s which discriminated against both Irish immigrants and Catholics.<sup>43</sup> This discrimination came into the Union. In April of 1863, soldiers of the National Army burned down a Catholic church in Jacksonville, Florida. As a further insult to the Irish-Catholics, they mockingly blew into organ pipes from the church organ that they vandalized as they fled the building. The 6th Connecticut and 8th Maine regiments both claimed that the other was the culprit of

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 Sept. 1864.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 Jan. 1863.

<sup>37</sup> While it would have been beneficial to have quotations directly from Irish immigrants, this paper focuses on the overall influence of the Boston *Pilot* on its Irish-Catholic audience.

<sup>38</sup> Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 228.

<sup>39</sup> *Pilot*, (Boston), 3 Nov. 1860.

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

<sup>41</sup> Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 28.

<sup>42</sup> Keating, *Shades of Green*, 122.

<sup>43</sup> Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 19.

the incident.<sup>44</sup> On 3 September 1864, the *Pilot* reported a tragic incident involving a Catholic soldier on his death bed that was denied by his hospital doctor from receiving last rites by a Catholic priest. Upon requesting a priest, he was informed by his nurse that there was a Protestant minister available on site, but that Catholic priests were brought in only for dying patients. The doctor refused to make the arrangements, so the soldier sent a letter to a local Reverend himself; in the end, he passed away before the priest arrived.<sup>45</sup> Many Irish soldiers believed that the Union unfairly granted Protestants spiritual benefits that Catholics seldom received.

Exacerbating their rejection of the war's goals, they believed that Irishmen were not adequately recognized for their achievements by the American media. The Boston *Pilot* took it upon themselves to correct these wrongs by reporting the bravery of Irish men. As stated by Ural Bruce, "Irishmen might read about the feats of their fellow countrymen in papers like the *Pilot* and the *Irish-American*, but these were accompanied by long casualty lists reminding the men the cost of such bravery."<sup>46</sup> Native-born Americans remained bitter about Irish soldier desertion of their fellow American soldiers by joining the St. Patrick's Battalion during the Mexican-American War. While the battalion was made mostly of American deserters, the Irish received the bulk of the blame because the leader, John Riley, was an Irishman.<sup>47</sup> This event caused many Americans not to take the Irish volunteers of the Union army seriously, believing that they may become deserters as well. The *Pilot* deflected these negative stereotypes by saying, "instead of stirring anti-Irish and anti-Catholic rancor by dwelling upon this imposter [Riley], why do not the nativist papers pay attention to another Riley, the brave and gallant colonel, who has distinguished himself so valiantly?"<sup>48</sup>

The lack of recognition, combined with mistreatment by the Union caused many Irish to reject the federal draft of 1863.<sup>49</sup> The *Pilot* declared, "we are an emigrant race . . . we did not cause this war; vast numbers of our people have perished in it. . . . But the Irish spirit for the war is dead! Absolutely dead! . . . Our fighters are dead."<sup>50</sup> This quote implies that Irish immigrants were losing their sense of American patriotism and felt it difficult to relate with the Union as it became clear that the Union was going against Irish ideals. The *Pilot* expressed this shift in support by commenting, "aliens are under no obligation to fight our battles; and no one has a right to make the smallest objection to them for refusing to do so."<sup>51</sup> This was an immense change from their previous stance on Irish participation in

<sup>44</sup> *Pilot*, (Boston), 25 Apr. 1863.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 Sept. 1864.

<sup>46</sup> Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 108.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>48</sup> *Pilot*, (Boston), 14 Sept. 1847.

<sup>49</sup> Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 147.

<sup>50</sup> *Pilot*, (Boston), 30 May 1863.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 Sept. 1862.



the Union war effort at the beginning of the Civil War, which was, “Stand by the Union; Fight for the Union; Die by the Union.”<sup>52</sup>

While the Boston *Pilot* made sure that Irish mistreatment in the Union army was not kept a secret to Irishmen before enlisting, they also discussed the undeniable benefits of joining. The *Pilot* reported that monetary benefits of volunteering in the Union included “a \$100 bounty from the city, a \$25 bounty from the federal government, and \$13 in an advance of one month’s salary, for a grand total of \$138.”<sup>53</sup> Another benefit to joining the Union would be that the Irish would be able to prove their worthiness of American citizenship. Their Union experience paired with the growing Irish population in America led the *Pilot* to proclaim, “our people came here with nothing; look at the grip they have today on the soil! The settled Puritan and his vices are melting away before the emigrant Irishman and his virtues.”<sup>54</sup>

To conclude, the Boston *Pilot* sought to reflect the values of Irish communities and their audience through their depiction of the treatment of Irish volunteers in the Union. Within the community of readership that the *Pilot* had, abolition was strongly unsupported, Catholicism was defended, and there was a strong sense of loyalty to the Democratic Party. The *Pilot*’s stance on topics essentially came from whatever would best benefit the Irish-Catholics. They encouraged Irish immigrants to join the Union by discussing the benefits to the Irish community in America for taking an active role in their war, and the monetary benefits to individual soldiers and their families for supporting the Union. With that in mind, they were not silent about Irish mistreatment by Americans and the troubles faced by Irishmen in the Union. The frustrations of Irishmen discussed by the *Pilot* may have influenced Irish immigrants to grow distrustful of the Union and whatever potential benefits they would receive from joining the Union cause. They also discussed topics such as abolition from the perspectives of Irish-Catholics and how they believed that abolition would negatively affect immigrants in the North by freed slaves taking their jobs. While they were vocal about the mistreatment of Irish in the Union and the negative native-born American opinions on Irish-Catholics, they never tried to dissuade Irish from volunteering for the Union or avoiding taking part in the federal draft, and never blatantly called for rebellion against the Union. They believed that the experiences faced by the Irish volunteers would help to shape and improve the way Americans viewed Irish immigrants.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 Jan. 1861.

<sup>53</sup> Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 145. This work provides further information on incentives given to Irish-Catholic immigrants in the Union.

<sup>54</sup> *Berkshire County Eagle*, (Pittsfield, Mass.), 20 Aug. 1863.



# **Scapegoats in the East, Heroes in the West: German Immigrant Soldiers in the Eastern and Western Theatres of the American Civil War**

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In recent years, there have been great strides made in applying new perspectives of thought to the storied and frequently discussed field of American Civil War literature, particularly in the exploration of previously ill-studied facets of life such as religion, ethnicity, and community that impacted how the war effected both individuals and groups alike. This examining of events through different filters has already shed new light on aspects of the war generally ignored by previous historians. The impact of religion in the ranks of both sides as well as the forging of new national identities by ethnic minorities through shared combat experiences are just two examples. Yet so far, little has been written about the trials and tribulations of one of the largest ethnic contingencies to fight for the cause of the Union, and arguably one of the most important: the Germans.

While Federal forces were no strangers to the use of immigrant soldiers, with over 510,000 men in blue having been born overseas by the end of the war, the German community was responsible for an impressive 220,000 native German soldiers who donned the uniform of the Union Army.<sup>1</sup> Their presence in the war brought both fame and infamy, as several regiments brought praise to their units as disciplined, veteran fighting forces responsible for crucial victories in key campaigns throughout the war. In comparison, other regiments were castigated for their debilitating defeats at Chancellorsville and on the first day of Gettysburg, two moments that would prove highly fateful for the perception of German soldiers for decades to come. Despite their large presence in the Federal army, little has been written on the history of the German regiments that gave life and limb in service of a country that was not their birthland. Even less has been written about how in turn the American military and even society shaped and changed the German soldiers fighting under its flag.

This article examines and contrasts the experiences of the German immigrant soldier in service of the Union army on two different fronts: The Eastern and Western Theaters. While it has become common knowledge that two different styles of war were waged in the East and the West, this article is more concerned with how German immigrants specifically were treated by civilians and the army alike. It will look at how their all-German regiments were recruited and organized to their standing in the public's eye. Moreover, it looks at the orders and

<sup>1</sup> Donald Allendorf, *Long Road to Liberty: The Odyssey of a German Regiment in the Yankee Army* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2006), xxiii.

assignments given to them, as well as the way their superiors discussed them in official reports and correspondence. Therefore, this article evaluates and compares the experiences of German immigrant soldiers in the different theaters through the most simple and convenient method available: comparing the services of the 15th Missouri Volunteer Infantry Regiment, an all-German unit in the Western Theater, and the 75th Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment, an all-German unit that served in the Eastern Theater.

This article will use primary sources from the men who fought in these regiments, (such as Maurice Marcoot, the primary voice of the 15th Missouri) to argue that while German immigrant soldiers faced certain similarities no matter their location, the experiences of Germans in the East and the West were ultimately vastly different.<sup>2</sup> This is demonstrated in ways ranging from discrimination in and out of the ranks to the usage of German regiments in battles and campaigns themselves.

Before a comparison of the differences and similarities between the two regiments can be discussed, the reasons for selecting them must be explained, and some precautions must be acknowledged. Firstly, while over 220,000 native Germans served in the Federal army, just under 40,000 served in German-only ethnic regiments; more would serve in German-only companies within American regiments, while most would serve as individuals with no larger German group around them.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, any conclusions taken from this article may not be applicable to the situations of all Germans throughout the course of the war, particularly those in non-ethnic regiments. Secondly, it is of this author's opinion that much further study of German-Americans during the Civil War would yield valuable information and insights. Aside from collections of documents and regimental histories there remains surprisingly little literature covering such an important group of people in a critical time of this nation's history.

The selected regiments were carefully chosen for several reasons. Firstly, both regiments have extensive primary source material. Maurice Marcoot's *Five Years in the Sunny South* is one of the more complete histories of an enlisted man's Civil War service to emerge from the conflict. Samuel P. Bates' work, *History of the 75th Regiment*, also holds a trove of letters, diary entries, and other primary documents from a mix of regimental sources. Secondly, both regiments saw prolonged service throughout the conflict, fighting in multiple major battles and suffering extensive casualties throughout several of the war's most consequential campaigns. These experiences provide an equal field for comparison and ensure any conclusion reached would not be based on regiments who had extremely different experiences while serving. Finally, the regiments came from different regions of the country and were recruited from different backgrounds (the 15th saw many rural recruits

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Marcoot, *Five Years in the Sunny South: Reminiscences of Maurice Marcoot* (S.I.: s.n., 189-), 65.

<sup>3</sup> Allendorf, *Long Road to Liberty*, xxiii.

from both Missouri and Illinois while the 75th was largely recruited from just Philadelphia) ensuring that any commonalities between their services would likely be due to their shared German identity and nothing else.<sup>4</sup>

After the fateful attack on Fort Sumter and Lincoln's resulting call for 75,000 volunteers to combat the rebellion, German communities around the country reacted similarly to many American communities. They pledged their full support towards the war and gathered to watch tens of thousands of their young men enlist in the Federal army. Before the end of April, a German rally in St. Louis had resulted in a crowd of hundreds of Germans marching from a beer-filled rally directly to the Federal Arsenal to offer their services. Still, their motives were not solely limited to patriotic duty. John Buegel, one of the members of that crowd, remembered that "[s]ince we Germans at the time were looked upon (by) Americans, old and young, with contempt and disdain, we decided, after having listened to some speeches, to sell our skins as dearly as possible. . . . The main thing, however, was that each one was eager to teach the German-haters a never-to-be-forgotten lesson."<sup>5</sup> The German-haters, as Buegel referred to them, gave every indication that they were not ready to learn that lesson. A group of civilians rained rocks and mud down on the German volunteers after their successful capture of a band of rebels at Camp Jackson on 10 May 1861.<sup>6</sup> Only a week later, a group of German recruits was ambushed as they slept near Cole Camp, resulting in fifteen killed and fifty-seven wounded Union soldiers.<sup>7</sup> Far from deterring further German enlistment, this enraged German communities for hundreds of miles and enlistments only increased. Recruits poured into St. Louis from across the region, including a company of Germans who marched from Highland, Illinois with a 16-year old Maurice Marcoot among them in order to find an all-German regiment to enlist with, having been denied a German Illinois regiment due to filled quotas.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, in the first few months of the war and hundreds of miles to the east in the City of Philadelphia, the large German community rapidly filled the ranks of new regiments, such as the 21st, 27th, 74th, 75th, and 98th Pennsylvania Infantry Regiments, all of whom were entirely or predominately German in composition.<sup>9</sup> Other German communities from around the state, notably Pittsburgh's, contributed thousands of men as well. This resulted in the formation of what was commonly referred to as "the German division" commanded by General Louis Blenker, which consisted entirely of ethnic German regiments. While tensions with American counterparts often ran high, there was no equivalent of the Cole Camp Massacre

<sup>4</sup> Marcoot, *Five Years in the Sunny South*, 13; Samuel P. Bates, *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861-5: Prepared in Compliance with Acts of the Legislature* (Harrisburg: B. Singerly, State Printer, 1869), 915.

<sup>5</sup> Allendorf, *Long Road to Liberty*, 12.

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

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Marcoot, *Five Years in the Sunny South*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Christian B. Keller, "Pennsylvania and Virginia Germans in the Civil War: A Brief History and Comparative Analysis," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 109, no. 1 (November 1, 2001): 45, JSTOR.

in Philadelphia or Pennsylvania as the German regiments coalesced. Neither was there mass public sentiment similar to that displayed by Missouri native Bethiah McKown who wrote upon the arrival of German regiments in St. Louis that “Our City is encompass’d with armed Goths and Vandels. . . . We are in hourly peril of life and liberty, surrounded by Dutch bayonets.”<sup>10</sup> Whether it was the cosmopolitan nature of the major eastern cities, the high percentage of German ancestry in the state, or the lack of pro-Confederate sentiment, the Pennsylvania Germans encountered much less abuse and violence than the Missouri Germans did during the formation of their regiments. This disparity in public opinion between the two theatres would be short-lived however, as different events on the battlefield would forever shape the image of Germans in the East and West.

