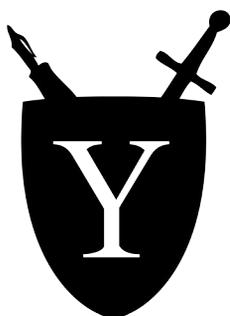




THE YALE HISTORICAL REVIEW
THE WOMEN'S ISSUE — FALL 2012





FALL 2012
VOLUME II
ISSUE II

THE YALE HISTORICAL REVIEW

AN UNDERGRADUATE PUBLICATION

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“Female aircraft spotters on the roof of a Leningrad building, Russia, May 1942”

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“Women War Correspondents working in the European Theatre of Operations” with Mary Welch on the far left

Photographer: Moore

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Signal Corps Photo (1 Feb 1943)

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

The Fall 2012 issue is one of surprises and new beginnings. We have reorganized the divisions under which our essays are published. We have eliminated past categories that were previously set aside for different course designations in the history department in favor of selecting the best essays all around, and have made more room for essays written by students outside of Yale. It is with great pleasure that we have entitled our seventh issue, “The Women’s Issue.” For a journal whose past editions have focused largely on Europe, cowboys, and “dead white men” (really, Winston Churchill has graced our cover before), we believe the Fall 2012 issue represents a new chapter in the history of our publication. After all, it’s not often that our selections have strayed from classical 20th century Cold War histories or five-page Directed Studies papers on Herodotus. However strong our desire to excavate marginalized and hidden histories may have always been, we can do little as editors if only a few papers that dare to challenge traditional topics of historiography arrive in our inbox. But we are pleased to announce that the essays inside this edition – whose subjects including women, the non-Western world, and the pre-modern era – do just that.

Angelica Calabrese, MC ’14, reconstructs the pre-colonial gender norms surrounding Nahua women as Spanish missionaries attempted to convert the Nahua population to Catholicism. Kelsey Norris, University of Chicago ’13, recalls the resilience of Soviet women in the siege of Leningrad during the Second World War. Katherine Fein, PC ’14, a former Editor in Chief of the *Review*, completes this trio of pieces focused on women with a lively portrait of Mary Welsh and her exploits as a war correspondent before she married American legend Ernest Hemingway. Take a look at our cover: Welsh is the charismatic woman sitting on the far left of the bottom picture with her fellow women war correspondents. Each of these essays offers a unique perspective on women. However, we have chosen to publish them not because they are about women, but because their stories were fascinating enough to merit their own telling.

Beyond our theme, Logan Koepke, Northwestern University ’13, argues for a more nuanced interpretation of *rapprochement* between the United States and the People’s Republic of China during the Cold War by stressing Congress’s role in thawing Sino-American relations, even before better known diplomatic events such as Nixon’s 1972 visit to China. Returning to tradition, Alexander Fisher, MC ’14, resurrects the posh, gentlemanly *milieu* that was Yale before the Second World War, and charts the changes that war brought to our campus – changes that persist to this day. Finally, we end with an elegiac tribute by Matthew Joseph, PC ’12, to Mississippi Hill Country blues music and the race relations implicated in its production. It is wonderful to welcome Joseph back to these pages; his work previously appeared in our Spring 2011 issue.

We hope this issue of the *Review* reflects the expanding diversity in undergraduate historical teaching and scholarship, both at Yale and across American universities. More importantly, we hope these essays inspire students to pursue fresh takes in their own work. We look forward to reading the results in future submissions.

Happy reading,

Annie Yi, Calhoun 2013

Noah Remnick, Ezra Stiles 2015

Editors in Chief

Andrew Giambrone, Pierson 2014

Managing Editor

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“YOU ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST A WOMAN.” WOMEN’S EXPERIENCE DURING THE SIEGE OF LENINGRAD

This paper, written by Kelsey Norris, a senior History and Russian Language and Literature double major at the University of Chicago, analyzes the siege of Leningrad through the experiences of women, reflected in their own recollections, artwork, and poetry. From describing their role as guardians of traditional morality to articulating their alienation from their own bodies, the paper presents a multifaceted view of women and their life under the siege, suggesting that the siege brought the ideal of the “new Soviet woman” into focus.

By Kelsey Norris, University of Chicago 2013
Written for “Life Stories of Russian Women”
Professor Sheila Fitzpatrick
Faculty Advisor: Faith C. Hillis
Edited by John D’Amico and Stewart MacDonald

"YOU ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST A WOMAN."

INTRODUCTION

The siege of Leningrad was one of the greatest tragedies of the Second World War, if not the entire twentieth century. Despite the signs given by the launch of Operation Barbarossa, the Soviet Union was ill-prepared for the German invasion, and within the first months of the war, German forces besieged Leningrad with the aid of the Finnish military. The siege lasted for 872 days, as bombing, shelling, disease, and starvation claimed the lives of 1.6 to 2 million civilians trapped within the blockaded city.¹ Of the 3,300,000 people who were trapped inside the city, only about 300,000 survived, all of who received the Medal in the Defense of Leningrad for their service.² The devastatingly high loss of life during the blockade was entirely avoidable. Hitler, however, deeming the Slavs an inferior race and being especially hostile towards Leningrad as "the cradle of the October Revolution," ordered that the city be starved into submission.³ Once German forces encircled Leningrad and destroyed its main supply of food in early bombing campaigns, the German military command expected the city to fall within a matter of months. They never imagined that Leningrad could withstand almost 900 days of siege.

THE SIEGE OF LENINGRAD: "A WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE"⁴

Tracing the historiography of the siege of Leningrad reveals a very compelling and perhaps even surprising story. After the war, the unvarnished history of the siege was suppressed until *glasnost* during Mikhail Gorbachev's regime. The National Museum of the Defense of Leningrad, dedicated to preserving the story of the siege, first opened in 1944, but the Soviet government closed the museum in 1953 until its reopening in 1989. Prior to *glasnost* and the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the historical memory of the Leningrad blockade was dominated by patriotic texts such as Vera Inber's *Leningrad Diary*, which portrayed how Leningraders, as loyal Soviet citizens, successfully defeated the invading German forces.⁵ Even Ales Adamovich and Daniil Granin, in their comprehensive *A Book of the Blockade*, a text based on interviews with hundreds of *blokadnitsy*, practiced self-censorship and

¹ To put this statistic into perspective, the number of casualties during the Leningrad blockade surpasses the number of American soldiers and civilians who died in all the wars from 1776 to the present day. Simmons, Cynthia, and Nina Perlina. *Writing the Siege of Leningrad: Women's Diaries, Memoirs, and Documentary Prose*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2002. Print. p. ix

² Skrbjabin, Elena. *Siege and Survival: The Odyssey of a Leningrader*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1971. Print. p. vii

³ Adamovich, Ales', and Daniil Aleksandrovich. Granin. *A Book of the Blockade*. Moscow: Raduga, 1983. Print. p. 28. As the secret directive 1-a 1601/41 declared, "The Fuhrer has decided to wipe the city of Petersburg from the face of the Earth. . . There is no interest whatever in continuing the existence of this large populated point after the defeat of Soviet Russia. . . It is proposed to ring it in a tight blockade and to flatten it to the ground by intensive artillery bombardment and constant aerial bombing. If as a result of the situation arising in the town a request to surrender is announced it will be rejected. . .

⁴ Simmons, and Perlina. *Writing*. p. 2

⁵ Vera Inber's diary was originally entitled in Russia *Pochti tri goda: Leningradskii dnevnik* in 1946. The diary was translated and published in English under the title *Leningrad Diary* in 1971.

excluded the more horrific aspects of the siege.⁶ Only in 1969, with the publication in the West of Henry Salisbury's *The 900 Days: the Siege of Leningrad*,⁷ did a more comprehensive portrayal of the blockade come to light.⁷ Along with the diaries of Elena Kochina and Elena Skrjabina, two émigrés who detailed their siege experiences in writing, Salisbury's account provides a more realistic depiction of the event, including stories of atrocities such as cases of cannibalism. Indeed, in more recent years, the historiography of the siege has taken a new turn, building off these more reliable sources to emphasize the fact that the siege of Leningrad placed a heavy burden primarily on Soviet women.⁸

In the first days of the war, Soviet men were called to the front lines in droves. As a result, with the exception of male political leaders, the elderly, and certain skilled factory workers who received exemptions, Leningrad was bereft of men. Once the food shortage became severe, men were often the first to die because their lower levels of essential body fat (3-5 percent), compared to women's levels (8-10 percent), made them more susceptible to starvation.⁹ Literary scholar and *blokadnitsa* Olga Grechina, noting the dearth of men in Leningrad, recalled in her memoirs:

In comparison with the number of women in the city, there were very few men, and one was immediately struck by their inability to adapt to the tragic conditions of life. They began to fall down in the streets, take to their beds in their apartments, to die and die and die. . . The long-suffering women of Leningrad suddenly realized that on them lay the fate not only of their family, but of their city, even of the entire country.¹⁰

Aware of the burden placed upon them to protect their city, able-bodied Leningradian women between 16- and 45-years-old were mobilized in numbers reaching the hundreds of thousands. Women formed the vast majority of the approximately half-million civilians assembled to build anti-tank ditches and defense fortifications along the Pskov-Ostrov and Luga rivers, and 1,500 women were mobilized to work in peat bogs to provide the city with fuel.¹¹ Additionally, women worked in factories, replacing the men who were sent to the front, and were largely responsible for the production of necessary war ammunitions. The factory industries' reliance upon female workers is evident in the fact that 76.4 percent of all

⁶ Simmons, Cynthia. "Lifting the Siege: Women's Voices on Leningrad (1941-1944)." *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 40.1/2 (1998): 43-65. *JSTOR*. Web. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40869962>>. P. 49, footnote 26. In an interview with Cynthia Simmons, Daniil Granin explained that he, along with his co-author Ales Adamovich, understood that a lot of the material they collected was not permissible for publication due to the regime's censorship policies and thus they practiced self-censorship.

⁷ Only in quite recent history have more details concerning the incidence of cannibalism in Leningrad come to light. Secret police reports released in 2002 reveal that approximately 300 people were executed and 1,400 were imprisoned for cannibalism. Jones, Michael K. *Leningrad: State of Siege*. New York: Basic, 2008. Print. p. 5

⁸ Cynthia Simmons and Nina Perlina's *Writing the Siege of Leningrad: Women's Diaries, Memoirs, and Documentary Prose*, along with Simmon's articles, "Lifting the Siege: Women's Voices on Leningrad," and "The City of Women: Leningrad (1941-1944)" reflect this more recent development in the historiography of the siege.

⁹ Simmons and Perlina, *Writing*. p. 2

¹⁰ Simmons and Perlina, *Writing*. p. 2

¹¹ Simmons and Perlina. *Writing*. p. xii, 233 (footnote 54)

"YOU ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST A WOMAN."

Leningrad's industrial employees and 79.9 percent of all factory workers during this period were women.¹² Although the ideology of the "new Soviet woman" under the Socialist regime no longer allowed women to adhere so stringently to their traditional gender roles, Vera Inber's poem *Victor (Победительница)*¹³ illustrates that women were still transcending social expectations by working in the factories:

Ты уезжала с заводом своим на Урал.
Бросила дом свой, ни разу о нем не заплакав.
Женским рукам удивлялся горячий металл,
Но покорялся однако.¹⁴

You left with your factory to the Urals.
Abandoning your home, and not for a single moment not weeping for it.
The hot metal is surprised at the women's hands,
But it submits all the same.

After completing an arduous day of work, women were responsible for keeping watch for incendiary bombs and cleaning the city in order to prevent the spread of disease. Many women also served on the Leningrad Front, thus playing a direct role in the war's unfolding. For example, Svetlana Magayeva recalls in her memoirs how her 18-year-old cousin, Klava, volunteered at the front as a nurse, taking Svetlana's blue hair ribbon with her as a talisman.¹⁵ Young women volunteered at the front, not only as medical professionals, but also as soldiers in some cases, with many of them even gaining the rank of senior sergeant and sergeant-major. In an interview, Major-General Emelyan Logutkin, who served on the front, stated, "We got about 17,000 young women and girls from Leningrad. They were a splendid lot . . . I have a good knowledge of history in general, and of our military history. I don't think there's ever been a case in our history when regular units of our troops were made of women."¹⁶ Throughout the war, women played an invaluable part in keeping Leningrad alive for the almost 900 days of siege, overcoming their traditional gender roles in order to defend their city.

"WE MUST PRESERVE THIS FOR HUMANITY" — MOTIVATIONS FOR RECORDING THE SIEGE EXPERIENCE

To evaluate women's experience during the siege more fully, one must consider not only the context in which memoirs and diaries about the event were published, but also the

¹² Simmons and Perlina. *Writing*. p. xii

¹³ It is important to note that in Russian, the title is in the female gender, so the title literally means "Woman Victor."

¹⁴ Inber, Vera. "Pobeditelnitsa (Победительница)." *Ленинград Блокада Подвиг*. Web. <<http://blokada.otrok.ru/poetry.php?t=107>>. Please note that all the English translations of the poetry are my own.

¹⁵ Magaeva, S. V., and Albert Jan Pleysier. *Surviving the Blockade of Leningrad*. Trans. A. V. Vinogradov. Lanham, MD: University of America, 2006. Print. p. 34-35

¹⁶ Adamovich, Ales', and Daniil Aleksandrovich. Granin. *A Book of the Blockade*. Moscow: Raduga, 1983. Print. p. 128

writers' motivations for recording their siege experiences themselves. Lack of paper at the time made maintaining a diary difficult, as exemplified by Elena Kochina, who wrote her diary entries on pieces of wallpaper, newspaper, and forms.¹⁷ Although not all-encompassing, the prevailing motivation for women to maintain diaries during the siege was to serve as witnesses of an historic event. Poet Vera Inber exemplifies this motivation to observe and record history, since Inber decided to travel to Leningrad at the start of the war and remained there throughout the blockade. Though Inber's husband, a doctor, received the option to work in Archangel or Leningrad, Inber wrote to a friend that, "as a poet, [she] should in time of war be in the centre of events; naturally Leningrad would be much more interesting."¹⁸ A desire to witness and record the suffering of the siege also compelled 18-year-old artist Elena Martilla to continue attending the only art school that remained open in the city and to depict the horrific, unforgettable images of the event. Her art teacher, Professor Yan Shablovsky instructed her:

Lena, things are getting very bad here. I don't expect to survive this. But someone must make a record of what is happening. Go out with a sketchbook and start drawing what you see. You are a portrait artist – so draw pictures of Leningrad's people under siege – honest pictures, showing how they are suffering in these diabolical circumstances. We must preserve this for humanity. Future generations must be warned of the absolute horror of war.¹⁹

While the desire to serve as witnesses to history explains many of the *blokadnitsy's* decisions to chronicle their experiences, the question remains as to what motivated *blokadnitsy* to write memoirs specifically. For *blokadnitsa* Olga Grechina, the ignorance and callousness of the modern Leningraders, who would say, "We're tired of hearing about your siege. Everyone suffered during the war," motivated her to record her experience.²⁰ Although many such accounts of the siege were subject to self-censorship, the authors' motivations provide some reassurance regarding the veracity of the records surrounding the event.

WOMEN AS THE PRESERVERS OF HOME AND HEARTH

One of the reoccurring motifs of these siege accounts involves the expectation that women would continue to fulfill their traditional domestic duties throughout the blockade. The lack of preparation for the German invasion, in addition to the bombing of the Badaev warehouse – the primary food stockpile and "the heart and stomach of the city"²¹ – resulted in a deadly food shortage, which transformed women's traditional duty of preparing meals into a desperate battle for survival.²² While accounts of the siege universally illustrate the

¹⁷ Kochina, Elena. *Blockade Diary*. Trans. Samuel Carroll Ramer. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1990. Print. p. 29

¹⁸ Inber, Vera. *Leningrad Diary*. [New York]: St. Martin's, 1971. Print. Introduction.

¹⁹ Jones, Michael K. *Leningrad: State of Siege*. New York: Basic, 2008. Print. p. 149

²⁰ Simmons and Perlina. *Writing*. p. 109

²¹ Inber, Vera. p. 16.

²²The following data illustrates the extent of the food crisis that gripped Leningrad since the very early days of the siege. "They counted supplies of grain as well as flour, live cattle and pigs as well as meat in cold stores, and poultry and canned goods. Pavlov concluded that the supplies of grain and flour would last thirty-three days, the supplies of cereals thirty days, the live and dead meat thirty-three days, the fats forty-five days and the sugar

"YOU ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST A WOMAN."

blokadnitsy's obsession with food and the anguish of starvation, women were primarily responsible for collecting rations, scouting for food, and preparing whatever they could obtain for their families. In Lidiya Ginzburg's piece of documentary fiction based on her own experience of the blockade, she explains, "men cope particularly badly with [ration] queues. . . . The siege queues were inscribed into an age-old background of things being issued or available, into the normal female irritation and the normal female patience. On the other hand, almost every one of the men who turned up in a shop tried to get to the counter before his turn . . . one thing they do know — a queue is women's business."²³ Along with queuing up for rations, which typically required waking before dawn, trudging to a bakery on foot since public transportation had stopped running, and standing in line for hours upon end, many women also struggled to acquire food on the black market. Diarist Elena Skrjabina, for example, wrote about the physical and emotional difficulties of trading cigarettes, her husband's boots, and a ladies' pair of shoes for 16 kilos of potatoes and two liters of milk.²⁴ In Elena Kochina's diary, on the other hand, the author describes her and her husband's joy at discovering over two pounds of wallpaper glue made of macaroni waste products. When Elena's husband began desperately stuffing the glue into his mouth, Elena tore the box from his hands, dismissed his imprudent suggestion to make porridge with the glue, and authoritatively decided to make soup out of it instead, which they could then subsist on for 10 days.²⁵

These anecdotal experiences illustrate how, during the siege, women simultaneously transcended their traditional domestic duties in order to perform the tasks abandoned by the men serving on the front, and yet also continued to fulfill their traditional gender roles. Indeed, these traditional domestic roles reached their greatest intensity during the most desperate days of the siege. As Elena Skrjabina wrote in her diary, "If I should fail, the whole family will perish. Who would bring these pathetic bread rations on which our lives depend?"²⁶

THE STRUGGLE FOR NORMALCY

Despite such dire circumstances, many *blokadnitsy* endeavored to maintain a semblance of normalcy during the siege by maintaining certain everyday routines. Public libraries remained open, actors continued performing at theaters, and students attended schools, even as already paltry rations steadily decreased and the sight of corpses, wrapped in sheets on their way to city cemeteries, became increasingly common during the severe winter of 1941-1942. One of the most remarkable examples of women's efforts to maintain normalcy entailed celebrations of both national and personal holidays. Several diaries and memoirs recount New Year's Eve celebrations during the winter of 1941-1942. In her memoir, Svetalana Magayeva, who was only 10-years-old during the blockade, recalls attending a 1942

and confectionery sixty days. These estimates were alarming, and the city's Party leadership realized if food was not brought into the city the population would die within two months." Magaeva. and Pleysier, *Surviving*, p. 13

²³ Ginzburg, Lidiya, Alan Myers, and Aleksandr Kushner. *Blockade Diary*. London: Harvill, 1995. P. 39

²⁴ Skrjabina, Elena. p. 28.

²⁵ Kochina, Elena. p. 51

²⁶ Skrjabina, p. 62

New Year celebration, where she “even received a New Year’s gift from Father Frost”: “At the time I received the gift, I thought I was dreaming or in a state of delirium caused by hunger. But the gift was not an illusion; it was real. It was a piece of bread along with a sweet stick of glucose.”²⁷ Every day, 14-year-old Svetlana saved some of the granulated sugar her family members used to drink with their tea, so that by the time her mother’s birthday arrived, she had amassed about 300 grams of sugar to give as a present to her mother.²⁸ Such efforts to maintain a semblance of normalcy by recognizing national and family holidays further demonstrates how women continued to perform their traditional gender roles as preservers of home and hearth.

THE DISINTEGRATION OF MORALITY

As historians Cynthia Simmons and Nina Perlina discuss in the introduction to *Writing the Siege of Leningrad: Women’s Diaries, Memoirs, and Documentary Prose*, women also continued to fulfill their traditional gender roles by acting as “arbiters of morality.”²⁹ Despite that Adamovich and Granin deemphasize the extent of criminal activity during the siege in *A Book of the Blockade*, diaries and memoirs abound with records of individuals stealing bread rations, fallen corpses in the street stripped of their belongings, and, most horrifyingly, rumors of cannibalism.³⁰ *Blokadnitsa* Sofia Nikolaevna Buriakova recalls that upon hearing of her brother’s death, she immediately suspected her brother’s neighbors of having murdered him in order to steal his ration card. Furthermore, while visiting the cemetery to bury her father, Buriakova was more horrified by the depravity of the gravediggers than by the sight of the communal trench graves in which the deceased were laid out in three rows, with each including as many as 200 corpses. Buriakova writes that “having grown numb from work, having lost a sense of what was permissible, the gravediggers stooped to all sorts of disgusting jokes, even blatantly violating the deceased. On the road leading to the communal grave a tall corpse had been stood with a cigarette sticking out of his mouth, his frozen, iced-over arm pointing the way to the trench-graves.”³¹ Still, Simmons and Perlina neglect to mention that women not only acted as “arbiters of morality” in society but also recognized their own moral failings. For example, Vera Inber recounts in her diary that when she and her husband were caught on the street during an air raid, an elderly woman approached them, desperately begging them to help her find her ration card which she had lost in the snow. Inber recounts, “I was overcome by fear and exhaustion, and I had reached the end of my tether. I said, ‘Look for yourself. We cannot.’” But Inber’s husband, ignoring her words, helped the elderly woman find her lost card, and

²⁷ Magaeva, S. V., and Albert Jan Pleyzier. p. 64.

²⁸ Adamovich, Ales’, and Daniil Aleksandrovich Granin. *Leningrad Under Siege: First-hand Accounts of the Ordeal*. Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military, 2007. Print. p. 155-156

²⁹ Simmons and Perlina. *Writing*. p. 11-13

³⁰ Adamovich, Ales’, and Daniil Aleksandrovich Granin. p. 82 “Some stories came our way – vague, second-hand ones – about bread being stolen (by adolescents or men, who suffered most from hunger pains and proved to have the least power of endurance). But when we began to question people, to ascertain how many times they had themselves seen it happen, it turned out, nevertheless, that there were not many instances. In such a big city, of course, all kinds of things happened.”

³¹ Simmons and Perlina. *Writing*. p. 101.

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then the couple led the woman off the street to safety. In admitting her own apathy towards the elderly woman who may well have died without her ration card, Inber suggests that the desperate conditions of the siege caused a widespread disintegration of morality.³²

In her diary, Elena Kochina candidly acknowledges how the conditions of the siege wholly changed her values. When she discovers that her husband, Dima, had stolen bread from the bakery, Kochina abandons her traditional moral judgment that theft is morally wrong and attempts to justify Dima's crime by arguing that the salespeople at the bakery are themselves robbing the population by profiting from the siege conditions. Kochina recalls the first time Dima arrived home with a stolen loaf of bread, manically laughing, and recounts: "I looked at him with horror. What could I say to him? That it's not good to steal? That would sound idiotic. So I just remarked: 'Be more careful.'"³³ Later in her diary, Kochina details her and her husband's preparations to evacuate Leningrad via the Road of Life, the route across the frozen Lake Lagoda leading out of the besieged city. Kochina recounts her preparations: "For the journey I put on Galya's bloomers. . . Putting them on I thought of how I had been revolted, just quite recently, when Dima took someone else's pants. And now I was doing exactly the same thing. The concept of honesty has evidently become a dead letter to us."³⁴ While Soviet women acted as "arbiters of morality," witnessing and judging society's crimes, they were also aware of their own shortcomings as the horrific conditions of the siege slowly undermined their own value systems.

Despite this environment of crime and immorality, the siege also encouraged great acts of heroism and respect for seemingly unimportant values. Even during the coldest days in the winter of 1941-1942, for instance, when people were desperate for firewood, Leningraders never destroyed any of the trees that adorned their public parks. In an interview, Olga Grechina proudly recounted, "But I wanted to say that even though it was so deadly cold, and almost everyone's windows were broken, even then not one Leningrader cut down a living tree. No one ever did that. Because we loved our city, and we could not deprive it of its greenery."³⁵

THE RESURGENCE OF RELIGION

As women during the siege acted as "arbiters of morality," they also became increasingly active in the religious community. As many of the *blokadnitsy* noted, the war served, in a way, as a cruel reprieve from Stalin's terror, as most explicitly demonstrated in the regime's more lenient stance towards the Orthodox Church, in contrast to earlier harsh anti-religion campaigns. During the siege, ten Orthodox churches were open throughout Leningrad, with daily services that attracted a decent attendance. Every day of the siege, even during air raids, the Metropolitan Aleksii led a procession with an icon around the Cathedral of St. Nicholas.³⁶ Even though many individuals attended mass, as Valentina Petrova did at

³² Inber, Vera. p. 33.

³³ Kochina, Elena. p. 60-61

³⁴ Kochina, Elena. p. 102

³⁵ Simmons and Perlina, *Writing*. p. 111. The fact that no one ever cut down any of the trees was evidently a point of pride, since in her diary, Vera Inber also notes, "All the fences, amongst them ours, have disappeared. But the beautiful centuries-old birch and lime trees have been left alone." Inber, Vera. p. 55

³⁶ Simmons and Perlina, *Writing*. p. xx

the Nikol'skii Cathedral, many people feared repression from the regime if they demonstrated their religious sentiment in public.³⁷ While recovering from severe starvation in a house for children, Svetlana Magayeva recalled seeing one of her teachers praying for her son: “She whispered to me that she had prayed to God to protect her son from war and to return him to her. She did not want anyone to know that she had been praying and asked me not to tell the others that I had seen her pray. I promised I would not tell anyone.”³⁸ Furthermore, Elena Martilla drew a picture of a woman stationed at the entrance of an apartment block, on watch for incendiary bombs and cradling her sleeping child. Martilla was quick to hide the drawing when she realized that she had subconsciously integrated religious imagery into the drawing by creating a Leningrad Madonna.³⁹ The suffering of the siege compelled women to transcend their gender roles in order to defend the city and, at the same time, motivated them to embrace their traditional role as preserver of morality by involvement, openly or covertly, in the Orthodox Church.

DISAPPOINTMENT AND DISILLUSIONMENT — THE DISINTEGRATION OF RELATIONSHIPS

In the conclusion of Cynthia Simmon's and Nina Perlina's collection of women's siege writings, they suggest that the predominant, if latent, theme of the women's siege experience was their suffering in having to endure a life alone, without family. “We could not help but sense a persistent, if underlying, motif — these women, though victorious suffered tremendous losses. Their greatest tragedies — after the death of their beloved children, husbands, brothers, parents, and friends — are revealed when we identify those aspects of a woman's natural peacetime existence that remain in

this collection *unchronicle*. They all have to do with life lived without men.”⁴⁰ While the loss of an almost entire generation of men is quite tragic, robbing many women of their husbands and stealing from many women the chance to marry and have children, I would



Figure 1: Elena Martilla's *Leningrad Madonna*
Jones, Michael K. *Leningrad: State of Siege*. New
York: Basic, 2008. Print.

³⁷ Simmons and Perlina, *Writing*. p. 125

³⁸ Magayeva, Svetlana. p. 99

³⁹ Jones, Michael K. *Leningrad: State of Siege*. New York: Basic, 2008. Print. p. 171-172.

⁴⁰ Simmons and Perlina. *Writing*. p.209.

"YOU ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST A WOMAN."

suggest that there is an even more tragic element concerning women's relationships with men during the siege: in the rare instances when relationships are mentioned, they are characterized by utter disillusionment and lead to the conclusion that during the darkest times, companionship provides no solace. The oboist Ksenia Matus, who performed in the concert of Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony on Leningrad Radio, recalled her disappointed romance with a fellow musician whom she refers to as V. Matus describes in great detail how, soon after V was drafted, she read an article informing her that V qualified for an exemption from service. Matus thus spent three days travelling around the city, moving through all the bureaucratic organs in order to secure V's deferral. Only a few days after securing his release, V went to return his military uniform and was promptly informed that his deferral was invalid and sent back to the front. Matus underwent the entire bureaucratic process once again and secured a deferral for V a second time. Happily reunited, Matus and V engaged to be married, but their chance for happiness was poisoned because the deprivations of the war made all too acutely clear V's "shameless selfishness," especially after everything Matus had done to save him from military service.⁴¹

In an even more heartrending portrayal, Elena Kochina's diary details the disintegration of her marriage. In the beginning of her diary, Kochina presents her husband Dima as a loving husband and a doting father devotedly caring for their infant daughter, Lena. After the outbreak of war, Dima was one of the few men granted a labor exemption, and so when Kochina missed the opportunity to evacuate with the institute where she worked, she was one of the few women not separated from her husband. In the early days of the siege, Dima continued to be a tender husband, saving the lunches he received at the factory for Kochina. However, as blockade conditions worsened, bread rations decreased, and hunger began to set in, Kochina witnessed her husband's transformation into someone she hardly recognized. As early as October 1941, Kochina suspected Dima of eating from their reserve of bread, despite their agreement to save it, and she also began to suspect Dima of surreptitiously eating the millet she had been saving for their daughter Lena. Kochina wrote in her diary, "I've noticed that during the last few days the millet is quickly disappearing. It's got to be Dima who is eating it. Every day when I leave the house I hide it in a new place: in the chimney, under the bed, under the mattress. But he finds it everywhere."⁴² Kochina eventually confronted Dima in the act of eating Lena's millet and decided to carry the millet with her wherever she went. Although initially sympathetic and understanding of Dima's desperate hunger, Kochina soon became outraged at his behavior, especially upon discovering that he ate Lena's special bread ration as well. Kochina explains the transformation in her relationship with her husband:

Dima and I have become like one organism. If one of us is sick or feels poorly, or is in a bad mood, the other instantly feels it painfully. And at the same time we've never been as remote from one another as now. Each of us struggles silently with his own sufferings. There's no way we can help one another. After all, it's my heart (only I hear its irregular beat), my stomach (only I feel its aching emptiness), and my brain

⁴¹Simmons and Perlina. *Writing*. p. 152-155

⁴² Kochina, Elena. p. 47.

(only I feel the whole weight of unexpressed thoughts) – only I can force them to endure. We realize now that man must be able to struggle alone with life and death.⁴³

While enduring the siege, Kochina also suffered through the deterioration of her marriage, the repeated betrayals of a husband so possessed by hunger that he would steal food from the mouth of their infant daughter, and the discovery of the bitter truth that despite all the consolations of companionship, man is inherently alone. As Lidiya Ginzburg explained in her work of documentary fiction, “In the circumstances of the siege, the first and closest degree of the social guarantee was the family, the cell of blood and existence with its inexorable demand for sacrifice. People say: the ties of love and blood make sacrifice easier. No, it’s much more complicated than that. So painful, so fearful was it to touch one another, that in propinquity, at close quarters, it was hard to distinguish love from hatred – towards those one couldn’t leave.”⁴⁴

THE STARVING BODY AND WOMEN’S SENSE OF SELF-ALIENATION

While the trials of the siege alienated women from their significant others, the suffering women endured during the blockade also alienated them from their own bodies. Bemoaning their loss of youth, beauty, and femininity reflects this sense of estrangement. Lidiya Ginzburg noted in her documentary, “During the period of greatest exhaustion everything became clear: the mind was hauling the body along with it.”⁴⁵ Their sense of detachment and even disgust at the sight of their emaciated bodies pervades women’s records of the siege. Anna Likhacheva, a doctor, wrote in her diary details of her work overseeing the distribution of “supplemental nourishment” to victims of dystrophy.⁴⁶ In her explanation of the proper quantity of fats and sugars to reintroduce into the diet of a starving person, Likhacheva explains that a certain regimen “produces wonderful results on a starving organism that has gone a long time without normal nourishment. I experienced this personally at the beginning of May, when I received supplemental feedings for six days.”⁴⁷ The trauma of the siege compelled Likhacheva to adopt a startling clinical tone for a document as personal as a diary, and this tone illustrates how the effects of starvation alienated Likhacheva from her own body so that she refers to her body as “a starving organism.”

Along with the sense of detachment from bodies they hardly recognize as their own, many women, such as Elena Kochina and Lidiya Okhapkina, lamented the fact that siege conditions left them so emaciated that their breast milk had run dry and they could no longer nurse their infant children. For Kochina and Okhapkina, the inability to breastfeed their children reflected how the war had personally assaulted their bodies and robbed them of an integral part of their identity – their ability to fulfill their role as mothers. Okhapkina describes the excruciating experience of hearing her infant daughter’s endless crying and feeling wholly powerless to nourish her. Okhapkina explains,

⁴³ Kochina, Elena. p. 70.

⁴⁴ Ginzburg, Lidiya. p. 7

⁴⁵ Ginzburg, Lidiya. p. 9

⁴⁶ The term “dystrophy” was a euphemism for starvation quite frequently employed in siege writings.

⁴⁷ Simmons and Perlina. p. 59

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My Ninochka cried all the time . . . in an attempt to get her to sleep, I gave her my blood to suck. There had been no milk in my breasts for a long time, and the breasts themselves had completely vanished, gone. So I pricked my arm above the elbow with a needle and applied my daughter's mouth to the place. She sucked gently and then fell asleep.⁴⁸

Vera Inber poignantly captures the drastic transformation a woman's body underwent during the siege, leaving women feeling genderless, robbed of their femininity. Inber's poem *Pulkovskii Meridian* includes the stanza,

У женщин начинается отек,
Они всё зябнут (это не от стужи).
Крест-накрест на груди у них все туже,
Когда-то белый, вязаный платок.
Не веришь: неужели эта грудь
Могла дитя вскормить когда-нибудь?⁴⁹

For the women, edema had started to set in,
They all suffer (and this is not from the severe cold).
Crisscrossed around their chest they have pulled tighter,
The once white, knitted scarf.
You cannot believe it: is it possible that this chest
Could have one time fed children?

When Okhapkina evacuated with her children from Leningrad and reunited with her husband after ten months of separation, their joyful reunion was tainted by the fact that her husband initially could not recognize her. Okhapkina describes her first evening reunited with her husband: "When I had undressed, I stood naked in front of my husband. 'See what I have become,' I said. I was nothing but skin and bone. My chest was especially awful, just ribs. And I was a nursing mother when the war began. My legs were skinny, hardly plumper than a half-liter bottle. Vasili looked at me and started to blink his eyes again."⁵⁰ For Okhapkina, as for many other women, the war and the starvation of the siege was a personal assault, alienating her from her own body, robbing her of her breast-milk to fulfill her maternal role, depriving her of her femininity, and making her feel repulsive in the eyes of her husband.

⁴⁸ Adamovich, Ales', and Daniil Aleksandrovich. Granin. *Leningrad Under Siege: First-hand Accounts of the Ordeal*. Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military, 2007. Print. p. 117

⁴⁹ Inber, Vera. "Pulkovskii Meridian (Пулковский меридиан)." *Ленинград Блокада Подвиг*. Web. <<http://blokada.otrok.ru/poetry.php?t=101>>.

⁵⁰ Adamovich, Ales', and Daniil Aleksandrovich. Granin. *Leningrad Under Siege: First-hand Accounts of the Ordeal*. Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military, 2007. Print. p. 185

THE POETRY OF VERA INBER

Throughout the war, poetry played a very important role in boosting the morale of the besieged and of the military forces. Poets and writers such as Vera Ketlinskaya, Olga Berggolts, and Vera Inber were frequently called upon to read their work on radio broadcasts and to soldiers on the front. In analyzing selected works by Vera Inber, the question arises as to how much insight these works provide into women's experiences during the blockade. Although Inber's poetry poignantly illustrates many of the motifs in women's diaries and memoirs concerning the siege, most of her poetry written during this period was blatant propaganda to raise the spirits of war-weary citizens and serve as a rallying call to defend the motherland. This description aptly characterizes poetry such as Inber's "*Beat the Enemy!*" featured on a TASS propaganda poster (Figure 2).

Inber herself explained in a lecture the purpose of poetry to beseech her fellow poets: "Let us do our utmost so that the poetry of the Fatherland War (in particular the poetry of Leningrad) should be worthy of that great goal it serves — the destruction of Fascism and the triumph of justice."⁵¹ However, the fact that Inber's poetry served as war propaganda does not preclude it from providing insight into women's experience of the siege. Comparing Inber's poetry to her diary reveals the sincere nature of her poetry. Although optimistic considering the circumstances, Inber's diary does include some pessimistic statements concerning the survival of Leningrad that she excluded from her poetry.⁵² On the whole, however, Inber's poetry is quite genuine, expressing many of the thoughts she records in her diary, such as her concern about the destruction of the city (she is especially preoccupied with the bombing of the Botanical Garden) and her grief at the death of her infant grandson.⁵³



Figure 2: TASS Poster
 "Beat the Enemy!"
<http://www.neboltai.org/>

⁵¹ Inber, Vera. p. 161

⁵² Inber, Vera. p. 43. For instance, in her diary entry on January 4, 1942, Inber wrote, "It seems to me that unless the blockade is broken within the next ten days the city cannot hold out... Leningrad has had all it can take from this war."

⁵³ Inber, Vera. "Pulovskii Meridian (Пулковский меридиан)." *Ленинград Блокада Подвиг*. Web. <<http://blokada.otrok.ru/poetry.php?t=101>>.

Я внука потеряла на войне...

О нет! Он не был ни боец, ни воин.

Он был так мал, так в жизни не устроен,

Он должен был начать ходить к весне.

I lost my grandson in the war...

Oh no! He was not a soldier, not a warrior.

He was so small, not yet settled in life.

He should have started to walk towards spring.

"YOU ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST A WOMAN."

We can also see how Inber's work portrays one of the most prominent motifs of women's experience during the siege – the fact that women transcended their traditional gender roles and fulfilled men's duties in order to defend their city. Inber's poem *The Nurturing Woman's Hand* (*Заботливая женская рука*) explains how women are not only tender, affectionate mothers, but can also perform many heroic actions in defense of their country. In the poem, women are on duty during an air raid, extinguishing fires from incendiary bombs, braving the din of shelling to rescue the wounded, and preparing defensive fortifications "with unwomanly strength" ("с неженской силой"). In the last stanza of the poem, women have wholly transcended their traditional gender role – they have been transformed into soldiers who never miss a shot aimed at the fleeing German forces. It is especially interesting to note how Inber's portrayal of women in her war's end poem *Victor* (*Победительница*) departs from her earlier depiction of women during the war. In celebration of victory, Inber reminds her female readers:

Минуло время тяжелой военной заботы.
Вспомнила ты, что, помимо профессий мужских,
Женщина прежде всего ты.⁵⁴

The time of heavy war work has passed.
You remembered that aside from the professions of men,
You are first and foremost a woman.

Inber's poem concludes at the woman returning home to her traditional gender role, caring for her child while she gently whispers for someone to be quiet and not wake up the baby.

CONCLUSION

The dearth of men in Leningrad during the war made the siege of Leningrad a woman's experience. In the face of the men's absence, women were expected to replace men in the factories, prepare defense fortifications, and protect the city from incendiary bombs, among many other traditionally male duties. All the while, women also fulfilled their traditional responsibilities, such as maintaining home and hearth and preserving societal morality, all increasingly difficult tasks during the severe conditions of the siege. Women managed to assume both roles, all while suffering from starvation, the disintegration of relationships, and alienation from their own bodies. Their experience of the siege illustrates how the ideology of the "new Soviet woman" – woman as man's professional equal, full-time worker, loyal Communist citizen, and devoted mother and wife – persisted in the darkest days of the siege of Leningrad.

Его зимою, от меня вдали,
На кладбище под мышкой понесли.

And so far away from me this winter,
They carried him under arm to the cemetery.

⁵⁴ Inber, Vera. "Pobeditelnitsa (Победительница)." *Ленинград Блокада Подвиг*. Web.