Service in the Western Theatre as a German soldier grew only more difficult upon the appointment of Major General Henry Halleck to head the Department of the Mississippi on 11 March 1862. At best, Halleck displayed sympathy for anti-immigration rhetoric; at worst, Halleck’s views were in line with the most fervent ultra-nationalists of his time. Indeed, Halleck held a particular distaste for Germans in America, and it was a distaste that he did not keep private. Railing against a lack of discipline in the West when he arrived, Halleck blamed “foreigners, officered in many cases by foreign adventurers or perhaps refugees from justice” who presented “a very dangerous element in society as well as the army.”<sup>11</sup> When President Lincoln replied in a letter that “the Germans are true and patriotic, and so far as they have got cross in Missouri it is upon mistake and misunderstanding,” Halleck replied in a dispatch that he was mustering out seven “illegal organizations,” all of whom happened to be volunteer German units such as Frémont’s Body Guards, a unit that had already distinguished itself in the trial of combat.<sup>12</sup> Driving home his disgust for Germans even further, Halleck argued that German soldiers were so barbaric and undisciplined that he received requests to not march them anywhere as they “robbed and plundered wherever they went, friends and foe alike.”<sup>13</sup>

Over time, however, the conduct of German troops in the Western Theatre began to build a reputation that prejudice alone could not suffocate. On 3 October 1862, as General Don Carlos Buell marched his forces which included a large contingent of German regiments, including the 15th Missouri, to Perryville, Kentucky to confront a Confederate army under General Bragg, a correspondent for the Evansville, Indiana’s *Daily Journal* wrote that he had seen several German regiments (the 2nd, 12th, and 15th Missouri) and that they “are a fine body of men, well uniformed and armed, and drilled. All of the Missouri regiments I have yet seen, are composed entirely, or almost entirely, of Germans, and if our other

<sup>10</sup> Allendorf, *Long Road to Liberty*, 13.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

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

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

regiments would imitate them a little in the arts of cooking and creature comforts it would be to their benefit.”<sup>14</sup> The Battle of Perryville would further the German soldier’s reputation in the West, as the 2nd and 15th Missouri, under the command of General Philip Sheridan along with the 44th and 73rd Illinois, captured Chaplin Heights and then withstood a vicious Confederate counter-attack, with the two German regiments suffering a combined 135 killed or wounded. The charge up Chaplin Heights, in full view of the rest of Sheridan’s division, alone cost the 2nd Missouri twenty percent of its strength.<sup>15</sup> Respect for the German soldiers began to begrudgingly grow among the American regiments and officers, but it was respect paid for in blood.

Within three months of Perryville, the German regiments in the Western Theater would have another defining moment on the battlefield, this one at an even grimmer price. At the Battle of Murfreesboro, General Sheridan’s division was the linchpin of the angled Federal line, and the 2nd and 15th Missouri again were heavily involved in the combat. Withstanding vicious assaults time and time again, the two German regiments performed a fighting retreat over the course of half a mile as American regiments on their right and left broke and fled. Running out of ammo and being resupplied three different times throughout the day, the Germans fought so viciously that the areas they defended now bear monikers such as The Slaughter Pen and Hell’s Half-Acre.<sup>16</sup> By the time the battle had ended, Sheridan’s division of 4,400 had taken almost forty percent casualties and had lost all three original brigade commanders as well as one of their replacements. Along with the rest of their division, the Missouri Germans had paid a horrendous blood price for holding the line and buying the rest of the army time to erect defenses. Throughout that day within the Union Army, of the nineteen Union regiments who fled early Confederate assaults, only two were German.<sup>17</sup> In the Western Theatre, German ethnic regiments pulled their weight and fought tenaciously in the face of both the Confederates and internal discrimination and bigotry. However, in the East, events unfolded that held devastating consequences for the image of German soldiers in the eyes of the American public and many among the officer corps.

The months of May, June, and July 1863 forever changed the relationship between German communities and regiments and their American brethren, leading to a reshaping of the Union armies in the Eastern and Western Theatres alike. On 2 May 1863, the Union Army of the Potomac was marching towards Richmond under General Joseph Hooker; the Eleventh Corps, which was comprised of American and German regiments in equal measure, was placed on the right end of the Union line, and the 75th Pennsylvania on the extreme end of the Corps’ line.

<sup>14</sup> “Army Correspondence,” *Evansville Daily Journal*, 10 Oct. 1862, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015672/1861-10-10/ed-1/seq-2/>.

<sup>15</sup> Allendorf, *Long Road to Liberty*, 60.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

This placed the Philadelphian Germans directly in front of Confederate General Thomas Jackson's infamous flanking movement. The unexpected attack collapsed the entire Eleventh Corps and the Union line during the Battle of Chancellorsville, and one of the first to break and run was the 75th Pennsylvania. The regiment was almost instantly broken and routed, with over forty men surrendering along with Lt. Colonel Matzdorff and dozens more being killed or wounded.<sup>18</sup> By the end of the day, over twenty percent of the Eleventh Corps was dead, wounded, or captured.<sup>19</sup> Within two months, the Corps suffered even more grievously, as poor leadership once again left the regiment exposed and vulnerable on 1 July during the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg. The men of the German and American regiments fought valiantly at Gettysburg itself, but could not hold their positions and were again forced to turn and flee for their lives from a Confederate onslaught. There would be successful defenses of Cemetery Hill the next day, but at this point the damage had been done, both in terms of reputation and physical attrition. The 75th Pennsylvania alone lost 139 men and officers killed, wounded, or captured.<sup>20</sup> The Eleventh Corps in total sustained 3,800 casualties out of less than 9,000 engaged, a casualty rate of almost forty-five percent.<sup>21</sup>

Despite half of the Eleventh Corps' regiments being American, the American press and many officers within the military painted the command as being entirely comprised of German cowards. The *New York Times* wrote in its report on Chancellorsville that the Eleventh Corps was made up of "panic-stricken Dutchmen" who couldn't have taken many casualties because "they were too fast for that."<sup>22</sup> The *New York Herald* bestowed the label of "the flying Germans" onto the Eleventh Corps as a whole.<sup>23</sup> Even *Harper's Weekly* editorialized that "the German troops, however, were not equal to the occasion."<sup>24</sup> The American public overwhelmingly heard negative portrayals of the German soldiers in the Army of the Potomac, and the result for many was a permanent association of German soldiers with cowardice. Many in the military only contributed to such sentiments, both from general staffs as well as the front-line men and officers. The Provost Marshall General Patrick wrote in correspondence that "the Eleventh Corps went to 'fight mit Siegel' in the rear," a harsh parodying of a German-immigrant rallying cry.<sup>25</sup> In official records, General George Meade argued that, "owing to the bad behavior of a portion of our own troops, the Eleventh Corps, we had to fall back and draw in our lines."<sup>26</sup> Anti-German sentiment flowed more freely from the lower

<sup>18</sup> Bates, *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 919.

<sup>19</sup> John H. Eicher and David J. Eicher, *Civil War High Commands* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 123.

<sup>20</sup> Bates, *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 920.

<sup>21</sup> Eicher and Eicher, *Civil War High Commands*, 140.

<sup>22</sup> Adam Ruschau, *Fighting Mit Sigel or Running Mit Howard* (Oxford: Miami University, 2007), 50.

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

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

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

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

ranks, with observations such as the 9th Massachusetts' Colonel Guiney's that "Hooker was beaten by two things: want of numbers and the disgraceful flight of the flying Dutchmen."<sup>27</sup> Even enlisted men shared their disgust, as did one private in the 154th New York who remarked that "our battalion . . . held the ground till every dutch 'sour krout' had retreated to the woods or fallen in the attempt. For my part, I have no confidence in the fighting qualities of the Dutch."<sup>28</sup> The insults and discrimination grew so rampant that a brigade commander in the Eleventh Corps, General Alexander Schimmelfennig, demanded that those writing such reports be banned from the army lines and their names given to officers in order to sue for slander.<sup>29</sup>

As the battles of Chancellorsville and Gettysburg irrevocably tarnished the German soldiers' reputation in the East, it could not but help affect German soldiers in the West. Communities across the region were shocked at the ethnic slander, and German recruitment slowed considerably across the nation.<sup>30</sup> The German soldiers already in the armies of the West, however, were not met with the same amount of scorn shown for those in the Eleventh Corps back east. Still not fully recovered in number from the battles of Perryville and Stones River, the 15th Missouri along with the rest of Sheridan's division were regarded as quality veteran troops and were entrusted with guarding the right flank of the Union Army after the first day of the Battle of Chickamauga by General William Rosecrans, the army commander himself. Unfortunately for the Army of the Cumberland, the Confederates were reinforced by General James Longstreet overnight, and on the morning of 20 September 1863, launched a surprise attack on the Union right flank equally as devastating to the Federal army as Jackson's at Chancellorsville. Colonel Leiboldt's brigade of Sheridan's division, the brigade that the 2nd and 15th Missouri were a part of, was ordered to charge downhill into the numerically superior Confederate forces to buy time for other retreating Union soldiers; the result was a bloodbath.<sup>31</sup> Within a few short minutes, the remnants of the brigade streamed back up towards their positions, ceding control of their defensive positions until the rest of Sheridan's division counter-attacked and temporarily repulsed the Confederates. Shortly thereafter, Sheridan ordered his entire force to fall back, as he and the rest of the Union right retreated from the field. The cost in men was staggering for the Army of the Cumberland in general, but especially so for Sheridan's division. For the second time in under a year, his men had sustained almost forty percent casualties, with 1,517 of 4,000 killed, wounded, or missing.<sup>32</sup> The 15th Missouri suffered the most out of Leiboldt's brigade, totaling

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Allendorf, *Long Road to Liberty*, 106.

<sup>31</sup> Marcoot, *Five Years in the Sunny South*, 89.

<sup>32</sup> Allendorf, *Long Road to Liberty*, 130.



one hundred enlisted men and officers fallen, leading to what Marcoot described as “the saddest [roll call] I ever attended” with his own Company B’s numbers down to just thirteen officers and men.<sup>33</sup>

Following the defeat at Chickamauga and the ensuing siege of Chattanooga and the Army of the Cumberland inside, President Lincoln ordered General Ulysses Grant and the Army of Tennessee to liberate the trapped army, along with reinforcements: almost the entire Eleventh and Twelfth Corps from the Army of the Potomac. The fact that Grant was given the German-filled Eleventh Corps was no mistake, as it had become a scapegoat for too many failures in the Eastern Theatre. Halleck, now the commander of all Union armies, saw the need to reinforce the Army of the Cumberland as the perfect opportunity to rid himself of the Flying Dutchmen, the Eleventh Corps derisive nickname. Regardless of their reputation, however, Grant had use of them for his plan to break out the defenders of Chattanooga, and on 25 November 1863, they were ordered to participate along with the Army of the Tennessee in a direct attack on Missionary Ridge, with the Army of the Cumberland in support. While the Germans in the Eleventh Corps, including the 75th Pennsylvania, fought well when they finally did reach the enemy, burnt bridges considerably slowed their progress, leading to one of the most dramatic charges in the war.<sup>34</sup> The Army of the Cumberland, led by Sheridan’s division with the 2nd and 15th Missouri at the forefront, scaled the entirety of Missionary Ridge under heavy fire from entrenched Confederate defenders without an order to do so. Within an hour, the ridge had been taken, and the Union forces in Chattanooga were freed from Confederate encirclement. During the heroic assault, Sheridan’s division in total had lost 1,304 officers and men out of 6,000 engaged. The price the 15th paid for being the “second ones inside of the [entrenchments] at the summit of the hill” according to second-in-command Captain Rexinger was twenty-seven killed and wounded of two hundred, further buying the respect of the army with the blood of its soldiers.<sup>35</sup>

This respect for its men was seen in newspaper accounts from across the Western states well beyond the day of the event. By February 1864, 138 of the 168 original volunteers left with the 15th Missouri re-enlisted for the duration of the war, and the unit was sent away from the front for a brief respite. The regiment arrived in St. Louis for the first time in two years, an occasion remembered by both Marcoot and several papers including the *Chicago Tribune*’s columnist in the city who wrote, “the 15th Missouri veteran volunteers arrived from Chattanooga this afternoon and received a most hearty and enthusiastic reception. . . . The streets were densely thronged with people, and flags waved from nearly every house.”<sup>36</sup> Writing of

<sup>33</sup> Marcoot, *Five Years in the Sunny South*, 92.

<sup>34</sup> Allendorf, *Long Road to Liberty*, 147.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-158.

<sup>36</sup> “From St. Louis,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 17 Feb. 1864, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84031490/1864-02-17/ed-1/seq-1/>.



the same event, *The Daily Gate City* wrote that “they were received by a large committee of citizens and escorted through the city by the military and several civil societies to Turner’s Hall where refreshments were provided and a flag presented.”<sup>37</sup> Marcoot would later remember that the next thirty days of furlough were filled with celebrations and banquets spreading across all sorts of neighboring towns and villages. As the months progressed, and the 15th Missouri joined Sherman on his March to the Sea, they participated in more bloody campaigns. The press continued to praise the regiment’s deeds: *The Goodhue Volunteer* wrote in its 31 August 1864 issue on the Battle of Atlanta that when the enemy met the 15th Missouri along with three other regiments on the skirmish line, “these regiments gave them one volley and fell back to temporary works on the crest of the hill, where they showed them a bold front, and in the open field poured into the double Rebel ranks volley after volley of musketry.”<sup>38</sup> Months later, *The Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye* reported that the 15th Missouri, along with the rest of the brigade led by the 15th’s old Colonel Conrad plugged a critical hole in the Union line at the Battle of Franklin: “The men who had been driven from the works rallied to sustain it. The rebels who had entered the works were assailed at once on all sides, and with relentless fury. The soldier whose ammunition was exhausted went at the ‘gray-backs’ with his bayonet or the butt of his musket.”<sup>39</sup> For the third time in three years, the regiment would lose forty percent of its effective numbers in battle.<sup>40</sup> It did not matter that the 15th Missouri was German to these papers: what mattered is that they fought hard, fought well, and won.

The portrayal and coverage of the 15th Missouri Volunteers is in sharp contrast to the news coverage of the 75th Pennsylvania. Outside of mass newspaper coverage of the terrible 16 April 1862 drowning of forty men and officers during a river crossing, there is noticeably little coverage of the German regiment aside from causal mentions during battle and casualty reports. In fact, on 21 January 1864, the 75th Pennsylvania along with the 58th New York re-enlisted as veterans and arrived in Indianapolis. *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, which would eagerly report on the festivities awaiting the 15th Missouri in St. Louis a month later, noted simply that “the 58th New York and the 75th Pennsylvania arrived [in Indianapolis] today from the front. They have re-enlisted as veterans. After being well-fed at the Soldier’s Home, they left for their homes.”<sup>41</sup> For the Germans from Pennsylvania, there would be no mass reception with dinner and speeches in the West. There would be no further battle reports for this regiment either: for the crime of being

<sup>37</sup> “Arrival of the 15th Missouri Veterans,” *Daily Gate City* (Keokuk, Iowa), 17 Feb. 1864, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025182/1864-02-17/ed-1/seq-4/>.