<<http://blokada.otrok.ru/poetry.php?t=107>>

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TITLE IMAGE

Woman sticking up agitation poster in blockaded Leningrad, 1943
 Retrieved online at http://25.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_m6fze87f4K1qbsns001_1280.jpg



QUITE A STORY TO TELL THE LAUGHS AND LOVES OF MARY WELSH

Using previously untouched archives at Yale's Beinecke Library, junior History major Katherine Fein explores the life of Mary Welsh, a plucky, short-statured woman from Bemidji, Minnesota, who went on to be a daring WWII correspondent and the last wife of author Ernest Hemingway. Welsh's ambition and aplomb not only gained her access to some of the most famous men of her day, but also made her an insightful witness to history. This short biography pays homage to the extraordinary charisma of one woman who, in the process of recording history, made it herself.

By Katherine Fein, PC '14
Written for "The Art of Biography"
Professor John Gaddis
Faculty Advisor: Cynthia Russett
Edited by Margaret Coons and Stewart MacDonald

FARGO, 1942

Mary Welsh was not yet accustomed to seeing her name in print, even though she had worked as a journalist for over a decade. At *Time*, she and her fellow correspondents collaborated in their reporting, and the magazine was printed without bylines. But on December 6, 1942, Mary's name made headlines when the *Fargo Forum* ran a piece entitled, "True Hollywood Touch to Mary Welsh's Story."¹ Most likely, Mary had not been surprised when the *Fargo Forum* interviewed her for this profile, since she was already a celebrity back home in Bemidji, a small town in Minnesota about 100 miles east of Fargo, North Dakota.² In a community of farmers, loggers, and fishermen, her European adventures had all the exotic appeal of a Hollywood drama: the short profile began cinematically, "Beauty with Brains Beats the Boys to the News Fronts; Romance Flowers in the Blackouts of London, Paris, and Cairo; Glamour Girl Travels with Invading Army."³ The piece went on to describe her coverage of the Munich Agreement of 1938, her flight to England as the Nazis invaded France, and her marriage to fellow journalist Noel Monks.

In Fargo and elsewhere, many people asked Mary to tell her story, and, never one to be shy, Mary acquiesced with a smile. Mary Welsh's story is one of personalities and encounters, of war and fear, and of laughs and loves. Much of the Hollywood touch in Mary's story comes from her natural glamour, wit, and spirit of adventure; the rest lies in the extraordinary circumstances she sought out for herself. Mary befriended great men, visited great places, and witnessed great events. The more people she met and places she went, the more she craved greater companions and greater surroundings. All the while, Mary wrote down what she saw, in letters, diaries, and official war correspondence. Her friends and colleagues thought her a great storyteller, mostly because while telling a story, Mary always wore her charming smile, capable of disarming even the greatest of men and hiding Mary's private doubts.

Though she never returned to Bemidji, Mary's story reverberated nowhere more strongly than where it began. While her classmates had remained at home, Mary had traveled across Europe. While her former neighbors had probably encountered a Chippewa Indian, Mary had met Winston Churchill. For her classmates and neighbors, even Mary's wardrobe was a topic of interest: "Being an accredited U.S. Army correspondent, Miss Welsh wears a regulation uniform while on duty."⁴ A different local paper had earlier printed a short profile of Mary on the occasion of her marriage to Noel Monks; that piece concluded, "She'll have quite a story to tell if she ever gets back to Minnesota."⁵

BEMIDJI, 1908-1927

Mary Welsh grew up among canoes, coyotes, and Shakespeare. At a young age, she learned to navigate white water rapids, identify animal tracks, and appreciate poetry. From her father Thomas Welsh, Mary inherited a love of nature and of words that she would

¹ "True Hollywood Touch to Mary Welsh's Story," *Fargo Forum*, 6 December 1942. Mary Welsh Hemingway Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

² Mary Welsh Hemingway Collection, Beltrami County Historical Society.

³ "True Hollywood Touch to Mary Welsh's Story," Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Clipping, 19 May 1941. Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

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retain throughout her life, even as she left Bemidji, Minnesota and her beloved parents far behind.

An only child, Mary spent her girlhood summers on her father's river-boat, accompanying him and his crew as they searched for new sources of timber and then hauled the felled trees back to town. On these expeditions, Mary was the only female of any age on the 120-foot-long vessel *Northland*.⁶ Excluded from the tasks of operating the boat and felling the logs, she spent her hours reading. *Northland* was furnished for such pursuits: on the second-deck, where Mary and her father would sleep, a modest lounge housed the boat's library. Tolstoy and Shakespeare shared a shelf with Ernest Thompson Seton, the author of *The Boy Scout Handbook*.⁷ Thomas shared Mary's love of words and encouraged her to read great works of literature, often guiding his daughter to questions about the nature of storytelling itself. Much later, after retiring from his logging career, Thomas would even attempt his own work of nonfiction, an autobiography and family history.⁸

Mary credited two writers, in addition to Tolstoy and Shakespeare, with instilling in her a desire to write. First, a friend of her father's, the editor of the *Bemidji Pioneer Press*, exposed her to the world of journalism, albeit on a local level.⁹ Second, the poet Carl Sandburg conjured for Mary an image of life in a big city. His poem "Chicago," first published in 1916, "changed the ambience of [her] youth."¹⁰

...Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and
coarse and strong and cunning.

Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here is a tall bold slugger
set vivid against the little soft cities;

Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage pitted against the
wilderness...

Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white teeth,

Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man laughs,

Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a battle,

Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under his ribs the heart
of the people, Laughing!...¹¹

Mary was captivated by this image of Chicago, with its vitality, bustle, and grit. For her, Sandburg "saw the wickedness of the city, but he also saw its grandeur and its pathos."¹² She felt that "without hearing the din of [Chicago's] streetcars and police whistles and feeling the heat of its inherent combat, [her] life would be zero."¹³ Her reading had captured her imagination before, but this time an adventure was within her reach, and she set her mind on making it to Chicago. When Mary graduated from high school in 1926, she spent a year

⁶ Thomas Welsh Papers, Mary Welsh Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

⁷ Mary Welsh Hemingway, *How It Was* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 10.

⁸ Although it was never published, Thomas completed a draft of his autobiography and Mary edited it. The full draft now resides in the collection of Mary's papers at the Beinecke Library.

⁹ Paul Bergly, "The Last Mrs. Hemingway," *Minnesota Monthly*, February 2004, 39-43, in the Mary Welsh Hemingway Collection, Beltrami County Historical Society.

¹⁰ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 25.

¹¹ Carl Sandburg, "Chicago," in *Chicago Poems* (New York: Holt and Company, 1916).

¹² Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 27 April 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

¹³ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 26.

studying at the local community college and saving the money she earned as a waitress in a nearby hotel. Her parents had been forced to sell their house out of financial difficulties,¹⁴ and Mary would need her waitressing earnings to help pay her tuition at Northwestern University's recently opened Medill School of Journalism, where she enrolled the following fall.¹⁵

CHICAGO, 1927-1937

Mary arrived in Chicago with little cash and big hopes. She found the campus beautiful, the city stimulating, but the University disappointing. With the exception of one anthropology professor, she encountered little intellectual excitement, and she detested Northwestern's "snobbery and pretensions" as well as her "shoddy dormitory with its smells and sounds and petty cliques of females."¹⁶ Eager for fresh air, the summer after her freshman year Mary drove east with a friend who sought a driving companion. In Boston, Mary was first exposed to life outside the Midwestern bubble and confronted the realities of earning money to pay the rent. She worked as a hostess in a tearoom in Boston's financial district, and by the end of the summer, she had saved enough money to buy a train ticket back to Chicago.

Mary's sophomore year would prove eventful. After a brief romance, Mary married Lawrence Miller Cook, a drama student from Ohio. She loved his "poetic eyes, superior tennis serve and gentle manner," and they were married without pomp by a justice of the peace. This "innocent mistake" was not to last, and the couple soon realized that their lifestyles were incompatible.¹⁷ Mary believed in hard work and achievement, but Lawrence could not keep a job, preferring instead to subsist on meager sums of money from his parents. They were divorced quietly within the year.¹⁸

While at Northwestern, Mary pursued journalism outside the classroom as a staff reporter for the Daily Northwestern and as a member of Cubs, a student journalism club.¹⁹ But before completing her sophomore year, Mary dropped out of Northwestern to accept a position as an editor of a trade magazine, *The American Florist*. Mary learned more about journalism in her first week at *The American Florist* than she had in two years at Northwestern.²⁰ But like her university career, this stint did not last long: Mary soon became frustrated by the petty reporting and the low wages, and she quit. Confronted with a dearth of job opportunities, Mary accepted a position at a firm that published throw-away weeklies financed entirely by advertising, but she continued to look for more fulfilling work. Her first break came when she was hired as an assistant on the society page of the *Chicago Daily News*. Disappointed with her beat, she longed to be "a real reporter, covering City Hall and the courts and politics rather than extolling the charms of women's hats or tiaras," but she

¹⁴ Bemidji Town Records, Beltrami Country Historical Society.

¹⁵ The Medill School of Journalism opened in 1921. Northwestern University had been admitting women since 1869. "History," Northwestern University, <http://www.northwestern.edu/about/history/index.html>.

¹⁶ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 27.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 29.

¹⁸ Bernice Kert, *The Hemingway Women* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983), 399.

¹⁹ Helen M. Tillman, "Durable 'Miss Mary,'" Northwestern Alumni News, November 1977, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

²⁰ Kert, 399.

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settled for “the women’s page.”²¹ Along with three other girls, Mary was victim to the wrath of Leola Allard, women’s editor at the *Daily News*. Miss Allard turned the newsroom into a war zone, dropping bombs each morning on the young reporters, perhaps for using the word “person” or other unsophisticated vocabulary in an article. Even so, Mary liked her job, and she credited Miss Allard with teaching her to write well and to work under strenuous conditions.

At the *Daily News*, Mary’s attempts at breaking into the city newsroom were thwarted again and again. She could not even set foot in the men’s territory without being teased or admonished: “You’re in my way,” the men would protest, and she was forced to return to the society page.²² But Mary did not let this obstruct her career. She later reflected, “When I worked on the *Chicago Daily News*, if I got a really hot story, the fellows in the city room would say, ‘Ah, that’s because you’re a female, you were able to lure the information out of them.’ (Laughs). Then, if I lost something, they’d say, ‘There, you see, a female can’t do it.’ Well, poop! I never took it seriously.”²³ In addition to working hard and maintaining an independent, positive attitude, Mary turned her gender into an advantage. In the women’s newsroom and outside the office, Mary’s disarming effect on men, especially important men, allowed her to strike a powerful position. She was instantly charming: her short, honey-brown hair curled tightly around her face, framing her chiseled features. She usually sported dark red lipstick, and she refused to wear a bra, contributing to her feminine and flirtatious appearance. She spoke softly, musically, and eloquently.²⁴ At only 5’ 2” in her size 6.5 AAA shoes,²⁵ Mary was a very small woman, but she commanded much more presence in a room than her physical stature would suggest.²⁶

As a reporter for the *Chicago Daily News*, Mary was introduced to influential writers and politicians, including her beloved poet Carl Sandburg. Like other men involved with the *Daily News*, he frequently visited the female reporters in their separate newsroom. Sandburg nicknamed Mary “Minnesota” and often invited her to his hotel room, where they would drink whiskey and sing until Mary took her leave. Another visitor to the women’s newsroom, French reporter Jules Sauerwein invited the young women to visit him if they ever found themselves in Paris. Neither Mary nor any of her female colleagues had been to Paris, and the invitation became a challenge: whoever traveled to Paris first would win \$10 and bragging rights.²⁷ Not surprisingly, Mary dutifully saved her earnings, as she had done since graduating high school. By 1936, she had enough money to buy a ticket from Montreal, Canada, to Belfast, Ireland, aboard a small boat.²⁸

²¹ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 30.

²² *Ibid.*, 33.

²³ Interview with Wood Simpson, ca. 1970, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

²⁴ Tillman, “Durable ‘Miss Mary,’” Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

²⁵ Mary always struggled to find shoes that fit her, especially during World War II in London. “Shoes are by far my biggest problem,” she wrote to her parents, “the British simply don’t make shoes that are narrower than B, and if I get them long enough, they fall off my feet.” Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 22 June 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

²⁶ Interview with Wood Simpson, Kennedy Library. Cf. Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 102, and photographs in the Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

²⁷ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 34.

²⁸ “True Hollywood Touch to Mary Welsh’s Story,” Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

Mary's first trip to Europe would captivate her in the way Carl Sandburg's poem had ten years earlier. After a stop in Dublin, Mary made her way to London, where she instantly fell in love with the sights and sounds of the city. She recognized its importance as the center of world affairs and was attracted to the sense of life and urgency she found in the streets.²⁹ After a few days of exploring, she hurried on to Paris to meet Sauerwein, whose challenge had inspired this journey. Unfortunately, he was in Munich, reporting on the rise of Nazism in Germany. By chance, Mary wandered into the small Paris bureau of the *London Daily Express*, located on the same floor as *Paris-Soir*, Sauerwein's paper. With her characteristic charm, Mary befriended the bureau chief, a young man from London, and he invited her to dine with him and his colleagues that evening. After dinner, wine, and dancing, they gathered at Les Halles for a bowl of onion soup to end the night. As Mary bemoaned the fact that she would soon return to Chicago, her new friends suggested she take a reporting job in London. Mary doubted the facility with which this could be accomplished, but one of the party handed her the telephone number of Lord Beaverbrook.³⁰

If anyone could secure a job for Mary in London, this man could. Lord Beaverbrook owned the *Daily Express*, the *London Evening Standard*, and the *Sunday Express*, in addition to serving in the British government in various capacities.³¹ Affectionately known as "the Beaver," the media tycoon and political figure would also be swayed by Mary's allure. After a brief meeting with her, he overcame his initial reluctance and set up an interview for Mary with an editor at the *Daily Express*. Unfortunately, the editor could not find room for her on his staff; he already employed another talented, young, American, female reporter. Mary returned to the States, disappointed to be leaving London and Paris but inspired by the pace and gravity of events taking place in Europe.³²

Back in Chicago, Mary's coworkers gave her the \$10 she had earned for reaching Paris first. She worked harder than ever, becoming the most respected female reporter on the staff. But the image of London did not leave her mind. She approached her boss about the possibility of taking a job in the London bureau of the *Chicago Daily News*. Unfortunately, there were no openings. She continued to inquire, but a year later, she remained in Chicago.

One day, out of the blue, Mary received a call from Lord Beaverbrook's secretary. The Beaver was visiting Chicago, and Mary accepted the offer to dine with him, first over lunch, and then again over dinner. Mary was exhilarated by her worldly and influential companion, but despite her subtle hints, the evening passed without discussion of a job offer. The Beaver went on to New York, and Mary did not expect to hear from him again, but he called her a week later and requested that she join him in New York City before he returned to London. Mary accepted on the condition that they discuss the possibility of her joining the staff of the *Express*. After an awkward evening of Mary reading to the bedridden Lord (he suffered from asthma), the Beaver had failed to convince Mary to accompany him on a cruise on the Nile. Frustrated, he imparted his advice on the young, charming, "Midwestern dolt": "...there is only one way in Europe in which a woman might advance toward whatever objectives she had and that is with the patronage of an important and influential man; ...the single,

²⁹ Interview with Wood Simpson, Kennedy Library.

³⁰ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 35.

³¹ Cf. Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Lord Beaverbrook: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

³² Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 36.

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essential goal of a young woman should be to learn how to please men in every aspect of physical living and then to perfect her practice of those sorceries.”³³ Perturbed but focused on her goal, Mary listened patiently and waited for him to move on to other topics before requesting again that he hire her to write for the *Express*. Finally, he relented, promising to find her a job in London. Upon returning to Chicago, Mary began to say her goodbyes.³⁴

EUROPE, 1937-1944

On July 2, 1937, Mary reported to work at London’s *Daily Express*. She encountered a large building, flamboyant and hostile with its modern lines and black glass panels.³⁵ Behind the impressive facade, through the art deco lobby, and up the oval staircase, the editorial floor left much to be desired. The long table that Mary shared with other reporters more closely resembled a lunch counter than an office desk. She put her bag and coat on the floor beneath her chair; the table barely had room enough to accommodate her notebook and typewriter.³⁶

Her first day at the *Express*, she was assigned to cover Amelia Earhart’s disappearance. Mary completed the 1,000-word story within the assigned one hour, not realizing that the shockingly rapid deadline was only meant to test her. As she settled into her new job, Mary’s assignments ranged from the frivolous (“Champagne-Drinking at the Derby”) to the political (“Trafalgar Square Rallies Protest Against British Policy on the Spanish Civil War”).³⁷ Her first assignment outside England took her to the Netherlands in January 1938 to cover the birth of the heir to the Dutch throne. As Mary awaited the baby’s arrival with reporters from around Europe, they filled the hours engaging in Mary’s favorite activity: drinking. Mary loved alcohol of all kinds, and along with her friends at the *Express*, she did her best to support the almost thirty pubs within a two-block radius of the London office.³⁸

Throughout this time, Mary lived in Chelsea, in the basement of a building occupied by young, single women who worked various jobs from modeling to film production. But Mary would not be single for long. After a ten-month courtship, Mary married Noel Monks, a fellow war correspondent. Bulky but fit, Noel was a native of Australia; he had traveled to Europe to cover the Spanish Civil War. He dressed crisply, and his premature gray hair only enhanced his distinguished appearance.³⁹ Together, they moved to a tiny house on Upper Cheyne Row. The two did not immediately attempt to have children together, after a medical examination revealed that Mary was likely to have a complicated pregnancy. As time passed, Mary expressed a desire for a family, but any attempts toward pregnancy failed; in a letter to

³³ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 37.

³⁴ Kert, 400.

³⁵ The London *Daily Express* building that Mary worked at remains standing today. “Art Deco buildings in London,” Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed 13 April 2012, http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1157_art_deco/about/buildings/daily.htm.

³⁶ Interview with Wood Simpson, Kennedy Library.

³⁷ Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke and Kennedy Libraries.

³⁸ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 42. Mary’s love of alcohol continued throughout her life, and though she did not speak Swahili, after her travels to Africa she learned how to say: “Tupa ile chpa tupu,” or “Take away that empty bottle.”

³⁹ Cf. Photographs in Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

her parents, Mary wrote, “I know that children keep a marriage alive and vital, and I’ve wanted some ever since [Noel and I] were married. Even though we haven’t been successful so far, I haven’t given up hope.”⁴⁰ The impending European war also deterred the couple from pursuing a family.

In keeping with Mary’s appreciation of language and indicative of her sense of humor, Mary loved word games. One game began with participants asking, “Have you heard of the moron that...” and finishing the question with a funny error: “...sat on a busy intersection with two slices of toast waiting for the traffic jam?...made socks for her son in the army because he wrote and told her he had grown a foot?” In the framework of this game, Mary was a moron: she “moved to the city because [s]he heard the country was at war.”⁴¹ Ever since Mary had first visited London while working for the *Chicago Daily News*, she had been fascinated by the tense political climate. Mary felt the pressure of the imminent European conflict, especially as Hitler moved to expand German territory, and she relished the opportunity to be present at the scene of major world events. Mary later remembered a common experience during the years leading up to the Second World War: “feeling vaguely disloyal to London if one spent a night away from it.”⁴²

In pursuit of important stories, however, Mary would spend time away from London. On September 15, 1938, Mary flew ahead of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to Munich, Germany, in preparation for his meeting with Adolf Hitler. After arriving at the hotel, she set up an open telephone line to the London office in order to prevent censorship, then talked her way into Chamberlain’s room, directly below her own, but found nothing of interest. She conducted interviews in the streets with anyone who spoke English and sat down with the chief of the Nazi women’s organization. When Chamberlain greeted a crowd from his hotel room window, Mary watched the spectacle from her balcony directly above his room and, facetiously, bowed to the streets below.⁴³

After the agreement had been signed, permitting the German annexation of the Sudetenland, Mary traveled to the German-Czech border to watch the fulfillment of the terms. Unsurprisingly, Mary and her companions played word games in the long car ride through Salzburg and Linz. Upon reaching the border, Mary found it difficult to craft a story because nothing newsworthy had taken place: the agreement had been enacted “correctly and courteously.”⁴⁴ While awaiting funds from London to finance her return voyage, Mary explored the villages nestled among the hills. While there, she missed Winston Churchill’s address to the House of Commons on October 5, 1938. Still excluded from government, Churchill represented a pessimistic view on German ambition, later validated by the course of history. “All is over,” Churchill lamented. “Silent, mournful, abandoned, broken, Czechoslovakia recedes into the darkness....I fear we shall find that we have deeply compromised, and perhaps fatally endangered, the safety and even the independence of Great Britain and France.”⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 16 August 1942, Mary Welsh Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

⁴¹ Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

⁴² Mary Hemingway, “England’s People’s War,” Overseas Press Club, 1964, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

⁴³ Kert, 402.