<sup>38</sup> “General Thomas Among the Guns,” *Goodhue Volunteer* (Red Wing, Minnesota), 31 Aug. 1864, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn89064562/1864-08-31/ed-1/seq-1/>.

<sup>39</sup> “The Terrible Battle of Franklin,” *Burlington Weekly Hawk-Eye*, 10 Dec. 1864, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84027060/1864-12-10/ed-1/seq-6/>.

<sup>40</sup> Allendorf, *Long Road to Liberty*, 263.

<sup>41</sup> “From Indianapolis,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 Jan. 1864, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84031490/1864-01-22/ed-1/seq-1/>.

German at Chancellorsville, this regiment of dozens of campaigns and battles would be relegated to garrison and guard duty after their re-enlistment, with their final hint of action coming at the Battle of Franklin. As the 15th Missouri fought for life and limb in the trenches around Carter Farm, the 75th Pennsylvania garrisoned the town itself and a nearby railroad. While the regiment recorded being under fire, no casualties were sustained.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the clear celebration of and tolerance for German soldiers in the West, it did not take long for reminders of nativist anti-German sentiment to reach the men of the 15th Missouri. The first of these was the slight to the whole Fourth Corps of the Army of the Cumberland; they were some of the only Union combat veterans to not be invited to the Grand Review in Washington D.C to celebrate the end of the war. Further insult upon injury was when the 15th Missouri was selected to go to Texas and begin guard and garrison duty; almost fully half of the regiment deserted at Cairo, Illinois on the way towards their Southern destination rather than continue on.<sup>43</sup> Then, in August, the Germans were told that they were to begin constructing a railroad in addition to their other duties. As the Missourians watched regiment after regiment muster out of service, including every other regiment of their brigade, resentment grew and carelessness on the job increased until there was hardly any work being done at all in protest of their extended service. Finally, in late November of 1865, the 15th Missouri received its orders to muster out, and on 24 January 1866, the fewer than one hundred remaining members of the regiment were discharged from service.<sup>44</sup>

By the end of the conflict, the country was exhausted by war. The years-long bloodletting had irreparably changed the nation and the people that lived within it, including the Germans who had put their lives on the line for their new homeland. While new identities would be forged by the German experience during the war, it is important to remember the differences that Germans in the West and East encountered during their services. The differences in their experiences are evident to this day, from the historic memory of their actions to the public opinion of their units, even when discrimination from leadership and persistent anti-immigrant attitudes followed the Germans in both fronts. Those differences are the reasons why the German soldiers became the scapegoats of the East and heroes of the West.

<sup>42</sup> Bates, *History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 921.

<sup>43</sup> Marcoot, *Five Years in the Sunny South*, 144-6.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

# **“Because Innocence is Sexier than you Think”: Love Cosmetics, the Beauty Myth, and the Hijacking of Female Experience through Advertising**

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One consumer revolution of the 1960s was the rise of what Thomas Frank refers to in his book *The Conquest of Cool* as “hip consumerism.”<sup>1</sup> In short, “hip consumerism” is the commodification of counterculture, which bore an advertisement industry that thrived on the decade’s rejection of the square standards of 1950s “mass society,” and the advertising industry that furnished such a society.<sup>2</sup> Frank summarizes, “And from its very beginnings down to the present, business dogged the counterculture with a fake counterculture, a commercial replica that seemed to ape its every move for the titillation of the TV-watching millions and the nation’s corporate sponsors.”<sup>3</sup> Later, Frank presents Wells, Rich, Greene (WRG) as a key purveyor of hip consumerism, first citing their humorous work on Alka-Seltzer and Braniff. Frank lauds WRG as “the agency whose history most clearly traced this trajectory from creativity to hip, from criticism to outright secession from the boring every day of mass society.”<sup>4</sup> From 1969 to the late 1970s, WRG represented a company called Love Cosmetics, whose approach to sales was driven by a countercultural version of love, and designed a campaign with the tagline “Because innocence is sexier than you think,”<sup>5</sup> which worked to reformulate feminine mass consumption into a youthful and free image for the era.

To establish its technique, Love Cosmetics took the “natural” approach, subtly asserting that it knew (and could facilitate the consumer’s embodiment of) the personal and popular concept of love through a faithful accentuation of natural beauty instead of shameless alteration of the self. The brand was meant to be a type of cosmetics that was impervious to the artificial, caked-on standards of the previous generation. “You don’t need make-ups that blank you out. Ours won’t. Ours can’t,” Love Cosmetics said as part of its premier campaign.<sup>6</sup> Pointed appropriations of “nature” like this one and the company’s friendly façade with its consumers enabled Love Cosmetics to partake in recrafting what would be,

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 26.

<sup>2</sup> “Commercial fantasies of rebellion, liberation, and outright ‘revolution’ against the stultifying demands of mass society are commonplace almost to the point of invisibility in advertising, movies, and television programming.” *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>5</sup> Rich Wells, Green Agency, “Because innocence is sexier than you think,” 1975, Photograph, accessed from “Racist, sexist, rude and crude: the worst of 20th century advertising – in pictures,” *Guardian*, 18 Nov. 2015, [https://www.theguardian.com/media/gallery/2015/nov/18/racist-sexist-rude-crude-worst-20th-century-advertising-in-pictures?fbclid=IwAR3zy0nqJenCP1bN3Pb5\\_HGIXe4yRLEhJITmPXB6Au4sE9iUMhsqpJHgOGw](https://www.theguardian.com/media/gallery/2015/nov/18/racist-sexist-rude-crude-worst-20th-century-advertising-in-pictures?fbclid=IwAR3zy0nqJenCP1bN3Pb5_HGIXe4yRLEhJITmPXB6Au4sE9iUMhsqpJHgOGw).

<sup>6</sup> Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 129.

borrowing a term from Naomi Wolf, a newer version of the “beauty myth”<sup>7</sup> that worked towards the unification of youth and sexual appeal. During the mid-1970s, the company’s advertising approach included images of doe-eyed, ambiguously-aged girls and a slogan that read “Because innocence is sexier than you think.”<sup>8</sup> This tagline, in conjunction with the brand’s coopting of nature, infantilized women and hijacked notions of youth and adulthood in order to perpetuate the repression of female agency through the beauty myth and to continue using female agency for profit.

In Naomi Wolf’s “The Beauty Myth,” she explains the eponymous social phenomenon as “a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women’s advancement.”<sup>9</sup> One rendition of the backlash that Wolf described was an idealized image that ran rampant in post-World War II American culture, and which ascribed a reductive type of domestic “beauty” to the feminine. This tight correlation between domesticity and femininity often referred to as the “feminine mystique” and could be considered the predominant beauty myth of the 1950s. In the first chapter of Betty Friedan’s 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*, she describes how the cultural notion of the feminine mystique reshaped the suppression of women after the first wave of feminism in the early 1900s. Discriminatory ideology and practice could no longer be primarily based on the physiological fact of an individual’s female sex (which was then narrowly defined by anatomy), so it was mapped onto a compulsory model of cultural desirability that women were taught to pursue from youth.

As Friedan says, “[Young women] learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights – the independence and the opportunities that the old fashioned feminists fought for.”<sup>10</sup> Friedan explains that as young women were alienated from their ability to pursue personal endeavors outside of domesticity, the freedoms and rights that first-wave feminism achieved were codified as “old fashioned,” instead of classic, which positioned the term which is aesthetically and functionally opposed to the innovations and nostalgic commodities that defined suburban America’s growing middle class in the 50s and 60s. The alienation of women from personal advancement in the 1950s is just one way in which women were provided with an ideal self-image that correlated the high feminine ideal with domesticity; thus, domesticity became the ultimate female pursuit of the time. In Friedan’s words: “Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity.”<sup>11</sup> This was the production of the “feminine

<sup>7</sup> Naomi Wolf, “The Beauty Myth,” in *Signs of Life in the USA: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*, ed. by Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon, third ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000), 481-89.

<sup>8</sup> Rich Wells, Green Agency, “Because innocence is sexier than you think,” 1975.

<sup>9</sup> Wolf, “The Beauty Myth,” 482.

<sup>10</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 45.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

mystique” that took place from the 50s going into the 60s, that great culmination of patriarchal impulses that inculcated the feminine from birth with the notion that to be domestic is to be feminine, which positioned patriarchal ideology once more as the arbiter of female success. This thinly veiled misogyny was also the monolithic ideology that Love Cosmetics used for traction in its advertising technique up to twenty years later.

Domesticity, or the orientation of a life around home and wifely duties, was widely used by advertisers who targeted women as well as those who targeted young girls. For example, young girls were encouraged to model their bodies and features around the pursuit of male pleasure with ads like, “Manufacturers put out brassieres with false bosoms of foam rubber for little girls of ten,” and an advertisement for a child’s dress, sizes 3–6x, in the *New York Times* in the fall of 1960, said, “She Too Can Join the Man-Trap Set.”<sup>12</sup> Domesticity, the cultural monolith, was inextricable from the economic monolith of the same name and definition, both of which coerced women into manifesting and maintaining them, whether it be through drug-store cosmetics purchases or in the ornate dinner parties of aristocratic women. Just as American capitalism of the 1950s was largely defined by this connection between mass culture and commercialism, it was the sounding beacon of mass society that sparked the consumer revolution of the 60s.<sup>13</sup> In the first pages of Thomas Frank’s *Conquest of Cool*, he says that “both sides” of the political spectrum, in remembering the legacy of the 60s in America “Both assume quite naturally that the counterculture was what it said it was; that is, a fundamental opponent of the capitalist order.”<sup>14</sup> With the growing dissent around the mutual confirmation between capital and culture, the 1960s progressed into the 70s and women began to sever themselves from compulsory domesticity.

Although female liberation from domesticity came not just as a feminist movement, but as the feminine contribution to the larger countercultural movement that sought to decenter consumption as the primary driver of culture in American society, the resulting media landscape had unique implications for women. In “The Beauty Myth,” Wolf states that “as women released themselves from the feminine mystique of domesticity, the beauty myth took over its lost ground, expanding as it wanted to carry on its work of social control.”<sup>15</sup> Instead of a successful subversion of gendered cultural norms, the result of the movement was an adjusted economic sphere which kept consumption at its center, specifically reformulating its mode of influence to maintain relevance to and power over a post-domestic female consumer base.

This redundancy was proof of the recurrent beauty myth, as the patriarchal reduction of women ran together with the forceful presence of American

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>13</sup> Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Wolf, “The Beauty Myth,” 482-483.

capitalism to create yet another “a violent backlash against feminism.”<sup>16</sup> When the countercultural attempt at decentering capitalism failed, and the new beauty myth emerged, countercultural monoliths like love and nature were rendered navigating forces in America’s cultural development. This shift insisted presence of some central navigating force mandated a marketable center in order to keep driving America’s familiar capitalist culture at all. As a function of this shifting center and the demands of counterculture, department-store domestic became less popular than the performance of an authentic and un-prescribed self and a new marketing opportunity arose and was developed over the coming decades. A new monolith, intentionally defined by the dissent of the time, arose; youth, sexuality, and freedom replaced the confines of the domestic feminine and the terms of female success were reformulated in tandem. This growing distance between women and assumed domesticity was the lucrative point from which Love Cosmetics grew into success.

As “love” rose in popularity, the advertising industry adjusted to account for the consumers’ newfound desire for freedom and transformed it into a means of driving the market. Frank summarizes this shift in advertising like this “leaders [. . .] had already settled on ‘youth’ and ‘youthfulness’ several years before saturation TV and print coverage of the ‘Summer of Love’ introduced middle America to the fabulous new lifestyles of the young generation.”<sup>17</sup>

This market driver was achieved largely through the guise of genuine engagement with the public’s dissent, that culminated instead in the mere reformulation of the beauty myth into something more subtle. For example, Love Cosmetics redefined beauty as a natural, young self with sex appeal, claiming through the careful cultivation of image and corporate personality that the products themselves could help female consumers achieve authentic beauty. From the beginning, Love Cosmetics was a blank slate that WRG built into a stroke of branding genius. In 1969, Menley & James, a pharmaceutical manufacturer, hired WRG to design a brand for a line of cosmetics that already existed but needed a commercial strategy.<sup>18</sup> Since the products did not have a marketing past that could conflict with its present aim and image, Menley & James’ advertising-first approach to creating their cosmetics brand was the perfect site for reinventing the beauty myth. For this brand, there was no necessary reconciliation with an old advertising technique; the devised approach was the beginning and the end of the product. Because Love Cosmetics had never made the claim that it was indulgent or continental like most brands of the 1950s had, it was able to make a direct claim to authenticity as both a product and as a company, which built its public image as a sympathetic business. Because of this sympathy, Love Cosmetics was able to convince its consumers that

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 482.

<sup>17</sup> Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 128.

it knew, and could provide, the face of love because, as a company, it had never known or provided anything else.

WRG used this apparent authenticity to place itself in stark contrast with its competitors, emphasizing its awareness of the year and the modernity that such awareness implies. As Love Cosmetics claims in its premier advertisement, “This is the way love is in 1969 [sic] freer, more natural, more honest – more out in the open.”<sup>19</sup> This line promised to the audience that change had arrived, that Love Cosmetics had brought it, and that love, given its newfound urgency to consumers, was finally available in earnest. By giving itself the authority to assert exactly what love is in 1969, Love Cosmetics made a spectacle of its apparent awareness of the discontent driving consumers and positioned itself in accord with their anti-establishment worldview. “Nonetheless, ‘most cosmetic companies’ remained ignorant of the new ways and ‘are laboring under the delusion that love and girls are the same as ever,’” Frank quotes Love Cosmetics’ address of its own brand.<sup>20</sup> As shown here, one essential means of building itself up in accord with the consumer was Love Cosmetics’ ability to neutralize its competitors’ potential for a similar relationship by negating their contenders’ potential for friendly affiliation with the consumer. Although it is true that Love Cosmetics was aware of the rejection of the previous generation, the company’s awareness of the uprising was not because it, too, was dissatisfied with society, but because it was on the side of the system that was being rejected. While its awareness of the conflict was genuine, the insider presentation of its affiliation with countercultural dissent was merely a strategic means of getting in the room with the consumer.

Another way Love Cosmetics achieved the familiarity that was essential to the process of reinventing the beauty myth, was through minimizing the authority of the product, largely through packaging design. It was welcoming: the packaging was bright, round, and featured largely sans-serif fonts. Each of these qualities was meant to soothe the consumer’s knitted brow towards conventional presentations of products, an approach that came from the decades in recent advertising history where the hard sell was the standard approach. The hard sell, as Frank quotes David Halberstam, sought “to hit people over the head with the product as bluntly as possible.”<sup>21</sup> In contrast to the grounded and authoritative techniques of the hard sell, further defined by its imposing and belittling voice, Love Cosmetics’ removal of serif fonts made their products appear less interested in commanding something of the customer and more interested in chatting with the customer to reach the authenticity that the product promised. The choreographed amiability of the packaging, amid Love Cosmetics’ false performance of discontent with the square standards of the 1950s, was a faux display of the agency’s respect

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

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

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.



for the consumer public. Love Cosmetics' presentation worked under the guise of authenticity, making a spectacle of its apparent distaste for the artificiality of the existing beauty myth. However, this presentation contradicted the company's alignment with authenticity since the campaign existed only to manipulate the dissatisfied consumer into purchasing a product that sedated their dissent, despite that company's blatant continuation of the same system that the consumer had already denounced.

Regardless of the betrayal contained in Love Cosmetics' advertising approach, the company was still able to rewrite the beauty myth through its copy. Specifically, turn to the series of ads that read "Love's Baby Soft: Because Innocence is sexier than you think."<sup>22</sup> This slogan, first issued in 1974, redefined the beauty myth and female success no longer according to domestic success, but according to a woman's ability to embody and maintain youthful femininity and sexual appeal. In one ad featuring the above tagline, a young girl, wearing a frilled white dress and holding a white stuffed bear looks directly into the eyes of the viewer with an intense, just-below-the-brow expression.<sup>23</sup> The sexuality of the image may be subtle, but the understatement of the girl's gaze makes it explicit alongside her performatively virginal appearance in a display of the unity between youth and sexuality furnished by Love Cosmetics.

The gaze, contained by the sexualized youth of the image, helped redefine the beauty myth for the consumer by enabling them to take part in the mimicry of her agency, this time through the manipulation of her identity and self-recognition as object. As John Berger states, "And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as woman."<sup>24</sup> The dually presented young woman is an engagement of the woman as both the surveyor and the surveyed; her self-awareness as one surveyed allows her to survey herself as well as the audience. Corresponding with countercultural values, she was seemingly empowered by the act of meeting the viewer's gaze with her own, which spited her status as a surveyed object, and elevated her to the status of an active surveyor. This subtext acknowledged each of her dual roles in image and identity, emulating the control of the self that second-wave feminists desired. However, as with many forms of hip consumerism, the appropriation of freedom for commercial use prevented that control from achieving authenticity, and no progress was made.

In conversation with the line "because innocence is sexier than you think," the dual gaze of the girl in the image allowed the voice of the ad to appear as the voice of the dissenting audience. The fixation on the audience's dissent produced a new necessity for advertising companies to indulge the collective "cult of the new" that

<sup>22</sup> Rich Wells, Green Agency, "Because innocence is sexier than you think"

<sup>23</sup> Jessanne Collins, "Girl Powder: A Cultural History Of Love's Baby Soft," *The Awl*, 5 Mar. 2013, <https://www.theawl.com/2013/03/girl-powder-a-cultural-history-of-loves-baby-soft/>.

<sup>24</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972), 46.



Leach explored in his text *Land of Desire*.<sup>25</sup> Leach describes the cult of the new as an American phenomenon for which Americans “had been prepared by their own history. Phrases like the ‘New World’, ‘new heaven on earth’, and ‘new nation’ were common currency.”<sup>26</sup> In their active redefinition of the beauty myth, the advertisers were also selling the imperial quality of American identity to the consumers of counterculture. In buying makeup that sought to make them look more natural and less “made-up,” women felt as though they were actively partaking in the blazing of a new trail, one that led to newer, greener pastures. However, as a result of the cyclical and controlling nature of the beauty myth, consumers were actively partaking only in the blazing of a newly confined definition of female success, one that, unfortunately, led once more to pastures where the grass was simply expensive and painted green.<sup>27</sup>

Alongside the continuous deception of its consumers, Love Cosmetics used its Baby Soft products to hijack fundamental notions of youth and nature from women in order to redefine the beauty myth. Because of the accessible binary between the “natural” and the domestic which was upended at the time, Love Cosmetics incorporated nature into its strategy by coopting the concept of “innocence.” The concept of being “natural,” as it existed then, in contrast to the mass society of the 50s, implied a version of a person that was closer to her true, untainted state; a natural woman was free from the common failings and cultivations of society. “Innocence,” a term which has youthful connotations, worked for Love Cosmetics as an extension of “nature” by mapping the natural onto the female consumer’s body by way of age. Innocence implied youth, which allowed the consumer to access a more natural version of herself which was free of the aged expectation of domesticity and propriety of social norms. Thus, marketing innocence couched in youth worked twofold: Love Cosmetics promised women not just a freedom from the suppressions of domesticity, but access to a form of herself that possessed and performed freedom from the unpopular forces of cultivated society.

Turning back to the “Because innocence is sexier than you think”<sup>28</sup> campaign mentioned earlier in this paper, Love Cosmetics incorporated youth into its strategy by developing an aesthetic of sexualized infantilization as a sign of a woman’s adherence to counterculture and her embrace of its sense of beauty. “Innocence,” per the line “Because innocence is sexier than you think,” and in correspondence with the image affiliated with the ad, existed as a method for the woman to embody girlhood once more, a time where she was already innocent, and did not need to prove it. In addition to the subtext of the line, the semantics of it directly employ “innocence” as a means of being “sexy.” All components

<sup>25</sup> William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 18.

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

<sup>27</sup> Wolf, “The Beauty Myth,” 487.

<sup>28</sup> Rich Wells, Green Agency, “Because innocence is sexier than you think.”

considered, the ad is both more robust and less palatable than the sum of its parts, equating childhood with sexual appeal in a transparent, nearly pedophilic frame of female success. In enabling her return to her youthful innocence, the tagline and the product promised her sexual success. Her performed youth, promised Love Cosmetics, would make her desirable. The melding together of youth, nature, and sex, as an antithesis to the confines of domesticity that was so crucially rejected by Love Cosmetic's consumer base, was both a symptom and a pioneering force of the beauty myth at the time. The close correlation between youth, nature, and female desirability coopted the structure of the beauty myth of the 50s, which had correlated femininity with the domestic, and adapted it for the countercultural urges of the decade, retaining its suppressive qualities as well as its commercial ones. Love Cosmetics sold a version of femininity that replaced one narrow version of female success with another, urging her pursuits and purchases to construct an identity that prioritized the embodiment of the unity between the natural quality of her innocence and her sexual appeal.

While the forced singularity between a woman and her apparent "natural" state was one of the pioneering ideas of the new beauty myth, it was also one of the most glaring detriments of the campaign. The advertisement sold a prepared image of women which inherently severed them from accepting their natural state and aligned the embedded values of the campaign again with the conventional and definitional mechanism of cosmetics. Fundamentally, a cosmetic product is designed and sold to alter and cultivate the unornamented appearance for some social impact, distancing that person from the natural form that defines the term "innocence." For this reason, along with the embedded American urge to produce something new, Love Cosmetics never authentically engaged with nature but merely plagiarized it to gain further access to the female market at the time. The campaign convinced women that they looked most beautifully natural when they donned Love Cosmetics, thieving the certainty of their actual, natural faces and replacing it with the insecurity of needing to look faux-natural, as the "innocence" of Baby Soft would allow them to do.

In addition to alienating women from their actual natural state in favor of an infantilized and sexualized model of nature defined through product consumption, the Baby Soft campaign also coopted women's connection to their experienced youth to weaken their confidence in themselves and perpetuate the control of the beauty myth. Under the influence of the youthful beauty myth, the adult female consumer was reminded of the constant quality of her own physical aging and was subsequently pressed into the throes of her expiring youth. Meanwhile, her younger counterpart was primed to become septic with anxiety surrounding her own loss of youth and innocence. Through her inundation with messages of the beauty myth, women were stripped down to the fundamentals of their material selves, and then reminded that the reality of their bodies was distinctly not ideal,

distorting their memory of their youth in the process. Her loss of youth became not a normal part of physical and personal growth, but a source of resentment and failure in her adult life. Because the woman was no longer “innocent,” she could not reach the natural and young version of sexiness that the beauty myth requires of her; because she had become an adult, she had failed her feminine identity, she was expired, undesirable. This fetishization of youth created a narrow path to the feminine ideal of sex appeal, which the adult woman cannot navigate because of her inescapable and embodied age. She was then caught between her pursuit of actualizing the beauty myth and the actuality of her existence.

As the woman mourned the version of herself which would have been successfully feminine in this beauty myth, her memory of that self was distorted not only by resentment of that loss, but by a melancholic nostalgia defined by such longing. She mourned not just for her days of innocence, but groped forward, longing to visually reclaim them in order to fulfill the feminine success that her past youth implied. It is in the woman’s nostalgia that the beauty myth found register for control in her; it inculcated her with the notion that her current form is deemed unfit for desire, and she relinquished herself to that notion. Furthermore, nostalgia engaged the woman as both surveyed and surveyor. Her existence as one surveyed destabilized her identity, but her hyper-occupation of her role as self-surveyor permitted the infection of nostalgia as she witnessed and compared two competing forms of self simultaneously. By destabilizing her self-image, the new beauty myth removed the woman from her present self and put her in impossible pursuit of an imagined, younger self, thus undercutting her agency in the present. As a result, she bought the makeup that claimed to restore her to her original state of innocence and deliver her to the shining gates of the beauty myth.

In the striking line of ads for Love Cosmetics’ Baby Soft with the tag line “Because innocence is sexier than you think,” the company developed a personality suited for the contemporary public at the time in order to maintain control of the beauty myth and continue female oppression through consumer habits. In short, this technique is an example of hip advertising, which strove to integrate the cultural critiques of the decade into the marketable mainstream culture developing in time with the dissent. With these ads, Love Cosmetics sold the same coercive model of mass society to the people who purveyed the movement against it, and, in the process, managed to convince them that the sale itself was not a failure. Although this pursuit is already structurally ironic, the particular irony of Love Cosmetics is that it is a makeup company. This campaign was fueled largely by developing a “natural” image, which was of sweeping detriment to women as it coopted the fragile state of youth into an avenue for sexual desirability and furthermore presented that success as the essence of successful femininity. Both in the structural deceit of hip consumerism and in the continual female suppression perpetrated by the production of a beauty myth, these ads are a product of the

developmental arc that stretched from the 1950s to the 1970s, which resulted in a consumer landscape that fundamentally had the same power dynamics as the one that the consumers meant to abolish, but with a subtlety that added one more layer of historic false accomplishment to the American public's search for authenticity and self without a brand.

## **Florida and the ERA: The Second Wave's Crash on Florida's Sunny Shores**

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As an off-shoot of the second wave of the American Women's Rights Movement, an electoral battle waged throughout the 1970s over passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. The ERA failed to pass, but in the ensuing debates, cultural divides over gender roles and rights were revealed and deepened. Yet, most of the voices heard regarding the ERA come from the leaders of the campaigns both in the South and nationally. But what of the average American in the Gulf South? Do their attitudes match that of leaders and scholars? Was there something uniquely Southern about those attitudes? Was there a gender or religious divide? Following Watergate in the 1970s, the start of this new decade garnered "conservative backlash against feminism," and the ERA failed in Florida, in part, because of the public's shift in attitude from one that saw the amendment as simply securing basic rights for both sexes, to one that saw the ERA as part of a moral battle over the social and cultural implications of those rights once secured.<sup>1</sup> This shift, which can be seen in citizens' letters to state officials as well as newspapers and telephone surveys, included concerns over a negative change in home and family life, protection by law under the contract of marriage or labor laws, and ideas about what makes a female a wife, a mother, and a woman.<sup>2</sup>

What links these fears, is a shared apprehension about the future, and an unclear understanding of the Equal Rights Amendment, which proposed that "equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." Brayden King and Sarah Soule describe "results [which] show that movements mattered more to legislative decisions in the earlier stages of the policy process, but that their effects were eclipsed in later stages by public opinion."<sup>3</sup> The Equal Rights Amendment focused on all individuals, not just one particular group of people, and was first drafted in 1923 by Alice Paul, lifelong political figure and feminine activist. It was later revised to assume an incremental approach to legislation by Grace Harte and others in 1940, which passed in 1943. Still, the amendment failed to generate a passing vote, even pressing into the early

<sup>1</sup> Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., "A Study of Attitudes Toward Passage of the Equal Rights Amendment," 1982, Box 3, Folder: "Equal Rights Amendment-After 1980," M91-13 UPI files, Florida State Archives; Laura F. Edwards, "The Reconstruction of Rights: The Fourteenth Amendment and Popular Conceptions of Governance," *Journal of Supreme Court History* 41, no. 3 (2016): 310-28. doi:10.1111/jsch.12121; Kate Daily, "Women of Watergate," *BBC News*, 19 June 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Viktor Gecas, "The Equal Rights Amendment in Washington State: An Analysis and Interpretation of Voting Patterns," Washington State University, Pullman Department of Rural Sociology, 1977, 1-22, See entire survey <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED160507.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Brayden G. King and Sarah A. Soule, *The Stages of the Policy Process and the Equal Rights Amendment, 1972-1982* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 5.

1960s.<sup>4</sup> Despite Paul and Harte's efforts, the amendment, while it was reintroduced every four years after 1923, was "not actually debated until 1972," when the ERA was finally passed by the United States Congress.<sup>5</sup>

By the original deadline set by Congress in 1977, only 35 of 38 required states had ratified the Amendment. Florida's vote became a determinant of fate. Strategists targeted progressives in the state, hoping that Florida's ratification would spur the remaining fence straddlers in other states to finalize the amendment's spot in the US constitution by 1979. Florida beaches rarely see an empty lot during the summer, but in the late Seventies, the sunshine state lost a number of vacationers on account of the Equal Rights Amendment. While business might not have suffered near the consequence as did activists and strategists of the women's movement, families all over the country were resisting traveling south for the summer until the ERA was successfully ratified, which we see in letters to Governor Smathers.<sup>6</sup> So, with so much support from the public, why did the ERA fail in Florida?