⁴⁴ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 46.

⁴⁵ Winston Churchill, “The Munich Agreement” (speech, House of Commons, London, 5 October 1938).

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After much delay, Mary did return to London, and while news of German aggression spread from the continent to Britain, she continued to feel removed from any conflict. This was a golden time for her relationship with Noel: they frolicked around London, in the parks and pubs, working but also enjoying the European lifestyle. In August 1939, Mary and Noel went on holiday in St. Jean de Luz, enjoying the Basque sun and French cuisine.⁴⁶ They returned to England on September 1, 1939, the same day that the German army invaded Poland.

On Sunday, September 3, 1939, Mary leisurely prepared breakfast for herself and Noel as morning sunlight streamed through the windows into their tiny flat. Meanwhile, at nine o'clock, Prime Minister Chamberlain presented the Nazis with an ultimatum: the Germans could withdraw from Poland, or Great Britain would declare war on Germany. At eleven o'clock, the ultimatum expired with no reply from the Nazis. Mary was called to the *Express* office to cover the news, but she noticed nothing unusual in her walk to work. Great Britain was peacefully at war, at least temporarily.⁴⁷

As autumn turned to winter, Mary became restless. War hovered over the European continent, but its effect on England was not yet newsworthy. Mary dawdled in London, covering debates in the House of Commons. She interviewed the American ambassador, but her editors disliked her story about his lack of faith in the British military. Frustrated by her distance from the important world events, Mary convinced her boss to transfer her to Paris to cover the British military presence in France. She spent a dreary few months interviewing troops, visiting encampments, and observing drills.⁴⁸ In a story for the *Express*, Mary quoted an officer as saying, "Actually, we could do with a bit of action, to take their minds off Home and Ma."⁴⁹ The articles she telephoned to London had little substance beyond fragments like this; the Phony War persisted, and like England, France still awaited the true outbreak of war.

Until a newsworthy event took place, Mary indulged in the luxuries of the Parisian lifestyle. While in Paris, Mary enrolled in French language classes, mastered the Métro, and used the bar at the Ritz Hotel as a rendezvous point. She frequented art galleries and sunbathed on rooftop terraces. On May 10, 1940, Winston Churchill became Prime Minister and Germany bombed and invaded Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. The gravity of these events was not immediately apparent to Mary, as the French press and indeed the military remained confused about details of the attacks. As the German army approached France, Mary continued to enjoy French wine and cuisine. Noel joined her in Paris after finishing a story in Reims, the location of the headquarters of the Royal Air Force. Afternoons saw the couple playing tennis and swimming casually at a nearby club.⁵⁰

Suddenly, panic took hold of the city as word spread that the German army had broken through French lines and threatened the city of Paris. Noel returned from his office on a humid Sunday afternoon with the news that Paris was about to surrender.⁵¹ Mary and

⁴⁶ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 46-47.

⁴⁷ Kert, 402-03.

⁴⁸ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 49.

⁴⁹ Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

⁵⁰ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 50.

⁵¹ Kert, 401.

Noel packed in twenty minutes, managed to hail a taxi, and directed it to the train station. The city was quiet, but the station was chaotic. Mary and Noel squeezed into a train compartment already overflowing with passengers, with Mary wedged between a frightened spaniel and a Louvre curator.⁵² Mary and Noel disembarked at Blois, where they had heard the French government was temporarily installed. They searched for sources of news, but even if they had learned anything in the chaos, they would not have been able to send their findings back to London.⁵³

With charm and by chance, Mary hitched a ride in an acquaintance's car to Biarritz, while Noel stayed behind in Blois in an attempt to cover the events there. He quickly realized that he would not be able to do anything productive amid the frenzy, and he soon took off after his wife. His journey was much more difficult than Mary's, taking him three days and two nights to reach Biarritz by a combination of train, hearse, and foot.⁵⁴ The morning after he arrived, Mary and Noel managed to find a cab driver willing to take them to Bordeaux, where Americans and Brits were gathering in hopes of leaving the country in advance of the German invasion. Along with many other journalists and British and American citizens, Mary and Noel crowded onto a cargo ship meant to accommodate 150 people; they were two of 1600.⁵⁵

Upon returning to England, Mary confronted a fact that she had known all along but had not yet internalized: a war would be fought in Europe, and she would cover it. She reevaluated her position at the *Express*. "I didn't want to work for the *Daily Express*," she said, "on account of the fact that I thought it would be a serious war – not just a European tiff – and that I would like to report on it to somebody in America."⁵⁶ She called a Chicago colleague, Walter Graebner, who had gone on to run the London bureau of *Time* magazine. He offered her a job.⁵⁷

On June 18, 1940, Winston Churchill delivered a speech to the House of Commons that would become famous. "The Battle of France is over," he asserted. "I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire....Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour.'"⁵⁸ Indeed, the battle was about to begin, and it would be named according to Churchill's remarks. On July 10, 1940, Mary began working at *Time*, and the German Luftwaffe began its aerial campaign against England. This ushered in a summer and fall that would test the mettle of Londoners and indeed the architectural soundness of the city. Mary's resolve would also be tested, and the next few years of war would become Mary's finest hour.

⁵² Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

⁵³ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 50.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁵ "True Hollywood Touch to Mary Welsh's Story." Mary Welsh Hemingway Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

⁵⁶ Interview with Wood Simpson, Kennedy Library.

⁵⁷ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 54.

⁵⁸ Winston Churchill, "Their Finest Hour" (speech, House of Commons, London, 18 June 1940).

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On September 7, the true Blitz began over London. Sirens sounded in the streets, bombs could be heard blasting nearby, and the reporting team frequently had to abandon their desks to find shelter in the basement. By this point, Mary and Noel had not settled in an apartment of their own, and their latest refuge was at Lansdowne House in Berkeley Square. One night, they returned to their apartment to find the windows entirely blown out by a nearby explosion. On another occasion, their landlord called and ordered Mary and Noel to go outside because a firebomb had landed in Berkeley Square. Along with her neighbors, Mary worked to put out the flames, and after a concerted effort by both firefighters and citizens, Mary passed around a bottle of whiskey in triumph. Lansdowne was lucky that summer not to suffer serious damage in this or any other fire attack: the water supply was never interrupted, and electricity and telephone service failed only occasionally. The residents of Lansdowne House left the door unlocked so that their friends could use the working bathroom, and frequently Mary woke up to one or two soldiers taking refuge on the second-floor landing.⁵⁹

The devastation was rampant throughout London. “It was a time of theater and travesty,” Mary wrote, “with seven million people, traditionally addicts of the outdoors, suddenly burrowing underground....There was the evening when I walked home alone from the Savoy in a fine new black suit. When I got to my flat and looked in the mirror the suit was gray. It was a night of incendiaries. I had flung sandbags on a couple of them that were burning along my way, and had thrown myself prone on the pavement five times during the mile or more when the descending screams sounded too close.”⁶⁰ Sometimes, when walking to and from work, Mary would pass examples of recent devastation. She saw gray vans carting dead men, women, and children away from bombed houses. Nights saw the heaviest destruction and the loudest attacks, preventing sleep and instilling deep fears in London residents. Some nights were worse than others, and some made Mary think she would not live another day. “Today has brought the usual post-bomb misery,” Mary wrote in her diary on May 11, 1941, “the taste of powder in the mouth, burglar alarms ringing incessantly, glass crunching under our shoes in the flat and also outside, clothes in the closets and drawers heavy with dust, my eyes red and face old looking and feeling as though it were burning, and a terrible job to concentrate my thinking.”⁶¹

Despite these challenges, Mary worked hard throughout the summer and fall. For *Time*, Mary wrote profiles of the new American ambassador, her old friend Lord Beaverbrook, Lady Astor, and others. She used her many connections in the military to secure her access to restricted areas and gain information about the goings-on at the front. She traveled around Britain reporting on military happenings, cabling updates and statistics back to the London office.⁶² She took up a post contributing to early morning BBC broadcasts and, with her dedicated reporting and feminine charm, won over *Time* founder Henry Luce, adding him to her list of powerful male friends. In 1941, Mary wrote a feature piece about British women contributing to the war effort. “In such elaborate upheavals as total war, no individual’s history can be typical,” Mary wrote, as much about herself as about her British

⁵⁹ Mary Welsh Hemingway Diary, October 1940, quoted in Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 64.

⁶⁰ Mary Hemingway, “England’s People’s War,” Overseas Press, 1964.

⁶¹ Mary Hemingway, diary entry, 11 May 1944, quoted in *How It Was*, 70.

⁶² Official *Time* Memos, Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

subjects. “These are the women of Britain today. They express few high sentiments of patriotism. They work. Privately they dream their plans for reconstruction after the war....They work so hard they have no time for tears.”⁶³ Like those of her subjects, Mary’s story was unique. Like her subjects, Mary worked hard and received little gratitude. Like her subjects, Mary faced extraordinary challenges in daily life, from air raids over London to the widespread food shortage to an interruption of family life. Like her subjects, Mary encountered additional obstacles because she was a woman.

At *Time*, as at other newspapers, gender inequality prevailed nowhere more strongly than in the domain of war correspondence. Women were frequently denied official accreditation from the military; women could not access military camps and facilities because there were no female restrooms or sleeping quarters; and women were prevented from interacting with soldiers because women distracted the troops.⁶⁴ Mary added her name to a letter authored by fellow American female journalist Ruth Cowan addressed to the President of the American Correspondents Association; it read, “I would like to submit a memo on the difficulties we women war correspondents are having attempting to report on the activities of Americans at war. We are being stopped from doing a first class workmanship job. Instead, we are forced into the position of wrangling and fighting to do our jobs. All I want is to do my job.”⁶⁵

In January 1942, Mary traveled to Dublin as an official war correspondent to report on the reception of American troops in Ireland. Accustomed to death and destruction around every corner, Mary noticed the “euphemism of life jackets” as she drifted out into the Irish Sea on an overnight ride from England to Ulster.⁶⁶ She encountered a hostile and confused climate; the Irish had conflicting motivations in the war. Prime Minister de Valera told a group of journalists that after centuries of harassment and abuse at the hands of the British, he could not condone the landing of American troops on Irish soil and could not in good conscience give aid to the British, their age-old oppressors.⁶⁷ Mary herself had a complicated relationship with Ireland, her family’s original home. While she understood that the stereotypical criticisms of the Irish had some truth in them, she felt loyal to the county and its traditions. “Ireland is a wicked, filthy, ignorant place,” she wrote in a letter to her parents on the occasion of St. Patrick’s Day, “filled with people who’ll die of nothing but stubbornness, rather than admit they’re wrong---and it would be fine if it sank in the sea. But...I wear the green for the great Kathleen ni Houlihan, for the wild gay men and women of Ireland’s history, with their bare feet in the mud, and strong drink in their stomachs, probably, and dreams in their heads. I wear the green for you, Pop, you contrary sentimentalist, you.”⁶⁸

⁶³ Mary Welsh, “No Time for Tears: Women at War Keep Busy with Problems of Work, Uniforms, Make-Up, Dates and Meals,” 1941, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

⁶⁴ Penny Colman, *Where the Action Was: Women War Correspondents in World War II* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2002), 28.

⁶⁵ *No Job for a Woman: The Women who Fought to Report WWII*, directed by Michèle Midori Fillion (New York: Women Make Movies, 2011). Martha Gellhorn, Ernest Hemingway’s wife at the time, also signed this letter.

⁶⁶ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 76.

⁶⁷ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 77.

⁶⁸ Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 17 March 1943, Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

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During the spring and summer of 1942, Mary was reintroduced to Henry Luce,⁶⁹ one of the many influential figures whose attention she craved. Then and always, Mary had a penchant for “rich, charming, talented, handsome men.”⁷⁰ She resented pettiness and anonymity, especially in people, preferring excitement, awe, even violence, if it meant adventure and grandeur. Fortunately for Mary, just as she enjoyed the attention of such men, these men enjoyed the company of a smart, sassy, and attractive female in a heavily militarized and male climate. Throughout her time in London, she took full advantage of this relationship, both inside and outside the office. In a letter to her parents, Mary wrote, “I go along as usual, working pretty steadily, getting free meals from my boy-friends, especially generals who like having a gal who’s young and passing decent looking to take to dinner.”⁷¹ In the same letter, Mary expressed her love of the important city, and not just the important men: “If it weren’t for you two, nothing would pry me loose from here now....London in the weeks and months and years to come is the most interesting place in the world to be.”⁷² In a second letter a few weeks later, she expressed the same idea: “Having seen the war through from here, I don’t want to miss even the beginning of the grande finale.”⁷³

Her parents did pry her loose, and in the fall of 1942, she returned to the United States for the first time since 1937. She visited her parents in Chicago, where they were renting an apartment, and her holiday was relaxing and joyful. In the background, the shadow of war darkened her vacation, and she hurried back to work. While she awaited the resolution of an issue with her passport, Mary worked out of the New York office of *Time*. There, she found even more gender-segregated newsrooms. “In the war between men and women inside *Time’s* antiseptic jungle,” Mary recalled, “the lines and ranks were strictly drawn, the pecking order inviolate. On the editorial staff men were ‘writers’ (associate or contributing editors in the masthead) and woman were ‘researchers,’ and never the twain would exchange crafts.”⁷⁴ Indignant and unaccustomed to such extreme gender bias, Mary defied these norms, to the astonishment of the men and the resentment of the women. Mary’s success in New York distinguished her among *Time’s* female reporters, but Mary was not happy in the United States: in a letter to her mother, she wrote,

I feel I could be of so much more use in London. (I know how you feel about it, Mommie, that I’ve done my bit about the war and ought to be able now to sit back and take it easy----but believe me, I couldn’t possibly do that. I’d be more miserable, I know, if I tried that, than I can describe to you. There is a tremendous job to be done by my generation toward winning this war, and particularly toward winning the peace afterwards; and I feel, without any doubts whatsoever, that my place to help in the best, most efficient way I know, that is, by going back to London and writing about it for America.)⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 77-78.

⁷⁰ Tillman, “Durable ‘Miss Mary,’” Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

⁷¹ Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 23 May 1942. Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 8 June 1942. Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

⁷⁴ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 81.

⁷⁵ Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 12 September 1942. Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

Finally, the issue with her passport was resolved, and Mary crossed the Atlantic once again to resume work in London. Noel also managed to return to London for a brief visit, though his work soon sent him on to various European cities and then to Cairo. The marriage suffered because of the lack of time they spent together, though Mary recognized that the war kept them apart. Soon, word reached Mary that Noel was seeing a woman in Cairo. She moped for two days but then shrugged, content to wait for the end of the war to resume normal married life. Meanwhile, though she never acknowledged it directly, she was not faithful to Noel any more than he was to her. Her friends knew this about her: “She was full of laughs and full of lovers,” said a colleague. “She was very little, very attractive....It was a marvelous period for her, perhaps the best time in her life. If the chase was on, it was the guy’s chase.”⁷⁶ Mary’s sexuality had always defined her appearance and personality, but this was a particularly flirtatious time for her, especially because of the war. “London was a Garden of Eden for single women in those years,” she remembered, “a serpent dangling from every tree and streetlamp, offering tempting gifts, companionship which could push away respective lonelinesses, warm, if temporary, affections-little shelters, however makeshift, from the huge uncertainties of the hovering, shadowy sense of mortality.”⁷⁷

ERNEST, 1944-1946

By 1944, Mary had a well-established social network. As her roommate Connie recalled, “Mary had been in London so long that she knew everybody, and had wonderful connections.”⁷⁸ One of these connections was Irwin Shaw. He had not yet published his first and famous novel *The Young Lions*, which would catapult him into the literary spotlight, but even as an officer in the U.S. Army, Irwin operated in the social circles of writers and journalists in London. Struck, as most men were, by Mary’s tight suit and sly smile, he took Mary to lunch on a sunny day in early May 1944. The restaurant was crowded and too warm for Mary’s wool jacket, so she removed it, much to Irwin’s delight. Mary never wore a bra, and that cloudless May day was no exception. As Irwin pointed out, their small table would be attracting male visitors, thanks to Mary’s bright yellow sweater.⁷⁹

Across the room, Mary noted a bearlike man lunching alone. At her request, Irwin identified him as Ernest Hemingway, a giant of the literary community since the late 1920s, after the publication of *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929).⁸⁰ On his way out of the restaurant, Ernest paused at Irwin and Mary’s table, as other friends had done throughout their meal. He asked Irwin to introduce his companion and quickly proceeded to invite her to dine the next day. Mary and Ernest’s first date was unremarkable: their outdoor table ensured poor service and loud background noise, while Ernest’s diffident manner turned Mary off. They discussed the war, leaving Mary underwhelmed by Ernest’s knowledge of current events in Europe.⁸¹ “I’d read all his stuff,” Mary said in an interview, “but he didn’t know anything about the war. He’d been sub chasing off in Cuba and he

⁷⁶ William Walton, quoted in Kert, 403.

⁷⁷ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 85.

⁷⁸ Connie Ernst, quoted in Kert, 404.

⁷⁹ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 93.

⁸⁰ Paul Hendrickson, *Hemingway’s Boat: Everything He Loved in Life and Lost* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 32-34.

⁸¹ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 95.

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didn't know anything about the European war at all. I felt rather superior, I might say, because he was ignorant about the resistance and the bombing program and all of that, and so I was impressed by him as a writer, but not by him in that circumstance."⁸² They went on to praise each other's spouses: Ernest had met Noel during the Spanish Civil War, and Mary knew Martha Gellhorn in the context of the journalism community.⁸³ After parting, Mary did not expect to see Ernest again, but their social circles continued to overlap.

One evening not long after this date, Mary bumped into Ernest at a cocktail party before leaving the event early in preparation for work the following day. She returned home to find her roommate and a male friend talking in the dark.⁸⁴ Mary sat down on her bed and joined their conversation. Before long, they were joined by an unexpected visitor. Ernest knocked on their door and quickly made himself comfortable on Mary's bed.⁸⁵ Ernest recounted stories of his youth for the captive audience, but suddenly, after telling the story of his high school prom, Ernest switched topics. "I don't know you, Mary," he said in the darkness, "but I want to marry you now, and I hope to marry you sometime. Sometime you may want to marry me."⁸⁶ Surprised, Mary waited and then replied hesitantly that his proposal was "premature," that they were both married, and that they hardly knew one another. He stuck by his statement, and left along with the other man, leaving the women alone. "He's too big," Mary told her roommate before they went to bed, referring to both his size and his stature.⁸⁷

This moment passed, and Mary's life resumed its wartime rhythm. She convinced a friend in the Air Force to give her a seat on one of his warplanes, and Mary flew with him over the Channel to see the gathering air force formations. She wrote stories about the increase of Allied bombing of northern France. In late May, Noel telephoned to say he would finally be returning to London from Turkey and Cairo, and Mary busied herself preparing for his arrival. "The last two weeks have gone by like a flash," Mary wrote in a letter to her parents on June 4, 1944, "chiefly because Noel got home, after being away nearly a year, and I was busy looking after him and getting him ready to move out again....He was so much more silent and reserved than I had remembered him."⁸⁸ Mary did not bring up the rumor she had heard of Noel's sexual adventures in Cairo, and if Noel knew about Mary's infidelity, he chose not to mention it.⁸⁹ On June 1, Noel again left London, this time on a secret mission regarding the coming invasion.⁹⁰ About this time, Mary got wind that Ernest had been in a

⁸² Interview with Wood Simpson, Kennedy Library.

⁸³ Colman, 40-44.

⁸⁴ At night, it was common to keep the lights off when the windows were open, even if social activity persisted. Connie, Mary's roommate, and Michael, her friend, had desired fresh night air, and thus turned the lights off as a protection against air raids.

⁸⁵ While unusual for such an important, married man to lie down next to a woman he hardly knew, visiting friends' apartments by night was not an infrequent occurrence. In the event of a raid, adults would often be forced to find shelter wherever they were, including strangers' hallways and friends' beds.