In 1982, 800 state residents were interviewed by phone for the purpose of "examin[ing] in some depths the perceptions about ERA held by the public."<sup>7</sup> The survey indicated opinions about the ERA in the State of Florida went from a fight for and about equal rights, to an argument based upon the outcome of the amendment's ratification. This study's conclusions about voter's attitudes were compared to the voices of the public, and one prospect that caused voter hesitation, as suggested by the survey, was the notion of difference feminism. This suggests men and women possess innate differences in physical makeup and intellect, which structure their roles in society. Mrs. Sellers of Tallahassee wrote Senator Smathers in 1974 requesting he "please, please vote against the ERA," and for him to help "keep a woman a woman, and continue our respect for our husbands."<sup>8</sup> Another couple wrote Smathers that same year, making it clear they did not need the ERA to establish "equality between them," because what made a woman a woman in the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies was her husband's success, her children, her clothes, and her demeanor.<sup>9</sup> The mentioned components warranted a specific behavior toward women, which, in some cases, made them feel very feminine, causing

<sup>4</sup> Gwen Jordan, "'Trying to Bail the Ocean with a Sieve': Grace Harte's 1941 Alternative Equal Rights Amendment," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 38, no. 2 (2017): 80-81.

<sup>5</sup> King and Soule, *The Stages of the Policy Process and the Equal Rights Amendment*, 1-3.

<sup>6</sup> Florida Office of the Governor (1979-1987: Graham), Governor Bob Graham's issue correspondence, 1979-1984, Box 14, ERA-1979, S 850, Florida State Archive; Bruce Smathers Papers, 1972-1974, Series 4, Senate Records, Box 16, Folder—ERA/Information Against, M75-93, Florida State Archives; It is important to note that the selected quotations are accurate representations of more than a single voice in Florida. The "Folders" as cited for the Smathers Papers, are not numbered in this particular box, so, it helps to keep in mind that these correspondence quotations are spread over many folders titled "ERA/Information Against." Also, the letters mentioned in the paper in relation to Smathers are from 1973 and 1974—most sent/received in April. Those from Graham—mentioned later—are from 1979/1981. These were grouped in this way so that all voices could be fairly and accurately represented by the selected quotes.

<sup>7</sup> Louis Harris, "A Study of Attitudes Toward Passage of the Equal Rights Amendment," 1982, Box 3, Equal Rights Amendment-After 1980, M91-13 UPI files, FSA. For more details, see Page 6, Table 1.

<sup>8</sup> Smathers Papers, 1972-1974, Series 4, Senate Records, Box 16, Folder—ERA/Information Against, M75-93, FSA.

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

them to view the standards required of motherhood and wifehood as a patriotic duty to be fulfilled, an idea communicated by St. Petersburg native, Kathy Tygart, who implored Smathers to “be patriotic” and “stop ERA.”<sup>10</sup> Mrs. B. B. Lane, a Democrat and wife, said she “enjoy[ed] being a woman – being treated like a woman, and this bill w[ould] do nothing to enhance [her] as a woman.” The beliefs portrayed here are centered on concepts of gender role as a dictator of relations between men and women, which had slowly led the Equal Rights movement in Florida toward matters of “husband versus wife, or female versus male.”

When Floridians were first introduced to the amendment, “a sizable 61% majority said they favored that amendment to the constitution.”<sup>11</sup> But, after hearing arguments pushing for acknowledgment of the differences between men and women, only a “55-38% (down to 55) majority statewide in Florida favor[ed] the ERA.”<sup>12</sup> The endless debating over the outcome of the amendment’s passage caused many Floridians to reimagine the positive outcomes of ratification, like the decline of sufficient mothering, and feminine imagery, and to consider how the amendment may influence “home and family life,” to which Mrs. B.B. Lane felt the ERA would be “a great threat.”<sup>13</sup> She and many others wanted to abort the ERA because of this single prospect. Aubrey Hargnett echoed her sentiments, asking Senator Smathers for a “no” vote because she claimed the bill would have “[gone] a step further in promoting the downfall of family life and responsibilities.”<sup>14</sup> Mattoon D’Amore brought to the forefront at an ERA roundtable, that the “success of Stop-ERA lay in the fact that it raised the specter of change [in that] ratification . . . would change the gender order of society in ways that would move us well away from the state sanction of traditionalism.”<sup>15</sup> The roundtable guests discussed the lack of communication and “assimilation” existing between feminist movements and groups like Phyllis Schlafly’s “STOP ERA,” creating misunderstandings that could have most likely been resolved. Well, in the Seventies, communication would have been deeply rooted in fear of liberal ideologies, so it makes sense that women opposing ERA would want to hold onto their protective rights, and tightly seize shelter by marriage, family, and labor laws. Shirley Spellerberg, President of “Women For Responsible Legislation” also wrote officials warning of the lack of clarity surrounding the institution of marriage, and the interpretative mess it would be if the ERA passed. She says

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Louis Harris, “A Study of Attitudes Toward Passage of the Equal Rights Amendment,” 1982, Box 3, Folder: “Equal Rights Amendment-After 1980,” M91-13 UPI files, FSA.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Noel Myricks, “The Equal Rights Amendment: Its Potential Impact on Family Life,” *The Family Coordinator* 26, no. 4 (1977): 321-24; Smathers Papers, 1972-1974, Series 4, Senate Records, Box 16, Folder—ERA/Information Against, M75-93, FSA.

<sup>14</sup> Smathers Papers, 1972-1974, Series 4, Senate Records, Box 16, Folder—ERA/Information Against, M75-93, FSA.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Frances Berry, Melinda Chateaubert, Katherine Cross, Jan Erickson, Roberta W. Francis, Bonnie Grabenhofer, Bettina Hager, Amy Richards, and Laura Mattoon D’Amore, “ERA Roundtable,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 38, no. 2 (2017), 1-40, doi:10.5250/fronjwomestud.38.2.0001.



women in America are “far luckier” than those in other parts of the world, and that “women of our nation enjoy a ‘better than equal,’ status.”<sup>16</sup> Another letter from Jacksonville, sent by Mrs. Kay Fletcher, suggested the amendment would “be a legal chaos,” and proposed a vote against the ERA to “keep the family unit.”<sup>17</sup> Other women, like Jeanne D. Rodriguez, business woman and bank director, felt women were “well taken care of under the 14th amendment,” and did not “need legislation to tell [them] that [they were] equal under God.”<sup>18</sup>

Florida women against the movement wanted it acknowledged by legislators that they needed specific protection. These women defined their womanhood as existing by their differences from men. For opponents of the ERA, this amendment would rob them of their identity. So, it seems appropriate that they feared the loss of their rights as women once the amendment’s wording replaced “woman” with “person,” or “individual.”<sup>19</sup> Harvard Law School Professor, Paul Freund, felt “use of the law in an attempt to conjure away all the differences which do exist between the sexes is both an insult to the law itself and a complete disregard of fact.”<sup>20</sup> Washington State researchers concluded in *An Analysis and Interpretation of Voting Patterns* which centered on the Equal Rights Amendment, that the highest percentage of women advocating against the ERA by 1972 believed in the “traditional division of labor (women in the home) as the natural order of things,” or they had come to feel the “ERA [was] too vague [and its] implications [un]clear.”<sup>21</sup> While it is evident most of the public agreed on the positives women would reap from ratification, it did not stop people from succumbing to fear of a constitutional change that promised equality, but was capable of producing unpredictable ramifications, including military drafting. Phyllis Schlafly, anti-feminist, lawyer and writer of “The Phyllis Schlafly Report,” published in Illinois, “led a STOP ERA movement [which] saw the threat of women being conscripted into active military duty.”<sup>22</sup> Schlafly’s “STOP” stood for “Stop Taking Our Privileges.”<sup>23</sup> There are certain physical differences that warranted concern over “equality of rights,” she argued. Would women be protected from the draft if they were deemed equal? Would they be able to volunteer, or would they be forced into combat? Would it even

<sup>16</sup> Florida Office of the Governor (1979-1987: Graham), Governor Bob Graham’s issue correspondence, 1979-1984, Box 14, ERA-1979, S 850, Florida State Archives.

<sup>17</sup> Bruce Smathers Papers, 1972-1974, Series 4: Senate Records, Box 16, Folder—ERA/Information Against, M75-93, FSA.

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

<sup>19</sup> Chelsea Griffis, “‘The Heart of the Battle Is Within.’ Politically and Socially Rightist and Conservative Women and the Equal Rights Amendment,” Electronic Dissertation, University of Toledo, 2014, 1-237, <https://etd.ohiolink.edu>.

<sup>20</sup> Smathers Papers, 1972-1974, Series 4: Senate Records, Box 16, Folder—ERA/Information Against, M75-93, FSA.

<sup>21</sup> Gecas, “The Equal Rights Amendment in Washington State,” Table 3, “Reasons Given for Voting Against ERA,” 22.

<sup>22</sup> Rachel Otwell, “Illinois Issues: ERA - Yesterday And Today,” NPR Illinois, August 3, 2017, [https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html#cg-journal](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html#cg-journal).

<sup>23</sup> Ninety-Second US Congress, “Equal Rights Amendment,” (Grey House Publishing Inc., March 22, 1972): 160-162; Otwell, “Illinois Issues: ERA - Yesterday And Today.”



be an issue? In 1973, Senator Bruce Smathers responded to Miss Angie Flynn of Jacksonville, Florida saying “I intend to work for elimination of this type of discrimination because of sex. However, I do not believe that all women should be treated identical to men in all situations.”<sup>24</sup> He continued, “women should have the right to voluntarily serve in the Armed Forces but I do not believe that they should be placed in a position where someday they could be drafted and forced to serve in combative roles.”<sup>25</sup> Smathers clearly shared in Mrs. Flynn’s fear of the legal interpretations bound to arise after the amendment secured national credence, as did Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Norton, who had similar reservations, wrote the Senator that “the ERA [would] have a substantial and pervasive impact on military practices. . . [and] women w[ould] be eligible for combat duty.”<sup>26</sup>

Was Smathers falling prey to the what ifs bringing the bustling movement to a halt? Instead of focusing solely on the concept of “equality of rights,” which was the amendment’s intended purpose, Smathers and much of the Florida public were partially swept up in the interpretive nature of the text. Still, in the early half of the decade, there were many who were not willing to overlook the vote for ratification as a “vote for human potential,” as was written to Senator Smathers by Dr. Edward J Harrell on the first of April 1974.<sup>27</sup> The Senator also received a telegram from the League of Women Voters of West Palm Beach eight days later, asking the “honorable” Senator to begin “affirmative action on ERA.” Lincoln Onfroy, Jacksonville public employee wrote Smathers a rather short and to the point letter, confirming a pro ERA approach which justified “rational, unemotional, [and] factual examinations of records” concerning Equal Rights legislation. A person harboring this view might not consider the military drafting part of the issue, nor part of the amendment’s outcome, whereas women like Fort Lauderdale resident, Mrs. George E. Simons, saw the “ERA as a simplistic solution to a complex problem [that] would open up a period of extreme confusion in constitutional law.” She stated that “interpretation of women’s rights w[ould] rest solely to the discretion of the courts,” and “the physiological and functional differences between men and women precludes any such nonsense as “equality.”<sup>28</sup>

In 1974, supporters of the amendment experienced this gradual shift in focus toward the what-ifs involving family life. Upon the public’s deeper inspection of ERA legislation, the Daytona Beach Morning Journal ran the headline: “Candidates say State Needs a Business Man as Governor.”<sup>29</sup> Bob Graham, Harvard Law School Graduate, was working on his campaign through the decade,

<sup>24</sup> Smathers Papers, 1972-1974, Series 4: Senate Records, Box 16, Folder—ERA/Information Against, M75-93, FSA.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Smathers Papers, 1972-1974, Series 4: Senate Records, Box 16, Folder—ERA/Information Against, M75-93, FSA.

<sup>29</sup> *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, “Candidates say State Needs a Business man as Governor,” 1974, 1.

beginning about this time, and was very much a proponent of Equal Rights.<sup>30</sup> In other words, Graham's election was a fire starter for ERA advocates, as they had experienced many obstacles nationwide before turning to Florida as a new space for gathering momentum. By 1979, the legislature was looking hopeful to ERA activists as letters of support flowed into the governor's office. Many of the letters were thoughtful thank you's, full of gratitude toward his efforts to establish equal rights for women in the State of Florida. He received countless letters from out of state complimenting his character in the perceptive manner Floridians wrote him, such as one Randall Klamer from Birmingham, Alabama, who said "it is great to know that there are people like yourself who care about giving people of this great country of ours 'equality of rights under the law.'"<sup>31</sup> By the late 1970s, people either stood firmly in their beliefs of equality of rights as a human and not specifically feminine right, or they stood in fear of imagined repercussions that would follow the legal recognition of equality between the sexes.<sup>32</sup> Mr. Klamer's quotation indicates he saw the movement as one shifting towards human rights. Kathy Carlton from St. Louis wrote Graham declaring, "a democracy cannot exist while 53 percent of its citizens are not protected from discrimination," referring to women as citizens, versus classifying them by sex.<sup>33</sup> She was not the only sender to adopt such language either.

In addition to supportive comments from citizens pleased with the governor's advocacy for the ERA, Mr. and Mrs. Milton Roth declared "this [was] an opportunity for Florida to make us a ratified country," which indicates even though Florida would not be the last vote needed for national ratification, it would surely put pressure on other states to close the gap between citizenship and sex. A generous portion of Graham's correspondence was sent to his office from out of state. Pro ERA forces tackled a last-ditch effort at maintaining sponsorships with big names like *Playboy* and the Rockefeller Foundation, while also keeping their cause alive in the legislature.<sup>34</sup> ERA proponents in and out of state sought Governor Graham's help to accomplish just this.<sup>35</sup> Sheila Shultz of Illinois excitedly reported "people all over the country ask you to make this a ratified country," and Sue Churalisz made it clear "even though I am from another state I want you to know I think the passage of this amendment in your state is vital," not to mention countless

<sup>30</sup> Florida Memory: State Library and Archives of Florida, "Letters to Governor Bob Graham." <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/326628>

<sup>31</sup> Florida Office of the Governor (1979-1987: Graham), Governor Bob Graham's issue correspondence, 1979-1984, Box 14, ERA-1979, S 850, Florida State Archives.

<sup>32</sup> Louis Harris, "A Study of Attitudes Toward Passage of the Equal Rights Amendment," 1982, Box 3, Folder—Equal Rights Amendment-After 1980, M91-13 UPI files, FSA.

<sup>33</sup> Florida (1979-1987: Graham), Governor Bob Graham's issue correspondence, 1979-1984, Box 14, ERA-1979, S 850, FSA.

<sup>34</sup> Kayla J. Hastrup, "The Feminine Mistake: Burkean Frames in Phyllis Schlafly's Equal Rights Amendment Speeches," Thesis / Dissertation ETD, Virginia Tech, 2015, 77-78.

<sup>35</sup> Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism: 1963-1975* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003).

letters passionately accentuated the phrase “your state,” signifying just how crucial Florida’s vote had become.

The amendment failed to pass in 1979, but Congress extended the deadline to 1982, and the women’s movement did not stop there. Legislators that supported Equal Rights were still diligently pushing for ratification, but by 1982, the ERA had lost the vote again. In 1983, Florida conducted a survey in the Senate, which showed that “the amendment would pass 25-15 if a vote were taken that day,” and it was recorded that Jack Gordon, Senator since ’79, “intend[ed] to formally file the resolution for consideration during the 1983 regular session beginning in April,” without trying to “get it passed.”<sup>36</sup> It seems that “the last time a vote was taken, only days before the national deadline for ratification, the Senate rejected the amendment 22-16, [indicating] a flip-flop in legislation.”<sup>37</sup> Why the sudden change in attitudes? Were those fears gripping the public, seeking out legislators in its wake? What could women do now? Once the gates to ratify had closed, many realized that the battle, while it was indeed a political one, would now rest, for the most part, in the hands of men who held political positions and power. The probability of continued male dominance made it rather difficult for women to imagine further participation, and materialized supporter’s loss.

Why the Equal Rights Amendment failed in Florida, is reminiscent of the amendment’s national failure. In both, publicized arguments sparked doubt in the amendment’s purpose, to legally establish equality between individuals through either “sweeping changes,” or “incremental legislation.”<sup>38</sup> Even so, “there is some doubt whether the ERA would bring about greater equality between the sexes. But the measure has taken on considerable symbolic importance for the women’s movement and has generated a strong reaction, both pro and con,” and we see this in our modern revival of the Equal Rights movement.<sup>39</sup> Gwen Jordan points out in her article, “Trying to Bail the Ocean with a Sieve,” most women in opposition felt and still feel that language as broad as that of the Equal Rights Amendment, could overturn some of the protective laws now in place.<sup>40</sup> This is the same hesitation that halted the movement in Florida. Today, almost fifty years later, the ERA is revisited, accumulating the yes votes and positive interest needed to propose constitutional ratification. Nevada was the thirty-sixth state to ratify in 2017, followed most recently by Illinois, who became the thirty-seventh state to ratify in

<sup>36</sup> Senator Gordon, Box 3, Folder—Equal Rights Amendment-After 1980, M91-13 UPI files, FSA; “Governor Says Prospects for ERA in House Appear Doubtful,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 1981; Smathers Papers, 1972-1974, Box 3, Folder: “Equal Rights Amendment-After 1980,” M91-13 UPI files, FSA.

<sup>37</sup> Smathers Papers, 1972-1974, Box 3, Folder: “Equal Rights Amendment-After 1980,” M91-13 UPI files, FSA.

<sup>38</sup> Jordan, *Trying to Bail the Ocean with a Sieve*, 81.

<sup>39</sup> Marsha Mercer, “#MeToo Fuels a Comeback for the Equal Rights Amendment,” *USA Today*, 1 Mar. 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Jordan, *Trying to Bail the Ocean with a Sieve*, 81-82.

May of 2018.<sup>41</sup> This rebirth of the movement poses an interesting question: Will Florida become a fresh battleground once more?

Those who wrote their congressional leaders and governors in the Seventies see echoes of their voices today in the arguments of a new generation, which has begun rallying behind a recent revival of the ERA. But culturally, the U.S. is in a different place. Women are now allowed in combat (although the draft is still male only). Society now takes sexual harassment as a serious issue. And the Supreme Court has legalized same sex marriages. It is hard to say whether this revival will match the veracity of the previous forty years ago. Many people today may decide that because of these gains for women, the ERA is now a mere relic of the past that has passed its usefulness. Then again, as we see the persistent problem that the #MeToo movement and the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh have uncovered, others may say we need it now more than ever. Future historians may decide if 21st Century women still will feel the need to write: "Protect women and vote no on ERA. I am as equal as I want to be."<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> David Montero, "Thirty-five Years past a Deadline Set by Congress, Nevada Ratifies the Equal Rights Amendment," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 Mar. 2017; Matthew Haag, "The Equal Rights Amendment was just ratified by Illinois. What does that mean?" *New York Times*, 31 May 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Governor Bob Graham's issue correspondence, 1979-1984, Box 14. FSA.

# The British Government's Response to the Czech Crisis of 1938

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## Introduction

The Czechoslovakian Crisis of 1938 may have been the last opportunity to arrest Hitler's plan for continental domination before he triggered World War II.<sup>1</sup> The greatest degree of responsibility for action in the crisis rested upon British shoulders. Although it was France that had a treaty outlining its duty to defend Czechoslovakia in case of an unprovoked attack, France awaited British support before fulfilling the obligation. Thus, history makes it clear that the British stance was more pivotal to the outcome of the crisis than any treaty.

The crisis arose from the fact that the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia contained many ethnic Germans. There were alleged instances of injustices against this ethnic German minority, and Nazi Germany eagerly took this opportunity to claim that the Sudeten Germans ought to be liberated from Czech "oppression" and incorporated into the Reich. German troops threatened to cross the border if Czechoslovakia did not grant the Sudetens the freedom Germany insisted upon. Czechoslovakia naturally feared for its national integrity, and Prague looked to France for reassurance. Britain feared any French involvement in the Crisis could drag Britain into hostilities, as the two western democracies were close allies.<sup>2</sup>

The ordeal concluded on 29 September 1938, with the Munich Conference. The Conference was a summit by Britain, France, Germany, and Italy to ultimately resolve the crisis. On this historic day, Chamberlain averted war – alas only for a year. Czechoslovakia was split, and Germany was the main beneficiary of the Conference.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars may be tempted to judge history from the privileged position they enjoy by having access to more complete information surrounding the unfolding, and, more importantly, the conclusion, of certain events. This mindset inevitably leads to a scathing critique of Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister from May 1937 – May 1940, and his policy of appeasement. Looking back, the choices the British "should have" made seem obvious, especially since recent evidence suggests that a stronger British stance could have led to the downfall of Nazism already in 1938.<sup>4</sup> Overcoming any frustration at the apparent oblivion of the British players in this international arena requires one to consider the uncertainty they must

<sup>1</sup> Terry Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy of 1938: The Unknown Story of the Military Plot to Kill Hitler and Avert World War II* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2003), xii.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Goodhope Colvin, *The Chamberlain Cabinet: How the meetings in 10 Downing Street, 1937-1939, Led to the Second World War--told for the First Time from the Cabinet Papers* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> Telford Taylor, Munich: *The Price of Peace* (New York: Doubleday Books, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Terry Parssinen, *The Oster Conspiracy of 1938*.

have experienced at the limited, and often contradictory, information available to them. The main strand of intelligence from the British Foreign Office indicating a belligerent Germany could be criticized as coming from German sources opposed to Hitler, while the type of intelligence coming from the British Embassy in Berlin could be criticized as being from sources too close to the regime.<sup>5</sup> Exacerbating matters was the fact that the British were dealing with a rather unorthodox and peculiar German leader – one who did not appear to play by the rules.<sup>6</sup> It is vital to keep these facts in mind throughout the following examination of events in order to limit the amount of hindsight bias.

Another recurring point throughout this paper and which must be presented in this introduction to better understand the British mindset is that many leaders in His Majesty's Government (HMG) did not believe that Czechoslovakia could be saved as a political entity, no matter how the British reacted. The fear was that even if Britain guaranteed Czechoslovakia and fought for it, the Czech state would not survive as it did pre-1938, and that it would never be the same. With regards to this apparent futility of British action, the debate in Cabinet therefore revolved around whether Czechoslovakia was the center of the issue at hand and was to be considered an isolated incident or whether the issue of Hitler's aggression went beyond the alleged aim of liberating the Sudetens. Although the evidence available to the British suggested the latter option, it is worth maintaining an awareness of these issues leading to the players' uncertainty.

The influential individual players related to British foreign relations of the time are many, but four stood out. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain naturally claimed part of the spotlight. He also was the flag-bearer of appeasement. Edward Wood, also known as Lord Halifax, became the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in February 1938.<sup>7</sup> He played an active role in communicating with leading German figures and in directing Cabinet meetings relating to foreign affairs. He is particularly intriguing for his turn from a stance supporting appeasement to one advocating a tough stance against Germany. Alfred Duff Cooper became the First Lord of the Admiralty in 1937 and was a very vocal proponent of a tough British stance on German aggression in Cabinet meetings.<sup>8</sup> The British Ambassador to Berlin, Sir Nevile Henderson, on the other hand, discouraged HMG to declare its support to Czechoslovakia.<sup>9</sup>

These four individuals are the most intriguing for their impactful role in the Czechoslovakian Crisis, but two more deserve honorable mention. Winston Churchill, the future Prime Minister, was a member of Parliament but not in

<sup>5</sup> Public Record Office London, [hereafter PRO], CAB [cabinet] 23/94/285–317.; Letters from Sir Robert Vansittart, [hereafter VNST II 2/19], 3.

<sup>6</sup> PRO, Foreign Office [hereafter FO] 800/314/73–79.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Roberts, *Holy Fox: The Life of Lord Halifax* (New York: Hachette, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Cooper Duff, *Old Men Forget* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Nevile Henderson, *Failure of a Mission: Berlin, 1937-1939* (Pickle Partners Publishing, 2018).

government at the time of the crisis. Unsurprisingly, he maintained a hawkish stance throughout the crisis and wrote often to members of government, urging for British intervention. Sir Robert Vansittart was the Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs up to 1938. He provided HMG with valuable information through his contacts with high-profile Germans, although this intelligence often conflicted with Henderson's reports.

### August 1938

Documents from early August include notes of a conversation Vansittart had with a high-profile German politician, Carl Friedrich Goerdeler. These notes help frame the issue the British faced with regards to the Crisis. Goerdeler issued a clear warning to the British regarding the state of affairs: the Runciman mission (an early mediation attempt by the British) was bound to fail because Hitler had already decided to thwart it.<sup>10</sup> Goerdeler was emphatic that Britain could never reach an agreement with Hitler, and he hinted that this failure could lead to a plebiscite in Czechoslovakia, and that nearby Hungary and Poland may demand peaceful plebiscites for their minorities in Czechoslovakia as well.<sup>11</sup> Goerdeler claimed that Hitler had changed over the last twelve months – no one could advise him because he “feels like a god” after his earlier foreign policy successes.<sup>12</sup> Although the German people and the *Wehrmacht* generals opposed war, Goerdeler maintained that Hitler was intent on it. Goerdeler believed that France would support Czechoslovakia, and that Britain would stand with France; therefore, he advised the British to openly state HMG's stance in defense of Czechoslovakia before Runciman's failure as to avoid a war. He further stated that if HMG adopted his proposed firm stance against German aggression, then a more reasonable government would prevail in Germany within the next twelve months.<sup>13</sup>

In a separate document from 9 August, Vansittart explicitly notes his information has been “at variance” with that collected by the British Embassy in Berlin.<sup>14</sup> He confirmed that Henlein, the leader of the Sudetendeutsche Partei (SDP), or Sudeten German Party, had been instructed not to accept any compromises from Prague, and that the Nazis wanted the Runciman Mission to become grounds for conflict.<sup>15</sup> According to the intelligence Vansittart had accessed, Henlein was Berlin's puppet, and he knew Hitler was intent upon the disintegration of Czechoslovakia.<sup>16</sup> Hitler believed Germany would easily overrun Czechoslovakia and temporarily hold off France. Additionally, he believed Britain would not fight but instead invite France

<sup>10</sup> VNST II 2/19.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> PRO, FO 371/21736 57610/182–211, 182.

<sup>15</sup> VNST II 2/19.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.; PRO, FO 371/21736 57610/182–211.



to make peace after Czechoslovakia was taken.<sup>17</sup> This report pointed to Germany's ill will regarding efforts to deescalate the Crisis. Vansittart truly believed that Germany intended to invade Czechoslovakia and that only the "clearest action on our part" could dissuade it.<sup>18</sup> However, he stated that he did not believe the Wehrmacht would resist Hitler, and this assertion may have been disheartening to other British leaders.

An opposing point of view is apparent in Henderson's letter to Halifax, dated 6 August. Henderson believed war was the last thing Germany wanted, but that it was not bluffing.<sup>19</sup> He believed that if Britain "showed [its] teeth," Hitler would not dare make war.<sup>20</sup> This statement is intriguing, coming from him, considering Henderson's recurring support for appeasing Germany. He nonetheless immediately reneged by stating he would believe a show of force to be a great tragedy, as it would not only merely postpone the conflict, but also be reminiscent of the May Crisis, a repetition which Hitler would not forgive.<sup>21</sup> The May Crisis was simply a scare to the western democracies, which had earlier threatened intervention in response to a German standard troop movement near Czechoslovakia. To Hitler's embarrassment, the end of the Wehrmacht's drill coincided with this threat, which thus appeared as a retreat to outside onlookers. Therefore, Henderson most probably hoped that British negotiation, as opposed to teeth-bearing, would not just postpone conflict but resolve it entirely. In the present case, Henderson believed the Crisis could be resolved peaceably by settlement, and he thought the British could not prove that the problem was capable of settlement without force "if we allow the Czechs to fob us off."<sup>22</sup> Henderson's tendency to blame the Czechs appears throughout his interactions in the Crisis. This is because, just as he had been convinced that Austria would inevitably become incorporated in the Reich, so would the Sudetenland.<sup>23</sup> Henderson's personal convictions strongly affected his actions in the Crisis.

In framing the events and debates occurring the next month, these opposing understandings and impressions of German intentions are key. Edwald von Kleist, a German politician opposed to Hitler's actions, assured Winston Churchill during a mid-month visit to England that nobody in Germany wanted war except Hitler, who desperately wanted revenge for the events in May. Indeed, if the Wehrmacht generals received any encouragement they would refuse to march.<sup>24</sup> Further, Kleist contended, if the generals insisted on peace, there would be a new system of

<sup>17</sup> VNST II 2/19.