⁸⁶ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 95.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁸⁸ Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 4 June 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

⁸⁹ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 98.

⁹⁰ Kert, 404.

car accident, and she decided to pay him a visit in the hospital. She brought flowers, and he made her promise to visit him when he was released in just a few days.⁹¹

On June 6, 1944, Allied troops arrived on the beaches of Normandy to begin the largest amphibious landing in world history. The top secret operation captured the attention of the press and indeed the world, but it was not immediately clear what the outcome would be. On June 8, 1944, Mary wrote in her diary, “Wrote a story about our wild Indian paratroopers with their brass knuckles for a newscast and found Noel’s first story from France in the *Daily Mail*. Tea with Pam Churchill who emphasized the stupidity of overoptimism about our chances in Normandy. The weather is being terrible and we are having trouble landing supplies.”⁹² Mary looked upon the events as the wife of someone involved, as a reporter covering the war, and as an American citizen with additional loyalty to Britain. Beginning with D-Day, Mary spent the summer of 1944 working long hours, traveling, and, in a way she had not yet been forced to do, confronting the realities of war. Mary wrote to her parents that, “The trouble with invasions is they take away the few remaining bits of my private life. Since D-day..., I have been eating, breathing, dreaming and talking nothing but air-force activities.”⁹³ Throughout this period, Mary spent her days pursuing the latest information from the front, as she recorded in a letter of June 13: “fifteen hours a day of flying around England to air stations and camps and hospitals, then back here at my typewriter to pound out the news.”⁹⁴ Pound it out she did, cabling military developments to London from around England as well as from France.

On July 12, 1944, Mary traveled to Normandy to report on the Medical Corps. “I stayed at a hospital camp,” Mary wrote in a letter, “worked every day from 6:50 am. until midnight, covering the endless miles of dusty roads, almost solid with traffic, talking to at least a hundred different people, including wounded and front-line doctors and behind the lines nurses and German prisoners.”⁹⁵ Mary was not content with the formal tour of northern France that she was given with a group of female journalists, so she found a young American man with a car to drive her off the crowded main highway and into the desolate landscape, where the country roads were lined with ditches and German signs announcing “*Minen*”: landmines.⁹⁶ The stench of death burdened the country air, and Mary more than once stumbled across anonymous corpses. More than any other experience in her reporting career, this visit to France made her understand the true nature of war. She was deeply moved by the anonymity of soldiers, the smells, sights, and sounds of warfare, and the devastating (and sometimes humiliating) effects of war on the human body.

With the invasion a success and the tide turning in favor of the Allies, Ernest left London for Paris in late July to cover the liberation. Mary followed him the next month, as journalists poured into France for what was sure to be a grand occasion. In the small pack on her back, Mary carried only a sleeping bag, road maps of France, candles, matches, a helmet, a water bottle, and her official uniform. Mary’s journey from London to Paris proved

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 405, and Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 98-99.

⁹² Mary Hemingway, diary entry, 8 June 1944, quoted in *How It Was*, 100.

⁹³ Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 22 June 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

⁹⁴ Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 13 June 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

⁹⁵ Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 18 July 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

⁹⁶ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 104.

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challenging, as the jeep scheduled to meet her in Cherbourg and drive her to Paris was nowhere to be found. She dallied at the hectic airfield, charmed the operations manager, and convinced him to persuade a pilot to drop her at a nearby army camp. There, she hitched a ride with an officer driving to Paris, but they soon got lost in the countryside. When they encountered a captain asking for papers, Mary cringed; she was breaking army rules by traveling by unofficial means. Lucky for Mary, the captain overlooked this offense and offered her a seat in his jeep, as he too was traveling to Paris. Finally, they arrived in Paris on August 25th, the Sunday after the liberation on Friday.⁹⁷

Mary checked into the Hôtel Scribe, the headquarters of the Allied press. The packed hotel was full of her friends and acquaintances, dating all the way back to her years in Chicago.⁹⁸ Soon after arriving, and before investigating the events at Nôtre Dame, Mary stopped by the Ritz to check in on Ernest. He greeted her with a characteristic bear hug, complete with lifting, spinning, and singing. Having thus far neglected her reporting work, Mary ran off to cover the joyous events, but not before she made plans to dine with Ernest. Mary switched hotels the next day, moving into a room at the Ritz four floors above Ernest's.⁹⁹ Proximity to him was her only draw, as she left behind her friends and colleagues at the Scribe; on top of that, the Ritz "used to be one of the finest in town," Mary wrote in a letter, "but [is] now as cold as everywhere else."¹⁰⁰

On August 26, Mary pushed through the massive crowd lining the Champs Elysées, the entire distance from the Place de la Concorde to the Arc de Triomphe. Along the way, she interviewed people in English and halting French, scribbling names and quotes in her small notebook. "*Vive la France! Vivent les Américains!*" the crowd chanted, in anticipation of the arrival of Charles de Gaulle and the victory parade.¹⁰¹ Mary watched the French heroes greet the crowd and hurried ahead to Nôtre Dame, where she used her press pass to gain access to the crowded cathedral. After this tremendous day, Mary returned to the Ritz to find Ernest waiting for her in his room. Amid the general glee at the liberation of Paris, Mary and Ernest spent their first night together. After that, it was only a matter of time before he moved into her room upstairs.¹⁰²

"Life here has been more hectic than ever before," Mary recorded in a letter, "with all the excitement and glory and all of the stirring times of those days in 1940 when we left France, but this time terrific joy instead of sorrow and gaiety instead of depression and new life instead of death, with so much happening and the simple solid facts of journalism colored at every corner with the emotion of seeing Paris and all its beauty again."¹⁰³ Certainly, Mary's life in Paris was hectic, but the source of Mary's chaos, as well as her gaiety, lay in that fact that Mary's hard work was overshadowed by her captivating romance. She and Ernest delighted in each other's company, laughing so much that it interfered with their

⁹⁷ Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 27 August 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

⁹⁸ Mary had wondered if Noel would be in Paris, but she learned by word of mouth that he was still in northern France.

⁹⁹ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 106.

¹⁰⁰ Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 27 August 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

¹⁰¹ Clipping, 27 August 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

¹⁰² Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 112.

¹⁰³ Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 4 September 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

sexual activity.¹⁰⁴ At lunch, they pretended that famous historical figures would join them in the Ritz dining room. Marshal Michel Ney, commander of the rear guard in Napoleon's retreat from Russia, was a frequent guest and one of Ernest's favorites to impersonate. Out and about in Paris, Ernest thrived in the literary, artistic, and military communities he had been a part of since the 1920s. Mary accompanied him on his rounds, stopping at 27 Rue de Fleurus, the famous address of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, as well as the studio of Pablo Picasso. Ernest requested that Picasso paint a nude portrait of Mary from the waist up; the artist agreed, but this commission was never realized.¹⁰⁵

From the liberation of Paris to the end of the war, Mary's life was marked by less frequent but intensive reporting, a progressing relationship with Ernest, and a series of trips to Germany. Ernest traveled to Germany in September to report on an extraordinarily successful American infantry division.¹⁰⁶ On Ernest's request, Mary then took a trip to Germany in November to investigate the news that Jack Hemingway, Ernest's oldest son, had been wounded and captured.¹⁰⁷ On December 16, 1944, the Battle of the Bulge began, and Ernest immediately left Paris to cover the battle; his favorite division, the 4th, was on the front lines.¹⁰⁸ Alone in Paris for Christmas, Mary sought out the company of friends and colleagues, and partook in general celebration as the war drew to an end.

Ernest returned in mid-January to find Mary suffering from scabies, a contagious skin infection in which a tiny parasite burrows in the host's skin and causes intolerable itching. On top of that, Mary had an allergic reaction to a sleeping medicine intended to relieve her of the itching. She looked terrible, her skin red and inflamed, often bloody from scratching. Mary appreciated that Ernest did not mind, was not scared of the tiny bugs, and declined to return to his own bed.¹⁰⁹ After recovering, Mary was ordered back to London in late January, as *Time* was short on staff. She was surprised to find her apartment and her bank accounts mostly empty, and discovered that Noel had taken many of her things. She made do and enjoyed the company of her old friends and colleagues. Meanwhile, Ernest traveled to Cuba, thrilled to be returning to his beloved *finca* and fishing boat *Pilar*.¹¹⁰

When the 9th Armored crossed the Rhine River on March 7, 1945, they were the first foreign troops to do so since Napoleon's army in 1805. Mary once again employed her disarming charm, this time with General Quesada to secure permission to travel to Germany.¹¹¹ "We do not understand the thinking and feeling patterns of German people," she reported to *Time*, "from whom we've been isolated so long both by their propaganda which we didn't believe – but they did believe – and by our own propaganda which we did believe, and they probably didn't hear." With her red lipstick, Mary caught the attention of the Germans she met, since lipstick was banned under the Nazis, and she was intrigued by their "curious" yet "cold" stares. Furthermore, she worried about the prohibition on "fraternizing"

¹⁰⁴ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 133.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 118-20.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁰⁷ Ernest felt that with his recognizable name and face he would inhibit success in discovering his son's whereabouts. Mary unearthed that Jack was recovering at a hospital in Alsace. Kert, 413.

¹⁰⁸ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 143.

¹⁰⁹ Notes between Mary and Ernest, Ernest Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

¹¹⁰ Kert, 416.

¹¹¹ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 146.

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with the enemy: “I know that our doughs,¹¹² chasing that dim light of victory through months of sleet and hunger and misery and killing fatigue, have never thought of it as making monks out of them. And they are too healthy in their own hearts to understand a nation – or a girl – without a conscience, a sense of shame, or a sense of decency.”¹¹³ This would be one of the last stories she wrote as a working reporter.¹¹⁴

On April 12, Mary broadcast her final radio report on the death of President Roosevelt. It marked the end of an era for the United States as well as for Mary: the following week, she travelled across the Atlantic Ocean and stopped in New York on her way to Cuba, where she would join Ernest at his private paradise. She landed in Havana on May 2, 1945.¹¹⁵

As for Noel, she had left him behind in the dust. “I suppose I ought to have an attack of conscience about it,” Mary wrote in a letter to her parents. “But I feel neither mistaken nor wicked nor foolish, and I have no attacks of conscience. And that is that.”¹¹⁶ Across the Ocean, Noel received the news less casually than Mary delivered it. In addition to taking her possessions while she was in Paris, over the winter and spring of 1945, he sent Mary multiple letters expressing his anger at her behavior. A journalist himself, Noel wrote poignantly, and the notes are revealing, particularly a letter of February 1945:

I don't know whether to congratulate you or be sorry for you. I'm sure you must be one of the most envied women in the world. You threw a sprat into the sea and caught yourself a whale. I knew of course there was someone who had caused you to 'lose confidence' in our marriage. A woman doesn't ordinarily gouge the eyes out of her husband just because he's dumb. I thought the pip-speak general had turned up again, or the film unit guy who was waiting to 'jump into your arms with spring-like rapture' soon as you hit France, or the queer looking guy whose picture you carry around in your wallet and whose face I have never been able to place. Or pimpley-faced Foot.....Or Clark again but Mister Hemingway.....All these horrible weeks I've been matching myself against these guys and reckoning that you'd soon tire of them. The sentimental streak in me was dying hard, Mary. Well--its dead now. I know I could never compete against Mister Hemingway. I couldn't even match his beard....We were two people in love with life and each other when we saw the lights go out. Now when they come up again, we will be hating each other, and life for me at least, will be as meaningless as the promise you made to love and honour me forever. You will hate me just for being your husband and I will hate you for letting yourself become one of Hemingway's characters. Maybe I'll find some woman who'll love me for being just myself--and not the husband of the woman the great Hemingway loves. I'm at least entitled to that break. I've been thinking of a remark

¹¹² “Doughs” was short for “doughboys,” a term used to refer to American troops in World War I and World War II.

¹¹³ Mary Hemingway, cable to *Time*, “Incident: Major Gen Terry Allen's 104th Inf. div. spearheaded into Cologne and found ample evidence how well Nazi underground was working, even then, behind the Rhine,” Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

¹¹⁴ Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 150.

¹¹⁵ Kert, 419.

¹¹⁶ Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 15 January 1945, Mary Welsh Hemingway Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

you made to me at the Savoy one night: “I want to walk in here and have everyone look at me.” You’re welcome, Madam.¹¹⁷

How Mary reacted to this letter, we do not know.

CUBA, 1946

Mary Welsh’s story ended on March 21, 1946, when she became Mrs. Ernest Hemingway.¹¹⁸ Mary and Ernest celebrated only fifteen anniversaries together before he committed suicide on July 2, 1961, but Mary remained Mrs. Ernest Hemingway until she died on November 26, 1986. In this role, Mary was often asked to tell her story, but listeners were interested in the story of the Nobel Prize-winning author who reinvented American literature, not the small woman without a bra who had captured his heart. Mary probably agreed that her story only served to illuminate Ernest’s, and she never seemed to mind retelling anecdotes about his wild birthday parties in Spain or his early morning writing sessions in Cuba. She maintained that her favorite memories were of long, sunny days aboard *Pilar* with Ernest, and she shrugged off his infidelity, mood swings, and occasional physical abuse. Only privately did she ever admit regret: “Where I am cowardly is in my fear of breaking away from him and this life and making a new one on my own,” she wrote in a diary in 1953.¹¹⁹

After his death, Mary found it easier to dedicate herself to Ernest. She oversaw the production and reproduction of his work, built his archives, founded the Ernest Hemingway Foundation, and, over and over again, told his story. James Meredith, successor to Mary as President of the Hemingway Foundation, reflected, “She needs serious consideration if just for what she did to continue Hemingway’s legacy. I personally think she did heroic work on developing and maintaining his archives. I don’t know of any writer in America who was better served by their surviving spouse than Hemingway by Mary.”¹²⁰ When she published her story in 1976 under the title *How It Was*, one reviewer suggested it be called *How It Really Was*, since its primary aim was “setting the record straight” about her late husband.¹²¹

Despite her distinguished career as a journalist, Mary did not consider herself a writer. In a note to Ernest, she explained,

But it is hard for me to write, not being a writer, having the thoughts run faster and helter-skelter and impossible to catch and arrange into orderly marches the big ones at the front dominating the little ones and all of them milling around and racing off before I recognize them or even note them. And it is even harder writing to you because the writing you read should be rich and strong and slow with history and time packed in unnoticeably because we all of us have no time, but also swift like a blow that catches you off guard and shows you god damn it just how things are.¹²²

For Mary, writing and reporting differed in that writing was active, while reporting was passive. Mary always considered herself within this second category, while Ernest

¹¹⁷ Letter from Noel Monks, 8 February 1945, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

¹¹⁸ Marriage Certificate, 21 March 1946, Ernest Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

¹¹⁹ Mary Hemingway, diary entry, 7 February 1953, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

¹²⁰ James Meredith, correspondence with the author, 21 February 2011.

¹²¹ Brian Malone, “Review of *How It Was*,” *The Grand Rapids Press*, 16 June 1977, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

¹²² Letter to Ernest Hemingway, 1 October 1944, Ernest Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

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championed the first. Reviewers criticized Mary's autobiography for its journalistic style: "Trained in the pre-war school of journalism, she sticks rigidly to facts: names, dates, places, Things done and Things said, all noted meticulously in her diaries, and as meticulously 'written-up' over the past eight years."¹²³ Mary used words as a means of telling stories – her own story, but more often, that of her husband and those of others – not as means of living, the way Ernest did.

Mary told stories, but she did not live them. For Mary, living meant the company of great men, the journeys to great places, and the witnessing of great events. In an interview, she reflected on her decision to abandon the war and Europe in pursuit of Ernest: "I took a chance--what the hell. It wasn't really very difficult because I thought [Ernest] was one of the most interesting creatures in the whole world--interesting and fascinating and complicated and charming."¹²⁴ After 1946, she lived through the story of one great man. Before 1946, Mary Welsh had lived through the great stories of others, first her father and Carl Sandburg, later Lord Beaverbrook and Henry Luce. At her best, Mary lived on the edges of the greatest story of her time: the Second World War. Mary doubted her own greatness – the quality she judged as most important. Mary masked her insecurity by telling great stories, and by always wearing her distinctive, sly smile.

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¹²³ Mary Armitage, "Review of How It Was," *The Book Page*, Australia, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

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TITLE IMAGE

“Ernest and Mary Hemingway Embracing in Cortina d’Ampezzo, Italy”

Accession Number: EH03204P

Source: Ernest Hemingway Collection.

John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston

Date: 1948

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DETERMINANTS OF U.S.-CHINA NORMALIZATION

HOW CONGRESSIONAL ACTIONS AND INFLUENCE SHAPED THE NORMALIZATION PROCESS

This paper describes how the United States Congress helped bring about normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China. Logan Koepke, a senior history major at Northwestern University, pushes back against traditional understandings of normalization as a top-down presidential initiative. Congressional hearings in 1966 ended McCarthy-era paranoia, and congressional visits to China informed executive policy. Through both legislative and non-legislative avenues, Congress was a major partner in transforming Sino-American relations.

By Logan Koepke, Northwestern University 2013
Written for "Sino-American Relations in the 20th Century"
Professor Melissa Macauley
Edited by John Hayashi and Jacob Anbinder

The bulk of historical literature on the “normalization” of the diplomatic relationship between the United States and communist China focuses on the interplay between the American presidency and Chinese party leaders like Mao Zedong. In the United States, historians and pundits alike generally ascribe credit for achievement of normalization to Presidents Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter. Undoubtedly, both men played influential roles in building the cordial relationship with China that exists to this day. Crediting these two presidents alone, however, ignores a supremely important body – the United States Congress – and the fundamentally influential role it also played in constructing that relationship.

A few key factors have influenced the relative lack of scholarship on the role of Congress in the making of modern Sino-American diplomacy. China policy emanates from multiple sources: the influence of the American constitutional structure, legislative-specific analysis, and narrow interpretations of what normalization meant.¹ The Constitution emphasizes executive involvement in foreign affairs, and as Guanqiu Xu has written, scholarship on Sino-American relations thus often focuses solely on the president’s role while ignoring Congress.² Furthermore, historians who have studied Congress’s role in normalization have generally focused exclusively on legislation.³ And while analysis of law is undoubtedly essential, interpreting Congress’s role only from its legislative record fails to recognize the non-legislative means that members of Congress can employ in influencing foreign policy. From congressional hearings to official and unofficial visits to China, a wide variety of developments played into normalization.⁴ Finally, some scholars, such as James Mann, use too narrow a definition of normalization. Instead of interpreting normalization as an extensive process beginning with Chinese-U.S. rapprochement, these scholars analyze normalization exclusively through the lens of late-stage, high-level negotiations between Beijing and Washington. This interpretation not only discredits decades of work done to create opportunities for normalization to occur, but also relegates a massive, monumental change in foreign policy to a few key actors at a few key moments. Other interpretations, such as those offered by Robert Sutter and Hao Yufan, focus less on the United States’ role and instead posit that “external factors” were responsible.⁵ Scholarly views of Congress are thus not uniform, but generally de-emphasizes Congress by centering on the notion that Congress was either ineffective in shaping policy toward China or was overshadowed by other actors.

There is clear evidence, however, that Congress played a fundamental role in shaping American policy toward China with a broad array of congressional action rooted in the Cold War precedent of members of Congress wielding influence through non-legislative means. Despite arguments to the contrary, the record and character of legislative and non-legislative actions demonstrate that Congress played a vital role in the normalization of relations between the U.S. and China.

¹ Tao Xie, *U.S.-China Relations: China Policy on Capitol Hill* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 7.

² Guangqiu Xu, *Congress and the U.S.-China Relationship: 1949-1979* (Akron, OH: The University of Akron Press, 2007), 2.

³ Guangqiu Xu, *Congress and the U.S.-China Relationship*, 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵ Guangqiu Xu, *Congress and the U.S.-China Relationship*, 8.