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

<sup>19</sup> PRO, FO 800/314/33-39.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

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

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

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

<sup>24</sup> Churchill's "Note of Conversation at Chartwell between Monsieur de K. and Mr. Winston Churchill, August 19. 1938," is in the Churchill Archives, Churchill College, Cambridge, CHAR [Chartwell] 2/340B, 152-157.



government in Germany within forty-eight hours. Churchill immediately urged Lord Halifax to consider the fact that Kleist had shared: that the Wehrmacht generals believed they could not sustain fighting for more than three months before certain defeat.<sup>25</sup> Earlier that month, Halifax had admitted to being astonished by the repeated reports of German troop movements that ended up being baseless, which probably made it difficult for him and other British leaders to grasp the gravity the German opposition claimed. Halifax also believed a war to protect or recreate Czechoslovakia after German intervention would be hopeless, as Czechoslovakia could not be saved as it existed presently.<sup>26</sup> Despite these two admissions, he had not been opposed to issuing a warning to Germany not to push the boundaries.<sup>27</sup>

Neville Chamberlain, the architect of appeasement, writing to Halifax in regards to Vansittart's conversation with Kleist, declared that he believed Kleist to have such a "violently anti-Hitler" bias and to be so anxious to overthrow Hitler, that Chamberlain thought that the British should "discount a good deal of what he says."<sup>28</sup> Chamberlain continued by rebuffing calls for him to take a firmer stance against potential German aggression, saying "Vansittart's phrase be 'more explicit' than on May 21, I reject."<sup>29</sup> He would not condone providing any gesture explicit enough to crystallize the anti-war sentiment in the Wehrmacht generals.

Kleist's type of report occurred repeatedly, and looking back on history, were true and accurate. Yet, this type of report was repeatedly undermined by Henderson's information and personal impressions. He confidently stated his impression to Halifax that Hitler was not just being led, but actually being deliberately misled, by an extremist faction within the Nazi Party.<sup>30</sup> In other words, Henderson "[refused] to see that Hitler [was] the prime mover" in German foreign policy.<sup>31</sup> This assertion undoubtedly undercut the confidence British leaders could place in the above reports that Hitler, as the principal leader in the German position, could be dissuaded by a British warning. Henderson also did not hide the fact that he believed the Sudetens' demands to be legitimate, and that he could not see how Czechoslovakia could ever be saved if Germany attacked.<sup>32</sup>

Henderson's bias resurged as he told Halifax that however badly the German leaders behaved, the British must also reprimand Edvard Benes, the Czechoslovakian President, and his "military enthusiasts."<sup>33</sup> Henderson almost seemed to make excuses for Germany, claiming that the German experience had been that they could not trust Benes, and that whatever Benes may say, he always

<sup>25</sup> PRO, FO 800/309/241.

<sup>26</sup> PRO, FO 800/313/25–32.

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

<sup>28</sup> PRO, FO 800/314/59–61, 60.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>30</sup> PRO, FO 800/314/73–79.

<sup>31</sup> Terry Parssinen, handwritten note regarding *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>32</sup> PRO, FO 800/314/73–79.

<sup>33</sup> PRO, FO 800/314/61–69, 64.

found a way to get out of it.<sup>34</sup> The irony of this statement is that one could swap the word “German” for “British,” and the name “Benes” for “Hitler” (so that the sentence would read something like “the *British* experience had been that they could not trust *Hitler*, and that whatever *Hitler* may say, he always found a way to get out of it”), and the phrase would be a more accurate reflection of true events as they unfolded before and after August 1938. Henderson’s opinions indicated his prejudice, but it is worth considering whether other British leaders with less of a bias trusted Benes.

The debates of August are neatly recapitulated in the Cabinet minutes of the thirtieth of that month. Information from a reputable German source emphasized that Hitler, against the Wehrmacht’s advice, was determined to intervene in the Sudetenland by force for three reasons: his personal beliefs, his desire for a sort of rematch for 21 May, and internal Nazi politics.<sup>35</sup> However, the conflicting reports left the Cabinet members split over two possibilities: if Hitler were bent on using force, the British could only try to deter German action, if they were willing to issue an explicit warning and carry it out; whereas if Hitler had not yet made up his mind to use force, they could not do much more than reiterate the vague stance HMG held since March in order to avoid provoking Hitler and to keep him guessing what the British reaction may be.<sup>36</sup> Adding to the Cabinet’s indecision was the consideration of whether Britain was even ready for a war.

### September 1938

In this eventful month, British leaders deliberated and debated how to pursue successful negotiations with Germany. Chamberlain visited Germany three times in this period. On top of external considerations pertaining to foreign policy, the Cabinet also had to stop and reflect on how public opinion at home, the House of Commons, and the Dominions would react to their decisions. Whatever path the Cabinet chose to pursue, it had to be politically viable for the Government to remain standing after this ordeal.

Sir Nevile Henderson set the tone for relations biased against Czechoslovakia, although he did so in a typically extreme manner, using blunt language which fortunately was not repeated by others in leadership. However, his words – taken from a letter he addressed to Halifax – “In the end Benes seems [...] will end by doing incalculable harm to his country and possibly to all of us” demonstrate that he continued place blame on the victim for the situation.<sup>37</sup> Henderson acknowledged that popular discontent and economic recession in Germany could lead Hitler to declare a war simply to distract his people “from the perilous state into which he

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> PRO, CAB 23/94/285–317.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> PRO, FO 800/309/267–269, 267.

has led the country.”<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, of the two countries involved in the Crisis, Henderson only blamed the weaker, less threatening one, remaining firm in his conviction that “only direct compulsion (which will save [Benes’] face with his people) will ever induce Benes to see realities.”<sup>39</sup> The effect of this letter on Halifax was that when he considered whether HMG should issue a more specific warning to Hitler, he dithered and concluded that perhaps the moment for a strong message had not yet come.<sup>40</sup>

Henderson disregarded reports coming from other sources stating that Czechoslovakia was only a small step and a mere pawn in the German aim of continental domination.<sup>41</sup> He ignored that Konrad Henlein (the leader of the Sudeten German Party, or SDP) was Hitler’s puppet.<sup>42</sup> Henderson continued to believe that Britain, and by extension, Europe, could not think of peace again until Benes had satisfied Henlein. He repeated his certitude that “Henlein wants peace and will agree with Benes if the latter is made to go far enough.”<sup>43</sup> He thought Germany’s pretensions on behalf of the Sudeten Germans were just, and that Benes could not go on refusing them forever. Henderson appeared to pride himself on the fact that the Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs also agreed with his appreciation of the situation as he expressed it to London. This should hardly be surprising, as Henderson’s bias was unintentionally fulfilling the exact wishes of the Reich.

The most flabbergasting action, or rather inaction, on Henderson’s part that had the most direct impact on British foreign policy and on the subsequent turn of events, surfaced in the Cabinet minutes of 12 September. Telegram number 354, containing a clear warning to Germany about its intended aggression against Czechoslovakia, was sent to Henderson on 9 September to be delivered upon receipt of specific instructions. After reading the telegram, Henderson refused to deliver the message to Hitler.<sup>44</sup> Many British leaders, including Chamberlain and Henderson, feared that a strong warning might provoke Hitler: another warning would not help if Hitler had already made up his mind to attack Czechoslovakia, but if he was still deciding, any provocation might propel him to “mad action.”<sup>45</sup> The Cabinet therefore decided that if Henderson was satisfied that he had personally conveyed the substance of the telegram, the delivery of an official demarche was unnecessary.<sup>46</sup> The troubling question, as one member of Cabinet pondered aloud, was whether Henderson had made the British attitude quite plain to Germany.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>40</sup> PRO, FO 800/324/108–114.

<sup>41</sup> Boothby’s “Memorandum” to the Foreign Office is in the Churchill Archives, Churchill College, Cambridge, CHAR [Chartwell] 2/331, 48.

<sup>42</sup> PRO, FO 371/21736 57610/182–211.

<sup>43</sup> PRO, FO 800/314/117–121, 119.

<sup>44</sup> PRO, CAB 23/95/2–31.

<sup>45</sup> PRO, FO 800/314/134–135, 134.

<sup>46</sup> PRO, CAB 23/95/2–31.

The inability to answer this question is even more concerning, since there was no precise record of what Henderson had said to the Germans.

At this point, it is useful to turn the focus to Duff Cooper and his hawkish stance. During that same Cabinet meeting of 12 September, he readily asserted that Telegram 354 was not an ultimatum, and therefore should not upset Hitler.<sup>47</sup> Further, Duff Cooper announced to the Cabinet, he was worried that they may be ignoring public opinion at home and abroad to take Henderson's advice only.<sup>48</sup> In his characteristically direct manner, Duff Cooper declared that to him it seemed Henderson's solution "would result in a complete surrender on the part of the Czechs."<sup>49</sup> He concluded with an (unsuccessful) appeal to send the telegram.

One of the most interesting considerations also came up in this Cabinet meeting, but it was unfortunately never followed up in subsequent discussions. Cabinet asked that the Chiefs of Staff provide an updated report of the Czech situation, and that this updated report should provide both the present position, and the position one year from September 1938 if Germany took over Czechoslovakia.<sup>50</sup> This request indicates that there were members of Cabinet who displayed an interest in the strength Germany would gain vis-à-vis Great Britain if the latter allowed the former to takeover Czechoslovakia. The underlying apprehension would have been that if the Sudetenland were not the end of Hitler's aims in Europe, then Great Britain would be comparatively weaker and more vulnerable to German demands after Czechoslovakia had fallen. Regrettably, the tendency to believe that Czechoslovakia was not the end of Hitler's aims was not a prevalent one among Cabinet ministers over the course of this Crisis.

What some British did realize, and tried to convey to Halifax, was the fact that the racial claims to the Sudetenland were only a pawn in Germany's political game.<sup>51</sup> German minorities in Italy and Poland fared far worse but were left unmentioned by Hitler, the implication being that these countries were not of immediate interest to him. Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, was strategically important because of its resources and its position as a steppingstone to the Black Sea. Regardless of these considerations, but made even more poignant because of them, it would have been just for the British to insist that Sudeten Germans needed full rights in Czechoslovakia, but it was not appropriate for them to admit that Germany had the right to incorporate territorially every German minority.<sup>52</sup> The question for Halifax to consider was something along the lines of *why should Britain give Germany the keys to Sudetenland instead of simply ensuring equal treatment?*

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>51</sup> PRO, FO 800/309/301-304.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

It would have been central to Cabinet, in answering the above question, to have given more weight to a particular report received by the Foreign Office. This type of report was often in direct opposition to the information provided to Cabinet by Henderson's sources, which added to Cabinet's uncertainty. This report titled "Notes on Germany" from 15 September outlined a series of insightful points. It delineated a rough timetable for a hypothetical short war, based on a tactic that came to be referred to as the "Austria technique"<sup>53</sup> in reference to the Austrian Anschluss. The attack would be preceded by rapidly developing "incidents" fostering internal hostilities between Sudeten Germans and Czechs which would be fanned by violent propaganda; public opinion would be allowed to ripen for a few days; Germany would then intervene in the so-called attack on its people by invading the country; it would then come to a full stop and offer peace to the neighboring countries. Even if France mobilized, it would be held off momentarily, and this rapid turn of events would be presented as a *fait accompli* to other countries after Czechoslovakia was broken. The German conviction was that Great Britain would see this as a *fait accompli* not only to avoid intervening but actually to pressure France into making peace.<sup>54</sup> If the British had considered this report in light of events at that time, they would have noticed striking similarities going beyond coincidence.

The "Notes on Germany" report clarified the rationale behind this short-war approach as it listed various factors causing Germany to be insufficiently strong to wage a longer war.<sup>55</sup> Factors included technical aspects, supplies, the year's harvest, oil access and reserves, and the economy. The report also noted that the continued success of the expansionist phase of the Nazi movement created a psychological situation which made further expansion necessary to make increasingly spectacular achievements and to offset internal political stress thorough external objectives. The conclusion drawn from this was that avoiding war in 1938 at the expense of a weak settlement did not change the fact that war would be almost inevitable in the near future anyway.<sup>56</sup> Further, though Germany was not prepared for more than a short war in September, given six to twelve months, it would be. The question in 1938 was simply whether the British would give Hitler an ideological victory. And if that were to be the case, then Hitler would be physically and psychologically in a position to make and enforce bigger demands. It is tragic that this report, so obviously correct in hindsight, was not given greater attention in Cabinet.

In fact, mid-month the Cabinet was contemplating different theoretical issues. One such issue brought up was whether a democracy could feasibly go to war over a plebiscite – to hinder the "will of the people." Put another way, could a country, which based its government on a certain ideology, declare war on another country

<sup>53</sup> PRO, FO 800/314/165-173, 166.

<sup>54</sup> PRO, FO 371/21736 57610/182-211.

<sup>55</sup> PRO, FO 800/314/165-173.

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

to prevent the institution of that same ideology? If Hitler were bent on a plebiscite in the Sudeten areas of Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain, speaking for his colleagues, expressed the view that it would be politically impossible for Britain to fight it. Furthermore, Chamberlain rationalized to his colleagues, the homogeneous and easily moved Sudeten Germans were “not a source of strength to Czechoslovakia.”<sup>57</sup> The irony in this statement is abundant. The way Chamberlain expressed himself sounds as though Britain would be doing Czechoslovakia a favor in allowing Hitler to split the country. Chamberlain confirmed this notion when he stated his doubt to the Cabinet that Czechoslovakia could ever have peace if the Sudeten Germans were part of the country.<sup>58</sup> For him, concession of the Sudetenland appears to have already been a forgone conclusion.

This Cabinet meeting of 14 September was also notable for a few brief mentions of topics the British leaders considered again later. The first mention of a guarantee for the rest of Czechoslovakia, if the Sudetenland were ceded, was made.<sup>59</sup> The irony is that it was Chamberlain who introduced this notion – though he disliked the idea, he was promoting a guarantee of protection for a weaker and harder-to-defend broken country while he refused to entertain the same notion for Czechoslovakia as a whole, as it stood in September. Supposedly, the difference between guaranteeing all of Czechoslovakia in September and guaranteeing only a “stub” of the country after cession lay in the hope that Hitler would not only be satisfied with the Sudetenland and not care enough to threaten or take the “stub,” but also be more open to “better relations between Germany and England,” according to Chamberlain.<sup>60</sup> A related point of this meeting was that some members noted that the plan Hitler laid out in *Mein Kampf* did not stop at the incorporation of the Sudeten Germans. One Cabinet member declared that “Immediate acceptance of a plebiscite would give Herr Hitler everything which he was now demanding by force and would be a complete surrender.”<sup>61</sup> Chamberlain gave his solemn word that he would not enter a definite engagement regarding a plebiscite.<sup>62</sup> A plebiscite could hardly be carried out fairly while the SDP acted provocatively and the Germans were mobilizing.

Cabinet meetings got more tense as time progressed. On 17 September, Chamberlain recounted his recent meeting with Hitler in Berchtesgaden, laying heavy emphasis on the “dramatic side” of his visit. He had relayed his colleagues’ concerns about whether the Sudetenland would be the last of Hitler’s aims, and he relayed back his belief that the *Führer* had been honest in assuring that the Reich would be satisfied with the Sudeten Germans.<sup>63</sup> This assertion on the part of the

<sup>57</sup> PRO, CAB 23/95/32–61, 41.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> PRO, CAB 23/95/62–111.

British Prime Minister is astounding in hindsight, and it is difficult to confidently deduce whether he was self-convinced, hopeful, or just plain blind to Hitler's true intentions. The intriguing part is that Chamberlain was definitely capable of a stiffer position, as he had demonstrated by asking Hitler whether he should return immediately to Britain if Hitler made the meeting into a "waste of time" with his rants about the injustices born by the Sudeten Germans and his assertion that he would risk a war to incorporate them.<sup>64</sup> Hitler had backed off, but once again took for himself the psychological upper hand: he put the responsibility for continued negotiation on the British.

Hitler wanted assurance the British would accept the principle of self-determination before continuing talks. Chamberlain now contributed a comment that proved to be pivotal to the course of Crisis negotiations. He assured Cabinet that he had told Hitler that he was not in a position to give such an assurance before consulting the Cabinet (and conferring with France).<sup>65</sup> However, Chamberlain did present Hitler with his personal opinion: that "it was immaterial to him whether the Sudeten Germans stayed in Czechoslovakia or were included in the Reich."<sup>66</sup> This effectively provided Hitler with a psychological victory, as he now knew the British Prime Minister was swayed and would act as such in Cabinet, potentially swaying other members.

When Cabinet asked Chamberlain whether "self-determination" was practically synonymous with "plebiscite," Chamberlain stated his belief in the affirmative. Keeping in mind this shift, certain members noted that it would be difficult to get Czechoslovakia to agree to a plebiscite and that HMG might have to use force to prevent fighting.<sup>67</sup> This is a flagrant manifestation of Hitler's psychological victory mentioned above: now other cabinet members entertained the thought of effectively doing Hitler's work for him in using force on Czechoslovakia to allow a plebiscite. Only Duff Cooper protested and chided the Prime Minister for his behavior, repeating his belief that Hitler was not prepared to leave any independence to Czechoslovakia. Further, Duff Cooper contested, Hitler's promises proved unreliable, so there was "no chance of peace in Europe so long as there was a Nazi regime in Germany."<sup>68</sup>

Lord Halifax attempted to rally the Cabinet behind the Prime Minister at this point in the meeting. He admitted that there was some element of German blackmail and threats, but that this fact should not blind the Cabinet to other considerations, implying future relations with Germany.<sup>69</sup> Apparently, he and Chamberlain did not view the present German attitude as a massive red flag for future relations. However, the German intransigence in negotiations began wearing

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.



down Chamberlain's support in Cabinet – more than one member wondered aloud whether Czechoslovakia was the last of Hitler's aims. Seven members advocated for attaching conditions to the acceptance of a plebiscite.<sup>70</sup> Another member echoed Duff Cooper's concern on the intentions of the Nazi regime, reiterating that Britain should obtain peace on honorable terms or seriously consider standing its ground and threatening war. Unless Britain did this and set the tone for future interactions, it would always concede to a bullying Germany.<sup>71</sup>

In meeting with the French during the following Cabinet meeting, the British discussed the logistics for a guarantee of the diminished country remaining. They also reviewed the German demands and studied the principles necessary for a smooth transfer. The British and French suggested Czechoslovakia agree to such concessions.<sup>72</sup> Prague sent an unofficial acceptance of the Anglo-French joint proposal on 20 September.

Chamberlain's second meeting with Hitler in September, this time at Bad Godesberg, took place on 22 September and was simply intended to smooth out any logistical issues before a final agreement between Berlin and Prague. The cabinet had a lengthy discussion the day before this meeting to review Chamberlain's talking points, but the final decisions can be summarized as follows: In the event that Hitler should 1) make claims surpassing those for ethnic German Sudetens, 2) object to a British guarantee for the rest of Czechoslovakia, or 3) impair Chamberlain from concluding a satisfactory settlement regarding the overseeing of the plebiscite, the British Prime Minister was to promptly return to London to confer with Cabinet before proceeding with further negotiations.

During the Cabinet meeting before Bad Godesberg, Duff Cooper asserted his belief that that the Prime Minister ought to "indicate to Herr Hitler that if he made any further demands we should go to war with him, not in order to prevent the Sudeten Germans from exercising self-determination, but to stop Herr Hitler from dominating Europe."<sup>73</sup> Clearly, Chamberlain did not do so. On 24 September, Chamberlain recounted to his colleagues how Hitler had not known the proposals had been presented to Czechoslovakia, how he appreciated the British efforts, but how he was "sorry, since these proposals were not acceptable to him."<sup>74</sup>

Hitler's new demands flew in the face of all three points described in the Cabinet meeting from before Chamberlain's visit. Hitler pressed for immediate occupation by German troops to protect Sudeten Germans from Czech incidents; he claimed plebiscites also for other ethnic minorities in Czechoslovakia; and although he did not explicitly oppose a joint guarantee from the other powers, he would not consider a German-Czech non-aggression pact until the issue of the other minorities

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> PRO, CAB 23/95/112–139.

<sup>73</sup> PRO, FO 800/309/347–348.

<sup>74</sup> PRO, CAB 23/95/140–165, 160.



had been resolved.<sup>75</sup> Chamberlain heard these demands but, contrary to his earlier promises, did not return immediately to London. Chamberlain displayed a lethal mix of anxiety for peace and overconfidence in Hitler's respect for him.

Upon returning to London, Chamberlain advised that HMG must accept these "German proposals" because Britain did not have a sufficiently superior military force to Germany.<sup>76</sup> In actuality, the comparative military situation had not changed drastically since the May Crisis, when Britain and France had seriously considered war, but Chamberlain now appeared to be psychologically at Hitler's mercy because the latter had played tough in person at Bad Godesberg.

The twenty-fifth of September was an important date in Halifax's evolving perception of the Czechoslovakian Crisis.<sup>77</sup> Previously, Halifax had supported Chamberlain in capitulating to Hitler. But he effectively had an epiphany the night before, and he noticeably changed the arguments he made in Cabinet that day. Halifax expressed to Cabinet that he "could not rid his mind of the fact that Herr Hitler had given us nothing and that he was dictating terms, just as though he had won a war but without having had to fight."<sup>78</sup> He concluded this initial speech echoing Duff Cooper's words from a week earlier, saying that there could be no peace as long as Nazism lasted.<sup>79</sup> It was not right to pressure Prague to accept the latest German demands, and if Czechoslovakia rejected them and France fought alongside them, England should join France.<sup>80</sup>

This Cabinet meeting also saw interesting debates on Hitler's character as it related to his aims. Certain members of Cabinet pointedly noted the history of statements regarding territorial claims that Hitler had made and broken.<sup>81</sup> These examples of broken trust highlighted in this meeting dated back to the 1935 reoccupation of the Rhineland and were practically regular up through 1938. Members underscoring this point were trying to promote an understanding that Hitler had not adhered to agreements before, so his declarations could not be trusted going forward. Furthermore, if HMG conceded in 1938, Hitler would only ask for more later.<sup>82</sup> Duff Cooper developed this point to stress that the "future of Europe, of this country and of democracy was at stake."<sup>83</sup>

It is almost reassuring to note that, as above, some members of Cabinet were, in fact, considering greater, abstract notions of justice in their relationship to both Czechoslovakia and Germany. Some of the questions posed revolved around whether the amount of British pressure on Berlin had been comparable to that on Prague; whether the Bad Godesberg "proposals" were the best terms HMG could

<sup>75</sup> PRO, CAB 23/95/166-192, 168.

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

<sup>77</sup> Cadogan, Alexander. *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, OM, 1938-1945*. Putnam, 1972, 103-105.

<sup>78</sup> PRO, CAB 23/95/193-233, 199.

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

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

obtain for Czechoslovakia; and whether HMG had increased its moral obligation to Czechoslovakia as a result of the action taken before Bad Godesberg.<sup>84</sup>

By 27 September, a final British attempt at sending Hitler a message to take a more reasonable stance had failed. Again, in this diplomatic mission, Chamberlain had restricted mentioning the position of the Cabinet hawks, saying nothing in the letter to Hitler that could look like a threat from HMG.<sup>85</sup> Again, the Cabinet took a “Chamberlain knows best” attitude with regards to Hitler’s aims and personality. Hitler had petulantly stated that he could not depart from the terms of his Bad Godesberg memo.<sup>86</sup> Additionally, he had insisted that he did not believe Germany and Britain would find themselves at war, so he “urged the Prime Minister to do all he could to induce Czechoslovakia to accept his Memorandum.”<sup>87</sup> The only “concession” Hitler had now made was to avoid overrunning the entire Czechoslovakia *provided* the Czechs offered no resistance to German occupation of the Sudetenland and the internationally-supervised plebiscite.<sup>88</sup> Germany would then cooperate and would make no more territorial claims in Europe. Duff Cooper flatly expressed his regret at this eleventh-hour British negotiatory failure, and he communicated that if the proposal before Cabinet that evening amounted to pressing for a complete Czech surrender, he “thought this course was quite unjustified and he could not be associated with it.”<sup>89</sup> Chamberlain stated his belief that “this offer was perhaps the last opportunity for avoiding war” soon thereafter.<sup>90</sup>

In a sensational speech against pressuring Czechoslovakia into acceptance, Halifax successfully changed some of his colleagues’ minds. This monologue had the potential of becoming another pivotal action to alter the course of the Crisis, but although it had an impact on the cabinet, it was disarmed by the forthcoming Munich Conference and deprived of this potential. Halifax conveyed his feeling that there the difference between the Anglo-French proposals and the German Memorandum was of a far greater magnitude than simply a difference of time, method, and degree. Therefore, “We [HMG] could not press the Czechoslovakian Government to do what we believed to be wrong,” Halifax avowed.<sup>91</sup> Following Halifax’s deliberation, the cabinet decided not to send the telegram instructing Prague to accept the Memorandum and surrender. This was the last Cabinet meeting before the Munich Conference, the epitome of appeasement.

It is necessary to note that the outcome of the Crisis remained an open matter at the end of the 27 September cabinet meeting. A Foreign Office document addressed to the British Delegation in Munich, containing a collection of informative letters

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.; *Ibid.*; PRO, CAB 23/95/193–233.

<sup>85</sup> PRO, CAB 23/95/246–259.

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

<sup>87</sup> PRO, CAB 23/95/260–278.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

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

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

and intelligence from reputable sources, pointing to the fact that there was still hope for avoiding both war and the surrender of Czechoslovakia. The essence of this conglomeration of communications was that “moderate circles” in Germany were still lobbying the British to stand firm against Hitler’s demands.<sup>92</sup> One letter asserted that a “negative message,” i.e. one warning against aggression toward Czechoslovakia, would be taken by anti-Nazi circles in Germany as incitement, and the Nazi regime would be overthrown.<sup>93</sup> Another letter acknowledged that no British leader could take upon himself the responsibility of saying that the Nazi regime should be toppled, and it reassured the Foreign Office that a mere negative statement would have a considerable effect, as “only the initial push ... is needed to set the stone rolling.”<sup>94</sup> A final message in this Foreign Office report from German military officials strongly advised not to give way another foot and to keep the responsibility for any use of force on Hitler’s shoulders.<sup>95</sup> These reports were to no avail.

The results of the Munich Conference were taken very favorably in Cabinet on 30 September. The meeting opened with a cheer for Chamberlain’s apparent success in averting a war with Germany.<sup>96</sup> Evidently, the fact that no Czech representative was present at the Conference was only a minor drawback for the British. However, there were a few notable differences between the Godesberg Memo and the present Munich agreement that made this political pill easier to swallow in resolving the Crisis. Although the agreement split Czechoslovakia, Prague accepted it because it was not an ultimatum and because it reverted to the Anglo-French plan of four powers under international supervision responsibly maintaining peace until the Sudetenland was effectively turned over to Germany.<sup>97</sup> The evacuation of the Sudetenland by Czech troops and by Czechs unwilling to be incorporated in Germany could occur in five stages rather than in a single operation on 1 October.<sup>98</sup> Finally, although Ribbentrop, the Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs, had objected, Chamberlain had secured a clause stating that all other questions not addressed by the agreement should come under the purview of the international commission.<sup>99</sup> Chamberlain had also arranged for no further commitment to the non-German minorities as of yet.<sup>100</sup>

In closure of this meeting, Chamberlain offered his thoughts that it could fairly be said that Munich was a “vast improvement,” that it represented an orderly execution of the Anglo-French proposals, and that it was a “triumph for diplomacy.”<sup>101</sup> Duff

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>93</sup> PRO, FO 371/21664 57610/226–233.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

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

<sup>97</sup> PRO, CAB 23/95/279–289.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

Cooper also agreed that the differences between Bad Godesberg and Munich were “much greater than he had previously recognized.”<sup>102</sup> However, Duff Cooper still felt considerable uneasiness and was afraid HMG might be drawn to making further concessions in the future.<sup>103</sup> He offered the Prime Minister his resignation.

### **Conclusion**

Making sense of British leaders’ thoughts and motivations during the Czechoslovakian Crisis of 1938 is not a simple task. Various appeasers, including Chamberlain and Henderson, seemed to want to be done with the issue out of exasperation and keep the matter circumscribed in terms of “local trouble” between Germany and Czechoslovakia. Despite this repeated rejection by Hitler of British mediation attempts, many British leaders in Cabinet still scrambled to try to make sense of the situation and appease Germany. On the other hand, anti-appeasers like Duff Cooper, and eventually Halifax too, were keen to highlight the bigger picture. They considered whether the Sudetenland was the last of Hitler’s territorial claims and whether there was an issue involving principle in the defense of the Czechs. The recurring roadblocks for Cabinet were whether HMG could and was willing to enforce any warning to Germany regarding unprovoked aggression towards Czechoslovakia. Clearly, that was a position that the Cabinet was unwilling to take. Czechoslovakia was left to be split and weakened by Germany. And history verified Churchill’s prediction from 11 September: “We seem to be very near the bleak choice between War and Shame. My feeling is that we shall choose Shame, and then have War thrown in a little later on even more adverse terms than at present.”<sup>104</sup>

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 285.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 287.

<sup>104</sup> Churchill’s letter to Lord Moyne is in the Churchill Archives, Churchill College, Cambridge, CHAR [Chartwell] 2/331.