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In fact, the congressional role in normalization followed a substantial precedent set by previous Congresses with regards to China, one that typically followed a model of containment and isolation. Members of Congress took an early interest in China policy, especially with respect to the Nationalist government led by Chiang Kai-shek. A small group of pro-Chiang Republicans formed the “China Lobby,” which raised support among legislators to “lobb[y] with persistent energy for support of the Nationalists and an unequivocal rejection of the Maoists.”⁶

This “China Lobby” of legislators affected policy in two important ways. First, by controlling the appropriation of foreign aid to Asia, they ensured a continued U.S. presence in China. Most frequently, this came in the form of members of Congress amending preexisting legislation to earmark economic aid for the nationalist government in China. An example of this legislative tactic is the 1949 Mutual Defense Assistance Act, which provided aid for Iran, Greece, Turkey, Korea, and the Philippines.⁷ In both the House and Senate, China Lobby members, including Congressman John Lodge and Senators Smith, Knowland, and Dulles, wrote an amendment to the bill allocating \$175 million to “non-Communist China.”⁸ Eventually, members negotiated the amendment down to \$75 million, and removed the “non-Communist” qualification. Despite the reduction, this instance is representative of a litany of acts that had pro-Chiang policy riders attached to them. From the 1948 China Aid Act and the 1949 Mutual Defense Assistance Act to the Far Eastern Economic Assistance Act of 1950 and the 1949 Export Control Act, members of Congress in the China Lobby consistently used their legislative muscle to force the administration’s hand on Chinese policy.

The China Lobby also influenced policy by using non-legislative means to pressure the Truman administration. Republicans attacked the Truman administration as being soft on communism and called for a more ideological policy toward China, as opposed to the moderate course Truman had taken.⁹ The China Lobby was “determined to bring the ‘China Hands’ in the State Department to task for permitting America’s immediate post-war advantage to be frittered away.”¹⁰ They did so through public statements, hearings, and legislative inquisitions into the loyalties of State Department employees, most notoriously through the work of Senator Eugene McCarthy.¹¹ Veteran State Department officials, such as John Carter Vincent, John Service, John Paton Davies, and O. Edmund Clubb, were among the victims of these China Lobby-backed “inquisitions.”¹² By purging the State Department of the “China Hands” through non-legislative means, Congress fundamentally altered the course of policy toward China by creating “a climate of fear and intimidation.”¹³ The result was the development of a policy toward China that began to focus on containment and

⁶ Robert Garson, *The United States and China Since 1949: A Troubled Affair* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1994), 31; Garson, *A Troubled Affair*, 31.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹² *Ibid.*, 33.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 97.

isolation of the emerging communist power in the country, setting a precedent that would shape America's engagement with China for years to come.

In fact, the policy of normalization, though it went against the hardliner elements of containment and isolation, developed directly from it insofar as Congress's role was concerned. The years 1964 to 1972 marked the beginning of a rapprochement with China and the end of the strict containment-and-isolation policy of the 1950s.¹⁴ To understand the importance of this new policy, it is essential to note that the rapprochement marked a "remarkable change in congressional attitude." The ideological partisanship of the 1950s gave way to a coalition of moderates from both sides of the aisle that, in the words of Victoria Marie Kraft, "increasingly used the Senate Foreign Relations committee as a platform from which to make their views on China known."¹⁵ This emerging coalition established the foundation for a major revision of the containment and isolation strategy into what would become "normalization."

Congressional criticism of the old policy began in the early to mid-1960s and occurred chiefly through non-legislative channels. In a 1964 speech entitled "Old Myths and New Realities," Senator J. William Fulbright argued: "There are not really 'two Chinas' but only one, mainland China, and that is ruled by Communists and likely to remain so for the indefinite future."¹⁶ Fulbright's speech essentially called for a stark reappraisal of policy toward China, which had previously focused on supporting non-communist factions. Fulbright stressed that U.S.-China policy should be flexible instead of ideological, and called for "competitive coexistence...with Communist China in the future."¹⁷ Public response overwhelmingly supported Fulbright's call for a new China policy. He received thousands of letters and *The New York Times* hailed his speech as "the beginning of a great discussion on foreign policy," a discussion that, in time, would lead to normalization.¹⁸

The 1966 Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on China also helped to frame a new China policy. According to Fulbright, the committee's chairman, the purpose of the hearings was "to provide a forum for well-known China experts and scholars...[to] concentrate on how the administration might best moderate [communist] leaders' attitudes and policies in an attempt to uphold a relatively stable balance of power in Asia."¹⁹ These hearings represented a marked departure from the past. Whereas, during the 1950s, Senator McCarthy publicly castigated the State Department's "China Hands" in order to advance a containment-and-isolation strategy, the 1966 hearings emphasized educating Congress and the public alike about the current state of China as a means of revising the old policy. The committee heard testimony from fourteen witnesses, among them the country's most eminent China specialists.²⁰ These witnesses generally belonged to three schools of thought: containment-and-isolation, containment *without* isolation, and the new policy that rejected

¹⁴ Guangqiu Xu, *Congress and the U.S.-China Relationship*, 180.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁶ *Congressional Record*, 84th Congress, Second Session, 1964, 110, pt. 5:6227-31.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5:6227-31.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁹ Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 187.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 187.

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both.²¹ The most popular opinion, as advocated by A. Doak Barnett, a professor at Columbia University, was that “the U.S. attempt to isolate Communist China has been...unwise and, in a fundamental sense, unsuccessful, and it cannot...provide a basis for a sound, long-term policy.”²² Barnett’s thesis, the consensus of the group, argued for “a policy of containment but not isolation, a policy that would aim on the one hand at checking military or subversive threats...but at the same time would aim at maximum contacts with and maximum involvement of the Chinese Communists in the international community.”²³ While the differences between McCarthy and Fulbright’s hearings are stark, in both cases members of Congress used non-legislative tools – hearings and public statements – to influence and shape policy toward China. Clearly, congressional action that shaped normalization and China policy at large was rooted in the precedents set in the post-World War II context.

The 1966 hearings, as well as subsequent hearings by the Far Eastern Affairs subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, shaped normalization in several key ways. First, they provided an invaluable educational effect, informing the public about communist China in a way the McCarthy hearings had certainly not.²⁴ This created a political environment conducive to candid discussions of a more practical policy. Vice President Hubert Humphrey called the China hearings “the most fruitful procedures under way in this government.”²⁵ Second, the hearings brought about increased pressure from academia for the Johnson administration to change its China policy. In March 1966, nearly 200 Asia experts issued a proclamation calling for an end of the isolation policy.²⁶ These same experts also called on the United Nations to recognize the new communist government in China and admit it to the General Assembly.²⁷ Most of the fourteen experts who testified in the 1966 Senate hearings were subsequently drafted onto a new China Advisory Panel to consult with the State Department’s East Asian Bureau.²⁸

Congressional hearings also led to increased pressure on the president from legislators themselves.²⁹ Two particular acts of Congress support this point. In January 1969, a bipartisan coalition of congressional foreign policy experts and congressional liberals appealed to the new administration “to signal the start of a new China policy.”³⁰ Further, in September of 1969, the Senate passed a resolution by a 77-3 vote declaring that U.S. recognition of a foreign government did not, “of itself imply that the U.S. approves of the

²¹ Ibid., 187-191.

²² “U.S. Policy With Respect to Mainland China,” Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Eighty-Ninth Congress, Second Session, March 8, 10, 16, 18, 21, 28, 30, 1966, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 4.

²³ Constructing Rapprochement, 57; “U.S. Policy With Respect to Mainland China,” Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations, 4.

²⁴ Guangqiu Xu, *Congress and the U.S.-China Relationship*, 193.

²⁵ *New York Times*, March 14, 1966, 1.

²⁶ Ibid., 194.

²⁷ Ta Jen Liu, *U.S.-China Relations, 1784-1992* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), 269.

²⁸ Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S. Rapprochement with China*, 57-58.

²⁹ Guangqiu Xu, *Congress and the U.S.-China Policy*, 199.

³⁰ “Five Senators Urge a New China Policy,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1969, sec. 1A, 1.

form, ideology or policy of that foreign government.”³¹ Implicit in this resolution was an attempt to clear the way for the recognition of communist China.³²

The hearings, which continued into 1970 in the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs, were successful in exerting pressure on the executive branch. Notably, President Nixon subsequently shaped his China policy to include “every one of the congressional recommendations [presented at committee meetings],” paving the way for his historic visit later in his presidency.³³

Certainly, the hearings did not meet universal acclaim. The conservative Senator Barry Goldwater, for example, labeled the hearings “naked and unabashed propaganda shows.”³⁴ Some even believed the Senate and House hearings were actually being held for the benefit of Communist China.³⁵ Such sentiments, however, were definitively in the minority. Overwhelmingly, the public, the media, members of Congress, and even the Johnson administration praised the hearings. In the years that followed, Congress continued to encourage normalization through official visits to China. There is a great body of literature concerning President Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s diplomatic efforts with regards to China. In reality, though, far more intergovernmental communication occurred through congressional delegation visits, which included members of Congress of all political philosophies.³⁶ In fact, as early as 1967, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield had proposed that President Johnson send him to China to meet face-to-face with Chinese leaders.³⁷ Mansfield had long been calling for a revision of U.S.-Asian policy, and ultimately did go to China in 1972, the same year as Nixon’s famous trip.³⁸ Visits to China by members of Congress like Mansfield helped fully detail the various points of contention and disagreement in the negotiations that were to come.

The official reports detailing these visits not only proved useful in determining what China was and was not willing to negotiate, but they also helped achieve cooperation and understanding between Congress and the executive branch on China policy. The members of Congress who wrote them predictably were not uniform in their assessments, but some consistent themes still emerged. The issue of Taiwan, for example, was broadly seen as non-negotiable; “the congressional reports showed that Peking remained uncompromising on its three main conditions for U.S.-PRC normalization: an end to U.S. diplomatic ties with the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan, a withdrawal of U.S. military forces from the island, and the termination of the U.S-ROC mutual defense treaty.”³⁹ Some delegations, however, including one headed by Congressman Clement Zablocki, found that “the possibilities for

³¹ Jaw-ling Joanne Chang, “How Clinton Bashed Taiwan – and Why,” *Orbis*, Fall 1995, *United States-China Normalization: An Evaluation of Foreign Policy Decision Making*, (Denver: University of Denver Press, 1986), 131.

³² Jian Yang, *Congress and U.S. China Policy*, (Huntington, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2000) 57.

³³ Guangqiu Xu, *Congress and the U.S.-China Relationship*, 240.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 196.

³⁶ Rober G. Sutter, *The China Quandary: Domestic Determinants of U.S. China Policy, 1972-1982*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), 22.

³⁷ Guangqiu Xu, *Congress and the U.S.-China Relationship*, 209.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

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negotiations...with genuine respect for the positions of all parties appear more favorable now than at any time in the past 20 years,”⁴⁰ and further questioned “whether inaction in the present, or opting for the status quo, will help perpetuate the presently favorable atmosphere.”⁴¹

The importance of U.S. negotiation and realism regarding the issue of Taiwan in furthering normalization was not lost on other delegations. In his official report from 1975, Senator Mansfield said, “The fact that must be faced is that we cannot have it both ways. We cannot strengthen our ties with a claimant government of China on Taiwan and, at the same time, expect to advance a new relationship with the government of the People’s Republic of China.”⁴² Mansfield concluded that normalization would be possible only after the U.S. severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan.⁴³ According to Mansfield, “Chinese leaders emphasized that the surest way to normal relations [was] via the ‘Japanese formula,’”⁴⁴ and after an extensive discussion of the history of Taiwanese relations with China, he further noted, “as for our defense treaty with Taiwan, it seems to me that it is properly seen as a relic of the past...to serve the public interest, treaties like any other aspect of a nation’s foreign or domestic policy, must be kept current.”⁴⁵ Importantly, Mansfield and other members of Congress who promoted immediate normalization did not propose an absolute abandonment of Taiwan, as some ultra-conservative members of Congress accused him of doing.⁴⁶ Other delegations shared the same conclusions about normalization and Taiwan. The Sixteenth Congressional Delegation published a report in 1978 that suggested the United States accept the aforementioned terms and attempt normalization within the year.⁴⁷ Indeed, this is almost exactly the strategy the Carter administration ultimately used to establish normalization with communist China.

All this is not to ignore the executive branch’s importance in shaping China policy – this has been well established by scholarly literature. The executive role, however, was connected intimately to the congressional one. The executive branch definitively supported and welcomed the recommendations offered by members of Congress in these reports. In a letter to Senator Mansfield, President Ford – who had also visited China as a congressman – wrote, “one of the most helpful aspects of the resumption of friendly contact with the People’s Republic of China has been the close collaboration between the Executive branch and the Congress and the complete bipartisanship which has characterized the

⁴⁰ *A New Realism: Factfinding Mission to the People’s Republic of China, July 3-13, 1978*, Report by the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs to the Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, December 1978), 6.

⁴¹ *A New Realism*, U.S House of Representatives, 6.

⁴² *China: A Quarter Century after the Founding of the People’s Republic: A Report by Senator Mike Mansfield* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1976), 23.

⁴³ *China: A Quarter Century after the Founding of the People’s Republic*, 23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁶ Guangqiu Xu, *Congress and the U.S.-China Relationship*, 260.

⁴⁷ *The United States and the People’s Republic of China: Report of the Sixteenth Congressional Delegation to the People’s Republic of China* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1978), 4-6.

undertaking.”⁴⁸ With respect to Senator Mansfield, Ford noted, “[your] background makes you an unusually qualified observer, and I would find it most useful to receive another report from you containing your latest impression of developments in the People’s Republic of China.”⁴⁹ Ultimately, congressional delegations to communist China solidified the White House’s ability to negotiate with the Chinese government, thereby catalyzing the process of normalization.

Congress also fundamentally influenced the progress of normalization through its formal legislative powers by repealing in 1974 the Formosa Resolution, which had stood as a major obstacle to normalization.⁵⁰ This resolution, a reaction to the first Taiwan Strait crises, empowered the president to employ the armed forces to protect Taiwan and its territories in case of attack by mainland China. Congress had previously tried and failed to repeal the Formosa Resolution in early 1971.⁵¹ The repeal was attached to S. 3473, an appropriations bill, and passed both the House and Senate with no debate, evidence of Congress’s strong commitment to normalization by the mid-1970s.

Historical scholarship has too often neglected to analyze Congress’s role in normalization. This is not to say that the existing scholarship is wrong in largely crediting Presidents Nixon and Carter for normalizing relations with communist China. One cannot deny, however, that through both legislative and non-legislative channels, Congress shaped and determined the course of normalization with China to a considerable degree. First, the 1966 hearings chaired by Senator Fulbright created a politically and culturally viable environment in which members of Congress, experts, and the public could freely discuss revisions to Chinese policy. This constituted a fundamental shift in attitudes from the previous political environment of containment and isolation exemplified by Senator McCarthy’s hearings. The many official reports of visits by members of Congress to China from 1972 to 1978 also played a role in the normalization process. In fact, the executive branch adopted most of the reports’ recommendations. Repeal of the Formosa Resolution also showed Congress’s determination to eliminate existing obstacles to normalization. Presidents like Nixon and Carter certainly did a great deal to advance normalization with China. However, members of Congress established the very framework in which these presidents operated. Nixon’s iconic visit to the Great Wall happened only because of the precedent set by legislators like Mike Mansfield.⁵² In this light, Congress not only played a determinative role in shaping the process of normalization, but in doing so, also reasserted Congress’s fundamental role in shaping foreign policy, especially with regards to China, for years to come.

⁴⁸ “China Enters the Post-Mao Era,” A Report by Senator Mike Mansfield, U.S. Senate, to the Committee on Foreign Relations, Report Number Three (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1976), vii.

⁴⁹ “China Enters the Post-Mao Era,” Senator Mansfield, vii.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁵² Guanghai Xu, *Congress and the U.S.-China Relationship*

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TITLE IMAGE

"Jimmy Carter and Deng Xiaoping participate in a meeting with U.S. and Chinese officials"

Photographer: White House Staff Photographers

Date: 29 January 1979

Source: U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

Jimmy Carter Library and Museum, Atlanta

Retrieved online at [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jimmy_Carter_and_Deng_Xiaoping_participate_in_a_meeting_with_U.S._and_Chinese_officials._-_NARA_-_183191.tif)

File:Jimmy_Carter_and_Deng_Xiaoping_participate_in_a_meeting_with_U.S._and_Chinese_officials._-_NARA_-_183191.tif



HYBRIDIZATION AND RESISTANCE IN EARLY COLONIAL MEXICO EXPLORING REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN NAHUA RELIGIOUS DRAMA

This essay examines the ways in which Nahua gender identity was constructed by Franciscan friars and reconstructed by Nahua authors and audiences. Angelica Calabrese, a junior Anthropology major, performs this task through a close study of *Final Judgment*, a Nahua-Franciscan morality play intended to convert indigenous Nahua to Christianity and instruct them in proper Christian behaviors. Although Franciscan friars attempted to reconstruct Nahua womanhood in a Christian framework, Nahua traditions ultimately permeated these works, allowing the indigenous people to resist the superimposition of Christian gender identity and maintain their own character. The paper explores the force of tradition in the face of colonial power in the experience that shaped Nahua society.

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INTRODUCTION

Ye men, ye are sluggish, ye are depleted, ye have ruined yourselves impetuously. It is all gone... There is nothing to be desired. But of this, we who are women, we are not the sluggish ones. In us is a cave, a gorge, whose only function is to await that which is given, whose only function is to receive. And of this, if thou hast become impotent, if thou no longer arousest anything, what other purpose wilt thou serve?

- Two old women, speaking to the men who judge their crime of having betrayed their spouses with young priests; *Florentine Codex, Book 6*, Bernardino de Sahagún, late 16th century

Are you not a Christian? Do you not know that four hundred times you have done great sins? ... If only you had saved, if only you had purified your soul! Why did you never receive the sacrament of marriage? Just to the Devil you sent the seventh holy sacrament, marrying in a sacred way... Now you never wanted to get married on earth. But be certain that you are going to get married there in the depths of the place of the dead. What you will merit will be suffering in the place of the dead.

- Catholic priest to Lucía, a woman who has sinned; *Final Judgment*, 16th century Nahua morality play

These two quotes provide an appropriate introduction to the following essay, an exploration of women's presentations and representations in early colonial Mexico. This essay will examine the ways in which Nahua¹ gender identity was constructed by Franciscan friars and reconstructed by Nahua authors and audiences through a close study of *Final Judgment*, a Nahua-Franciscan morality play intended to convert indigenous Nahua to Christianity and instruct them in proper Christian behaviors. Much of what we know about women's lives is accessible only as a construct of colonial males, limiting the scholar's ability to access precolonial Nahua women's perspectives. Therefore, I cannot claim to discern precisely the way in which these processes were carried out. However, my reading of the available primary documents in the form of these morality plays shows that although Franciscan friars attempted to reconstruct traditional Nahua womanhood in a Christian framework through performances of plays such as *Final Judgment*, Nahua traditions ultimately permeated these works, allowing the indigenous people to resist the superimposition of Christian gender identity and maintain their own identities.

¹ Nahua is a term used to refer to the ethno-linguistic group that stretched from northern Mexico to Panama, at its height at the beginning of the 16th century. They may also be referred to as Aztec. In spite of sharing the common root Nahuatl language, there were many distinct cultures/civilizations that are referred to as "Nahua"; many of these cultural groups ultimately came to be dominated by the Mexicas, an ethnic group that established and ruled the Aztec empire out of the city of Tenochtitlán (contemporary Mexico City) until the Spanish invasion. This essay will discuss primarily the Nahua traditions of Tenochtitlán/Mexico City and the surrounding region, as this is where the majority of primary sources were written.

Final Judgment is a morality play, likely written in the first half of the 16th century by a literate Nahua Franciscan scholar.² The play tells the story of Judgment Day, beginning with the story of Lucía, a young woman who goes to confess her sin (implied to be pre-marital intercourse), and is confronted by her confessor. Appalled at her sins, he warns her of the impending Judgment Day. Christ soon arrives and judges the living and the dead; Lucía is sent to the Nahua-Christian hell in flames, along with the other sinners.

Morality plays such as *Final Judgment* were not simple tools of subjugation and colonization employed by Franciscan friars; rather, they acted both as a “theater of legitimation” and a “theater of transformation,” in which “Nahuas represented themselves as pious Christians who understood Christian narratives [and] followed Christian teachings” while concurrently reframing the religion within their own language, traditions, beliefs, costumes, and gestures.³ These plays thus brought into being a new Nahua-Christian discourse that would continue to shape, and be shaped by, both traditional Nahua society and belief and by Franciscan tradition.

In *Final Judgment*, many of the representations and symbols associated with women attempt to reconfigure those of pre-conquest society. Before the Spanish arrived, Nahua women occupied important positions within the home and within society, a role that was parallel to that of Nahua men. The Franciscan friars, in their attempts to colonize and civilize, sought desperately to subdue these strong women; the Franciscans’ goals of repositioning Nahua women in society are manifest in their morality plays. The authors of such works appear to disassociate Nahua motherhood from its traditional loci of the home and the hearth and re-associate motherhood with purity and honor. However, such attempts at the reconstruction of gender identity were impeded by the Nahua’s ability to reframe Christian doctrine in the terms of indigenous culture, resisting their own conversion to Christianity.

FINAL JUDGMENT IN CONTEXT: SPANISH AND NAHUA COLONIAL HISTORY

Spanish conquistador Hernando Cortés first laid siege to Tenochtitlán, the capital of the expansive Aztec empire, in 1519. After two years, the Nahua population, reduced to almost a quarter of its original size by epidemics and warfare, finally surrendered. The Franciscan friars arrived soon after, in 1523. They began their official mission in 1524 by constructing informal boarding schools in which to teach the Roman alphabet, Latin, and written Nahuatl to the sons of indigenous nobility, with the goal of training assistants who would help friars attain the language skills they needed to convert the rest of the native population.⁴ The ultimate goal of these boarding schools was to Christianize and pacify the new colonies by raising leaders whose loyalties would lie with their Franciscan teachers

² Barry D. Sell, “Nahuatl Plays in Context,” 15. The actual date and author are not recorded on the document; Sell concludes these dates and the Nahua authorship through a textual and linguistic analysis. The date and authorship are further complicated by the fact that many of these plays were passed down and recopied by following generations, so it is difficult to know the precise moment when a certain play entered the colonial discourse.

³ Louise M. Burkhart, *Holy Wednesday: A Nahua Drama from Early Colonial Mexico*. (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996) 48.

⁴ Marilyn Ekdahl Ravicz. *Early Colonial Religious Drama in Mexico: From Tzompantli to Goglotha*. (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, Inc., 1970), 31-33.

rather than with their indigenous parents.⁵ These early efforts at indoctrination created a population of young Nahua conversant in two languages and two cultural traditions, a community equipped to “compare and evaluate both cultures, to challenge Spanish authority on its own grounds [and] to subvert its paradigms through subtle manipulations and restatements.”⁶ These young Nahua scholars, the authors of the majority of the Franciscan prayers, sermons, and plays, would be at the forefront of the creation of a new Nahua-Christian discourse, and a new Nahua-Christian identity.

As a medium of Christianization, plays worked particularly well within the Nahua cultural tradition. Public ritual was an important aspect of pre-conquest civilization, and the most important of these events involved costumed Nahua individuals assuming the roles of deities.⁷ The rituals, similar to Christian plays, were also carried out in the open air, for the public to observe and join.⁸ The narratives they told frequently centered on the people’s obligations to worship and nourish the gods – just as many Christian plays centered on the people’s responsibility to obey the laws of God. Aware that these public rituals had played such a central role in pre-Christian religion, the Franciscans found songs, dances, plays, processions, and pageantry extremely effective ways to convert many Nahua to Christianity.⁹

These Christian plays were performed by native actors, for native communities, usually in open-air chapels or on church patios, in conjunction with other religious festivals. These were often the same public spaces in which pre-conquest rituals had taken place. Due to other similarities, such as the incorporation of singing, dancing, and audience participation, the Nahua audience readily equated these plays with the rituals they replaced.¹⁰ As Louise Burkhart writes, it is “very likely that Nahuas involved in these theatrical events did not draw sharp distinctions between the play and the rituals, between the actors and the audience, between space temporarily used as a stage and the permanently sacred precinct of the church and its patio.”¹¹

Final Judgment is one of about twenty such plays that have been documented. These plays bridged past and present realities, giving their Nahua audience new ways of understanding and relating to their colonial reality. All of the plays analyzed here, particularly *Final Judgment*, were probably written autonomously by the young Nahua-Christian men of the Franciscan’s boarding schools. They present their audience with a version of Christianity that they might understand, one that has been filtered through the lens of a Nahua mind. The lives and lifestyles presented on stage are complex, bearing the traces of both Christian theology and Nahua life and tradition. The women of these plays are nuanced: they are at times submissive, at other times powerful, both reconstructed in the Christian model and shaped by their former Nahua traditions. The following sections explore their

⁵ Burkhart, *Holy Wednesday*, 55.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Louise M. Burkhart, “Death and the Colonial Nahua” in *Nahuatl Theater: Volume 1, Death and Life in Colonial Nahua Mexico*, ed. Louise M. Burkhart and Barry D. Sell. (Norman, Ok.: University of Oklahoma Press), 43.

¹⁰ Burkhart, *Holy Wednesday*, 45.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

lived experiences and their representations in these plays, arguing that in spite of the Franciscans' attempts to reconstruct women's role in society, Nahua traditions survived, permeating, shaping, and hybridizing with Christian thought, resisting and reshaping a new Nahua-Christian discourse.

NAHUA WOMEN IN PRE-COLONIAL SOCIETY

Before colonization and Christianization, gender roles were structured in what Susan Kellogg has called "gender parallelism": men and women occupied different realms of society and had different roles therein, but were both highly respected in their relative positions.¹² A cognatic kinship structure in which property was transmitted through both male and female lines of inheritance allowed women some economic and social independence,¹³ but their sphere was nevertheless believed to be that of the home and household, whereas men's domain was on the battlefield. However, these distinct realms of home and battlefield were parallel in their centrality to nation-building and to the functioning of society.¹⁴ Cooking, cleaning, sewing, and caring for children were assumed to be just as important to maintaining order in society as war, and women also participated in the formal economy, as marketers, doctors, artisans, and priests.¹⁵

In pre-Hispanic Mexico, the woman's domain was that of the home, but, as Louise Burkhart has argued, this home was perceived as a "home front" similar to that of the male's front on the battlefield.¹⁶ At birth, while boys' umbilical cords were buried on the battlefield, girls' umbilical cords were buried at the hearth or beside the grindstone at which she would later make tortillas.¹⁷ While boys were presented with weapons by the midwives who delivered them, girls were presented with spindles for textile production.¹⁸ From birth, girls symbolically 'defended' the home and the hearth.

Sweeping and cleaning the household was also a particularly important action for women. In the realm of the gods, the male god Quetzalcoatl carried out the sweeping; in the temples, priests and priestesses were responsible for the sweeping, but in the home, it was the particular responsibility of the women.¹⁹ Sweeping was conceived as an act of bringing order: as Burkhart writes, the housewife "saw herself as an actor in the regeneration of order... [the broom] was the housewife's defense against invading dirt and disorder."²⁰ It was also the women's responsibility to tend to the hearth of the home, where fire gods, such as

¹² Susan Kellogg, "The Woman's Room: Some Aspects of Gender Relations in Tenochtitlán in the Late Pre-Hispanic Period," *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 42, No. 4, Women, Power, and Resistance in Colonial Mesoamerica. (Autumn, 1995), 564.

¹³ Kellogg, "The Woman's Room," 565.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 564.

¹⁵ Louise M. Burkhart. "Mexica Women on the Home Front," in *Indian Women of Early Mexico*, ed. Robert Haskett et al. (Norman, Ok.: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 25-54.

¹⁶ Burkhart, "Mexica Women on the Home Front," 26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33-35.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

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Huehuetotl and Cihuacoatl, were thought to reside.²¹ The women not only kept the fire burning, but were also responsible for the domestic rites and daily rituals performed: they gave offerings of food and drink to the fire for daily protection, health, and wealth, and gave offerings especially often when their husbands were at war.²² It was thus the women's responsibility to be in direct communication with the gods of the home. Motherhood was also deeply respected, as was childbirth. The Aztec pantheon contained a goddess of mothers who died during childbirth, and childbirth was conceived of as a battle to be won or lost; women were highly respected for participating in that battle.²³ With these actions – sweeping, tending to the household fire, and raising children – Nahua women maintained order, sustained the household relationship to the gods, contributed to the economy, and worked alongside men to ensure the proper functioning of society.

The difficulty in analyzing women's roles in pre-Hispanic society, however, lies in the fact that the majority of information that we know about women comes from the writings of colonial ethnographers, most of whom were Franciscan monks. They write of Nahua women as industrious housewives and devoted mothers: Sahagún writes that a good noblewoman is “a protector – one who loves, one who guards people ... venerable, respectable, illustrious ...meritous of obedience, revered ... a woman ruler, leader, governor, and teacher.”²⁴ The words he uses are wholly flattering, but Sahagun's observations are also filtered by his perspective as a Spaniard and as a Christian; it is difficult to distinguish to what extent he is truly representing the roles of Nahua women, and to what extent he is painting them as he wishes to see them, fitting them within the “Virgin Mary” mold of the good Christian mother.

In fact, as Burkhart points out, Franciscan friars had “little knowledge and much fear” of Nahua women and their place within the home.²⁵ Although they saw and admired their roles as housewives and mothers, the Franciscans were also wary of their position inside the home, which included tending to the fires, performing the daily household rituals, and otherwise blessing the actions of their family members. These interactions, particularly with the hearth fire, were seen as evidence that women were the weaker sex and were easily manipulated by the devil.²⁶ Controlling the actions of women in this highly inaccessible place of the home and the hearth was thus one of the friars' major goals: they sought to reconstruct the notion of womanhood within the bounds of Christian control and morality, far from the idolatrous fires of their past.

The plays that the young Nahua-Christians produced were part and parcel of this effort. In order to accomplish this objective, the plays attempt to de-link Nahua womanhood and motherhood from their traditional associations with the hearth and the home. However, in spite of their attempts to reformulate Nahua womanhood, Nahua culture nevertheless resisted this imposed narrative, asserting itself in subtle nuances of the text, and likely

²¹ Kellog, “The Women's Room,” 568.

²² Burkhart, “Mexica Women on the Home Front,” 40.

²³ Ibid., 49-50.

²⁴ Bernardino de Sahagun, *The Florentine Codes: Book 11, Earthly Things*, edited and translated by Arthur J. O. Anderson et al., (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1963), 45-46.

²⁵ Burkhart, “Mexica Women on the Home Front,” 52.

²⁶ Ibid.

through subtle manipulations of performance as well (though it is difficult to assess this aspect of the plays).

FINAL JUDGMENT: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW NAHUA WOMAN

Final Judgment's female characters are complex and can be viewed through the lenses of both Christian doctrine and Nahua tradition.²⁷ There are two main female characters, clearly pitted against one another: Holy Church (or Virgin Mary), and Lucía, the main character and the primary sinner being judged. Holy Church represents the ideal woman, pious mother of Christ, tender yet assertive; Lucia, on the other hand, represents the sinning woman, regretful and repenting, but punished nonetheless. The voices and stories of these two women reveal the Franciscans' attempts to construct the new ideal of womanhood as that of the pious and pure mother, one who spurns the temptations of the devil and the idolatrous Nahua religion. They do so not only through the actions and speeches of the women themselves, but also through a reframing of the Nahua tropes of womanhood: sweeping, tending to the fire, and maintaining her home.

The play opens with a short speech by Saint Michael, after which five allegorical characters — Penance, Time, Holy Church, Sweeping, and Death — enter. These five characters discuss the disobedience and sinfulness of humankind, and the imminent Judgment Day, when Christ will return to decide their fates. Holy Church and Sweeping play particularly interesting roles both in this exchange and in later appearances.

Holy Church is an allegory for the Virgin Mary, and she defines herself as “the compassionate mother” of Jesus Christ. She is indeed compassionate, as she proclaims, “on account of the people of the earth I am always weeping, especially when one of them dies.”²⁸ The author of the play thus begins to reformulate motherhood not as an act of strength, nor an act of war, but rather as a process of becoming compassionate. Furthermore, she is responsible for “purifying [the people] with the seventh sacrament, marriage,” which she “keeps for them.”²⁹ Her motherhood is linked not to the fire of the traditional Nahua home, but rather to purity and honor. She is “the sacred light of the complete faith” and she “illuminate[s], ... shed[ding] light for all Christians, so that they will come and I will purify them.”³⁰ This can be read as an attempt to draw Nahua women out of the mysterious and impenetrable home, inaccessible to the Franciscan friars, to transfer the associations of motherhood to purity and light.

The character Sweeping is also interestingly reconstructed within the context of the play. As laid out before, sweeping was an essential responsibility of women in the home, interpreted as the ability of women to make order out of chaos, and connected to the crucially important roles of priests in temples and to certain gods. In the context of this play, Sweeping becomes reconstructed as an act of penance, not of empowerment. Although in

²⁷ “Final Judgment,” translated by Louise M. Burkhart, with assistance from Barry D. Sell, in *Nahuatl Theater: Volume 1, Death and Life in Colonial Nahua Mexico*. (Norman, Ok.: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 191-209.

²⁸ “Final Judgment,” 193.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

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this work, Christ sweeps in the same manner as the Nahua gods, this act is reframed as a way for Christ to “purify heaven and earth,”³¹ and for the rest of the population “to keep vigil, to arise in the morning, to do penance, to suffer cold, ... [and] to sweep their spirits, their souls ... so that they will receive compassion and be pardoned.”³² Instead of an empowering act, as it was conceived in pre-Hispanic times, it becomes an act of penance, an expression of submission to God’s power, instead of as an assertion of one’s own power and responsibility, as a man or a woman.

After the introductory scenes in which Holy Church and Sweeping assert their authority, the play shifts to a scene in which Lucía attempts to confess her sins to the priest. The priest, however, refuses to accept her confession, launching into a diatribe against the sincere young woman: “Are you not a Christian? ... Why did you never receive the sacrament of marriage? Just to the Devil you sent the seventh holy sacrament, marrying in a sacred way... What you will merit will be suffering in the place of the dead” (*see introduction for full quote*).³³ The priest’s words are striking for a number of reasons. First, he refuses to accept Lucía’s confession, tacitly asserting her powerlessness. Even though Lucía chooses to confess her sins in an attempt to be reconciled with God, the priest maintains his power to accept or reject this confession. Furthermore, it becomes clear that what Lucía is confessing appears to be having sex out of wedlock; many scholars contend that the play was designed to eradicate the practice of polygamy, which was widely practiced by indigenous nobility in pre-Hispanic society.³⁴ However, whereas in some representations of adulterous relationships both of the individuals who engaged in such carnal relations were punished,³⁵ in this play, only the woman takes the blame.

Furthermore, the blame that she takes is particularly terrifying. Following her confession and the departure of the priest, the Antichrist arrives, followed shortly by Christ, who prepares to give his final judgment. Those who have died return to life, and the living prepare to be judged. While the first person to be judged is accepted into heaven, the next two people to be judged are both sent to hell with the message that “today ... there is no longer any pardon.”³⁶ Lucía then rises to be judged; she is sent, along with the other sinners, to “the house of the place of the dead.”³⁷ Christ later describes this hell as “the sweatbath of fire,” and the demons who escort the sinners to hell also refer to the “fiery chains and fiery metal staff” with which they will torment the sinners.³⁸ In the next scene, when Lucía is brought into hell with Satan and the devils, she appears bedecked in flames: “*fire butterflies*

³¹ Ibid., 201.

³² Ibid., 193.

³³ Ibid., 199.

³⁴ Vivian Diaz Balsera, *The Pyramid Under the Cross: Franciscan Discourses of Evangelization and the Nahua Christian Subject in Sixteenth-century Mexico*, (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 2005), 68

³⁵ Images and text from the Codex Mendoza show an adulterous couple punished for their act by being stoned to death. Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt, ed. *The Essential Codex Mendoza*. (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1997), 147.

³⁶ “Final Judgment,” 203.

³⁷ Ibid., 205.

³⁸ Ibid., 205.

are her earrings, a snake her necklace, and they tie one [fire snake] around her waist.”³⁹ Lucía cries over the pain and burning of the fire, claiming they “signify how [she] used to beautify herself” with jewelry and other ornamentation⁴⁰ – this seems to be the Franciscans’ attempt to reconstruct the Nahua tradition of wearing jewelry as an act of sin and vanity, one to leave behind during the conversion to Christianity. More importantly, fire, formerly the core of the home and of Nahua family life, thus becomes associated with sin, hell, death, and pain. Furthermore, the woman to be housed forever within the flames is not a mother herself; rather, she has expressly rejected marriage and motherhood.

The work can thus be read as an attempt to deconstruct traditional notions of Nahua womanhood by disassociating motherhood from the home and the fire, and reassociating it with light, purity, honor, and the image of the Virgin Mary. Fire, formerly the site of women’s daily rituals and offerings, becomes a symbol of punishment and terror, the place not of the good Christian mother, but of the sinful woman who rejects motherhood. This may have been the intention of the Franciscan friars overseeing the work; however, the real question becomes one of reception: to what extent would the Nahua women watching the performance have experienced it as such?

Though contemporary readers cannot claim to understand precisely how Nahua women might have responded to this play, there are aspects that point to a more complex interplay of Nahua and Christian worldviews. Although Holy Church, the main “mother” figure, is associated with light and purity instead of with hearth and home, she nevertheless retains the responsibility to provide sustenance for the people of the earth, proclaiming that she “will feed them, [and] ... will give them drink if they are thirsty.”⁴¹ Furthermore, Holy Church/the Virgin Mary wields significant authority in this text: she is responsible for purifying the people – similar to an act that Nahua women were responsible for, the “cleansing of the hands, the rinsing of the faces, the washing of the mouths” as a part of the daily offering to the gods⁴² – and for administering the seventh sacrament, which is a much greater responsibility than is possessed by any of the other allegorical figures. This greater responsibility is reminiscent of the gender parallelism of the Nahua cognatic kinship structure, in which men and women shared equal responsibility over property.

Such shifting of responsibility to the Virgin Mary has been observed by other authors as well: in *Holy Wednesday*, Burkhart also argues that the Nahuatl Mary is invested with more authority and knowledge than her counterpart in the Spanish morality play from which the Nahua play was derived.⁴³ Burkhart also points out the ways in which Christ is represented as an obedient son who acts not independently, but rather because his father and ancient prophecies demand it. Although these elements are not evident in *Final Judgment*, they nevertheless support the suggestion that the Nahua notion of motherhood as a highly

³⁹ Ibid., 207. From stage directions.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 207.

⁴¹ Ibid., 193.

⁴² Burkhart, “Mexica Women on the Home Front,” 39.

⁴³ Burkhart, *Holy Wednesday*, 89. Some plays, such as *Holy Wednesday*, are known to have Spanish antecedents; *Final Judgment* has no Spanish antecedent.

respected element of society permeated the narratives of such plays, resisting Christian manipulation.

Another example of the complexities that this play creates can be seen in the character of Sweeping. Although the inclusion of sweeping could be read as a conscious attempt to reconstruct women's responsibilities within a Christian framework, de-linking them from the prestige that they previously held, it can also be read as an attempt on the part of Nahua scholars, or Nahua society, to allow this essential act of womanhood to retain its former place and power in society. The simple framing of sweeping as an act of penance does not necessarily mean that the people who physically performed the act of sweeping re-conceptualized it as such. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, Christ also performs the act of sweeping: is the assumption of sweeping a Christianization of Nahua traditions, or rather a Nahuatlization of Christian traditions? Perhaps the fact that Christ assumes the role of sweeper associates Christ with the Nahua god of sweeping, Quetzalcoatl, who also created mankind from his own life-blood, provided mankind with corn, and protected priests and priestesses.⁴⁴ To portray Christ sweeping was thus to synthesize the Nahua god into the Christian religion and to reframe Christ as a modified Aztec god with many of the same characteristics. The incorporation of Sweeping as a character and as an action thus plays an essential role in the maintenance and incorporation of Nahua traditions into the new Christian society.

But the most interesting character is Lucía, the unmarried woman sent to hell for her sins. First of all, when Lucía is condemned, she is dragged by the devils to Christian hell, which the author of the play has chosen to call "Mictlan," the name of the Nahua afterworld.⁴⁵ Christian hell and Nahua Mictlan are thus collapsed into the same space – however, Nahua Mictlan was crucially different than Christian hell. In the Nahua tradition, the deities of the underworld were not perceived as evil; furthermore, most people went to Mictlan, regardless of the way they had lived their lives.⁴⁶ It was a place from which souls re-entered the cycle of life and were reborn.

Furthermore, as mentioned before, upon her arrival in Mictlan, Lucía is transformed – reborn, perhaps: she arrives on stage bedecked in flaming butterflies and flaming serpents wound around her waist and neck. The Franciscans may have intended these images of flames to inspire fear and terror in the Nahua people; however, these symbols – of serpents, of butterflies, and of flames – were all symbols that had been associated with Nahua deities. Huehuateotl and Cihuacoatl were the male and female gods of fire:⁴⁷ Cihuacoatl was also known as the "snake-goddess," and is often framed by a serpent in sculptures;⁴⁸ Xochiquetzalli, goddess of fertility and of female sexual power, was often represented with a retinue of butterflies.⁴⁹ So, these varying symbols and images converge upon the figure of Lucia, recalling the Nahua gods of fire, fertility, and womanly power. Instead of being

⁴⁴ "Quetzalcoatl," accessed May 4, 2012. <http://www.azteccalendar.com/god/Quetzalcoatl.html>

⁴⁵ Diaz Balsera, *The Pyramid Under the Cross*, 74.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁷ Huehuateotl is referenced in Burkhart, "Mexica Women on the Home Front," 29; Cihuacoatl is referenced in Kellog, "The Women's Room," 567.

⁴⁸ "Cihuacoatl," accessed May 4, 2012. <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/c/cihuacoatl.html>

⁴⁹ "Xochiquetzal," accessed May 4, 2014. <http://www.azteccalendar.com/god/xochiquetzal.html>.

condemned, Lucia is deified, assuming the role of goddess – just as men and women used to assume the roles of gods and goddesses in their pre-colonial temple rituals. Carrascas has used the term “cosmo-magical” to refer to such metamorphoses, in which “divine energy and force inhabit buildings and people, hills and temples ... costumes as well as animal skins and feathers”⁵⁰; Lucía is thus cosmo-magically transformed, inhabited by the divine energy of the Nahua gods and goddesses, representative of feminine power to defy and reject Spanish impositions of propriety and proper behavior.

This dual imagery of Lucía both condemned and deified provides a good example of the ways in which Nahua people – perhaps explicitly, perhaps implicitly – resisted the intrusions of Christianity into their daily lives. These plays created a hybridized discourse through which Nahua could perform Christianity yet also counter it, creating a synthesis of new and old beliefs. As Diaz Balsera has written, this play “dramatizes the impossibility of the discourses of domination to remain untainted by and impermeable to the gaze of the other”⁵¹: the synthesis is inevitable. Furthermore, the play begins with a rousing call to the audience: “So then, weep, remember it,” proclaims Saint Michael in the opening passage.⁵² What are the people being called on to remember – the play and its message of sin and punishment, or perhaps the ancient Nahua traditions that reappear and persist in spite of Spanish colonialism?

CONCLUSION: HYBRIDIZATION AND RESISTANCE IN EARLY COLONIAL MEXICO

Many scholars have studied the ways in which Nahua culture persisted throughout attempts at Christian conversion and Spanish colonization; Nahua religious drama provides an especially fertile resource through which to examine the myriad complexities of colonialism and of indigenous resistance to and reinterpretation of the colonial program. This particular reading of *Final Judgment* argues that Franciscan friars attempted to restructure the roles of Nahua women by reassociating traditional women’s symbols with Christian penance and punishment: sweeping was converted into an act of atonement, fire was converted into a vehicle of punishment, and the hearth and home were relocated to Christian hell, where sinners such as Lucia resided. However, the Nahua writers of these plays and their Nahua audiences may have flipped these re-associations around, interpreting them as ways to weave their ancient culture into their new religion: the responsibility and authority of Holy Church allows her to absorb some elements of the Nahua cognatic kinship relations, the assumption of sweeping prompts a transformation of Christ into Quetzalcoatl, and the presentation of Lucía’s transition to hell as the re-birth of a flaming, feminine deity encircled by serpents and butterflies defies the Christian narrative of sin and punishment. Just as the Franciscan friars attempt to deploy “the power of the colonialist discourse to annihilate heterogeneity, disobedience, and resistance of the other, the suppressed

⁵⁰ David Carrasco. “The Sacrifice of Women in the Florentine Codex,” in *Representing Aztec Ritual: Performance, Text, and Image in the Work of Sahagun*, edited by Eloise Quinones Keber, (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2002), 200.

⁵¹ Diaz Balsera, *The Pyramid Under the Cross*, 79.

⁵² “Final Judgment,” 192.

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unexpectedly returned, hybridizing and estranging the images and representations of authority,” creating a subaltern discourse that implicitly resists the colonial power.⁵³

This implicit resistance appears to have been largely successful in the early colonial period. For the most part, the cognatic kinship structure, in which property was owned and inherited by both men and women, was maintained, as can be noted in wills and testaments collected and translated by Anderson, Berdan, and Lockhart.⁵⁴ Furthermore, travelers to Mexico such as Thomas Gage noted the extent to which “sin and wickedness abound in Mexico, yet there are no more devout people in the world toward the church and clergy,” perhaps implying that many of the “sinful” traditions of the Nahua – such as polygamy or pre-marital intercourse – were maintained in spite of devout religiosity.⁵⁵

Although it is difficult to access the perspective of indigenous women whose culture was deliberately suppressed centuries ago, the available documents reveal the ways that women may have experienced, shaped, and resisted the narratives imposed upon them by the colonizing force of the Spanish and the Franciscan. This reading of the surviving texts provides an example of the permeability of discourses of power, and the ability of subaltern groups to shape and manipulate those discourses in order to maintain the beliefs, traditions, and societal structures they hold most dear.

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⁵³ Diaz Balsera, *The Pyramid Under the Cross*, 78.

⁵⁴ Arthur J. O. Anderson, Frances Berdan, and James Lockart, trans. and ed. *Beyond the Codices: The Nahua View of Colonial Mexico*. (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1976). There are many wills and testimonies left by women in which the clear distinction between women’s property and men’s property is maintained, and in which women pass along land and other property to daughters, sons, and grandchildren.

⁵⁵ From the writings of Thomas Gage. Edited by , J. Eric S. Thompson. *Thomas Gage’s Travels in the New World*. (Norman, Ok.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 70.

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TITLE IMAGE

"The midwife bathes the baby boy"

Source: Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahua-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989) p. 114.

Illustration in the Florentine Codex, Book VI, 170r (Photo from Sahagun 1979)



WHEN NORMALCY NEVER CAME COMING HOME TO A CHANGED UNIVERSITY

Alexander Fisher's paper examines the legacy and transformative impact of the Second World War on Yale University's housing policy. Fisher draws from student publications of the time and official reports of administrative committees to detail the University's efforts to accommodate an unprecedented number of students, including returning servicemen. The paper argues that the University's permanent adoption of what were initially temporary measures was determined by the economic advantages of the new policy. In tracing the origins of "doubles" and cafeteria-style dining halls, this paper not only presents the transformation of daily life at Yale but also demonstrates a major shift in the ethos of the institution.

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Written for "World War II and Its Legacies"
Professor Jenifer Van Vleck
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Edited by Tiraana Bains and Spencer Weinreich

On September 12, 1946, Yale welcomed its largest freshman class in history. 1,800 new students enrolled, more than twice the number that would conventionally matriculate. Returning servicemen who had previously completed only part of their degrees enlarged the overall undergraduate ranks to an unprecedented 8,500. The impact on campus life was profound. Dining halls that had once hosted elaborate formal dinners with waiter service now offered simpler cafeteria-style provisions with basic metal trays. Under the guidance of the newly established Housing Committee, a “doubling up” process was implemented in virtually all dormitories: bedrooms that formerly housed only one student saw bunk beds installed to fit two, whilst beds were also placed in common rooms and other social spaces.¹ Overcrowding in the established dormitories was relatively minimal, however, when compared with the conditions in which 378 freshmen found themselves. These students resided in an impromptu barrack-style setting on the basketball court of Payne Whitney Gymnasium. The *Yale Daily News* reported on the situation in a front-page article on September 14, 1946, which emphasized the abnormality of this new Yale experience: the headline read, “Reconversion, Not Normalcy.”²

But even though temporary housing arrangements were rendered unnecessary through the stabilization of student numbers, many of the makeshift changes that had been introduced into student life at Yale remained in place. The “doubling up” system was not reversed, and to this day hundreds of rooms designed for one student, in particular those in Vanderbilt and Lanman-Wright Halls on Old Campus, house two; in fact, Yale today promotes the idea of having a roommate as an integral part of the college experience.³ Maid service in student dormitories was reduced, and eventually abolished entirely. The impromptu cafeterias that had been set up in the dining halls remained in place, and waiter service meals were restricted to special occasions. In short, “reconversion” emerged as the norm; not because the changes it brought about were gradually reversed, but because they remained in place for long enough to become entirely normative for a new generation of students, who had never known the pre-war university.

What might have prompted these long-term reforms? Financial interests are likely to have played a part. The expanded capacity of existing dormitories provided a straightforward route towards increased enrollment, while simultaneously reducing the overall costs of student services. Whereas Yale routinely needed to call upon its endowment to cover the majority of its operating expenditures during the pre-war years, the university’s endowment spending fell rapidly after the war, amounting to only 33% of expenditures in 1948 compared to 52% ten years earlier. By the mid-1950s, the overall value of the endowment, which had not increased at all between 1938 and 1944, had surged by 50%.⁴ Close quarters were, perhaps, seen as a price worth paying in order to bring about a period of impressive financial growth; and may also have been considered socially purposeful as a means to foster increased interaction among undergraduates. In introducing changes to accommodate the

¹ “Largest Freshman Class In History Matriculates Today As University Confronts Problems of ‘Reconversion,’” *Yale Daily News*, September 12, 1946. Print.

² “Reconversion, Not Normalcy,” *Yale Daily News*, September 14, 1946. Print.

³ Josie MacMurdo, “Make Yourself at Home: Frosh Housing,” *Yale Herald*, Summer 2001, Frosh Issue 2001 edition, <http://www.yaleherald.com/archive/frosh/2001/here/po3.html>.

⁴ *Summary of Endowment, 1900-2010* (New Haven, CT: Office of Institutional Research, Yale University, n.d.), <http://oir.yale.edu/node/349/attachment>.

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extraordinarily large number of students returning from the war, Yale seized the opportunity to radically restructure its undergraduate experience, thereby bringing about a transformation motivated primarily by financial factors and later reinforced by effective marketing and redefined social norms.

Yale's residential college system, modeled loosely on the long-standing collegiate universities of Oxford and Cambridge, was itself a relatively recent innovation. It had been first conceived of in the 1920's as part of what was then termed the "Quadrangle Plan."⁵ This scheme envisioned the break up of the rapidly expanding student body into smaller, self-contained units of around two hundred students, and was to be funded by the philanthropist and Yale alumnus Edward S. Harkness. After much internal debate concerning the function and design of the colleges, University President Charles Seymour decided to retain the architect James Gamble Rogers to supervise the project. He saw to fruition the construction of ten colleges, built in traditional Gothic and Georgian styles. The first of these colleges, Jonathan Edwards, opened in the fall of 1933. Gamble Rogers resisted the single and triple rooms that had been adopted at Harvard, and instead settled for two-man suites, usually containing a large common room and two single bedrooms. In doing so, he continued a long-standing Yale tradition of housing undergraduates in a style that was believed to be conducive to both socialization and individual study. Waiter service in dining halls, together with elaborate common rooms, contributed towards an atmosphere that was described as "midway between that of an Oxford hall and an American club."⁶ Harkness' donation had allowed for the establishment of a college system that not only addressed serious problems of capacity, but also introduced a degree of refinement in daily student life.

These relatively luxurious conditions were not, in any way, representative of the typical American college experience at the time. Outside of the Ivy League, most universities had abandoned the British model of housing, instead constructing generic dormitories based around corridors and not staircases. Rooms were typically small and shared between two or more students, whilst sanitary conditions suffered since bathroom facilities generally served an entire corridor. It is, therefore, unsurprising that Yale undergraduates quickly warmed to their new facilities; they participated enthusiastically in the freshly established intercollegiate sports program, and took full advantage of the opportunities that the colleges provided for interaction and dinners with faculty. This spirited attitude was epitomized in the rapid emergence of internal customs and idiosyncrasies. Students wore college ties and jackets, and colleges hosted special dinners at Thanksgiving and parties at Christmas.⁷ By implementing the college project, the administration had hoped to go far beyond conventional dormitory-style housing, and build long-lasting residential communities. Based on students' experience of the colleges' early years, their plan was an unequivocal success.

As the war came to an end, it was immediately clear to Yale administrators that the University faced a severe housing crisis. Thousands of students had left in the midst of

⁵ Abraham Pierson, *Yale: The University College, 1921-1937* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1955), 207-213.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 423.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 432.

degrees to serve in the Armed Forces; virtually all expected to return to campus for the fall semester of 1946. Still more had been offered places at Yale but had been unable to join on account of military service. In a press release of February 3, 1946, Dean of Freshman Affairs Norman S. Buck made clear the extent of the quandary confronting the University: “Yale University, flooded with applications for admissions pouring in from all over the country, is currently facing one of its greatest problems in its 245 year history.”⁸ Deferring reenrollment was politically unfeasible; veterans returning from war did not expect to have their places in their own institution withheld from them. Likewise, unless a full conventional freshman class was admitted, it would be impossible for the University to return to normal class sizes for at least another four years. There was no option but to somehow accommodate all of those expected to arrive in or return to New Haven during the fall.

Plans for the new semester were hastily prepared, and rapidly adjusted as the number of students anticipated continued to surge. Initially, attention was focused on increasing the number of beds available in dormitories; Buck wrote that “[t]hrough a “doubling up” process – such as four students being fitted into suites normally designed for two – the campus undergraduate housing capacity will be increased by nearly 50 percent.”⁹ Repeated audits of the campus were carried out, and the projected number of students set to be housed in each dormitory increased with every audit. In some cases, these increases were dramatic. As of March 1, 1946, Silliman College was expected to house 243 students under “semi-congested” conditions; this number would rise to 300. Come the fall, 355 undergraduates found themselves crowded into Silliman.¹⁰ The graduate schools were called upon to provide additional space for undergraduates where they could; the Law School announced that it would operate under “congested capacity [with] 3 to a double.”¹¹ Throughout the Housing Committee’s reports, student life is not referenced at all; the University’s sole focus was ensuring that a bed was available for every returning student who needed one.

Even with the adoption of such a radical program of restructuring, the University’s housing shortage remained acute. The Housing Committee had initially ruled out placing undergraduates in former military barracks, noting in a report of January 7, 1946 that the idea was “entirely impractical.”¹² One year later, 355 students had been placed in such accommodation.¹³ Similarly, though administrators originally expressed doubts that any

⁸ Norman S. Buck, “Press Release,” February 3, 1946, Record Unit 23, Box 147, Folder “Special Committee on Housing,” Records of Charles Seymour as President of Yale University, Yale University, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Reports of the Housing Committee, March 1946 and December 1946*, 1946, Record Unit 49, Box 192, Folder “Housing Bureau,” Records of the Secretary of Yale University, Yale University, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹¹ *Reports of the Housing Committee, January 30, 1946*, January 30, 1946, Record Unit 49, Box 192, Folder “Housing Bureau,” Records of the Secretary of Yale University, Yale University, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹² *Reports of the Housing Committee, January 7, 1946*, January 7, 1946, Record Unit 49, Box 192, Folder “Housing Bureau,” Records of the Secretary of Yale University, Yale University, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹³ *Reports of the Housing Committee, April 28, 1947*, April 28, 1947, Record Unit 23, Box 147, Folder “Special Committee on Housing,” Records of Charles Seymour as President of Yale University, Yale University,

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students would be willing to live in the William Wirt Winchester Hospital in West Haven, by June of 1946 the University had signed an agreement to “house about 250 unmarried veteran students” there.¹⁴ Others were housed in a swiftly assembled complex of Quonset huts on Whitney Avenue.¹⁵ The housing shortage was exacerbated since many servicemen had married during their time away from Yale; some were now parents, and naturally wanted to live with their families instead of in student dormitories. Existing university buildings could not easily be readapted to suit their needs, especially since there was no long term need for accommodation for married couples. A prefabricated complex of family homes was quickly assembled in order to meet their requirements.¹⁶

Despite the unquestionable inconveniences borne by students as a result of these arrangements, it is clear that their initial response to the changed conditions on campus was one of acceptance and understanding. When the *Yale Daily News* resumed publication on the first day of the fall semester of 1946, it carried a message from President Seymour on the front page; the editorial column observed that “life at Yale this fall will be unsettled, confused, and, at times, turbulent,” but praised the administration for having “more than fulfilled its obligations in providing facilities for the incoming eighteen hundred students.”¹⁷ An article printed the following day adopted an ironic tone in discussing how beds would no longer be made by maids: “Gone are the halcyon days at Yale when an undergraduate could expect to return from his 12:10 Econ. class to find his room cleaned spick and span and his bed faultlessly made up by a crisply uniformed lady in waiting.”¹⁸ When it appeared that those students being housed temporarily in the Payne-Whitney Gymnasium would soon be able to move into barracks, the *News* reported the news positively: “Hopes of the 385 inhabitants...are nearer realization today, as officials of the contracting firm...revealed...that construction was proceeding to schedule on the three Whitney Avenue barracks.”¹⁹ Students evidently appreciated that changes had to be made in order to accommodate all those returning to Yale, and they approached the consequential reforms in the best of spirits.

By the following year, however, student concern relating to on-going housing issues began to grow. One third of the freshmen entering Yale in the fall of 1947—over 350 students—were “selected to enjoy the comforts of the ex-Coast Guard Barracks” on Whitney Avenue, which the *News* cited as evidence that “the housing problem at Yale is still far from solved.”²⁰ Taking note of a sustained increase in demand for admission to Yale, a Board of

Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹⁴ *Reports of the Housing Committee, June 6, 1946*, June 6, 1946, Record Unit 23, Box 147, Folder “Special Committee on Housing.”, Records of Charles Seymour as President of Yale University, Yale University, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹⁵ *Statistical Summary of the Housing Problem, May 7 1946*, May 7, 1946, Record Unit 23, Box 147, Folder “Special Committee on Housing.”, Records of Charles Seymour as President of Yale University, Yale University, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ “Editorial,” *Yale Daily News*, September 12, 1946. Print.

¹⁸ “Maids to Discontinue Making College Beds; Yale Crisis Looms,” *Yale Daily News*, September 13, 1946. Print.

¹⁹ “Pre-Fab Barracks Near Completion,” *Yale Daily News*, September 17, 1946. Print.

²⁰ “Improvised Rooms Remain Necessary,” *Yale Daily News*, September 18, 1947. Print.

Admissions representative “predicted that the situation would not be cleared up before 1950.”²¹ Students were reminded that the situation at Harvard and Princeton was no better. During the previous year, both the administration and the student body evidently saw the close quarters on campus as an inconvenient but temporary burden that had to be borne in order to facilitate a return to normality. One year later, it appeared that the return to normality was much further away than had previously been envisioned.

Meanwhile, some of the fledgling residential college traditions that had awakened immense excitement amongst the student body in the pre-war era began to wane. For example, at Pierson “traditions did lapse, [like] the International Relations Club [and] the French Table.” Athletics, in contrast, “did as much as anything to arouse the College to a fine frenzy of enthusiasm.”²² It is notable that whilst Yale’s sports program remained strong, the intellectual life of the colleges provided cause for concern. This was perhaps a consequence of the abolition of formal dining and its replacement by a “cafeteria system...with waiting lines and trays...[that] is efficient.”²³ Overcrowded, self-service dining halls did not have the same heightened and scholarly tone that their waiter-service predecessors had once exuded; interactions between undergraduates and their professors were no longer a routine part of everyday life. Faculty deemed it appropriate to remind students that extra-curricular activities were “indispensable to a good education.”²⁴ Such reminders had not been necessary in those pre-war days when a great tide of enthusiasm and vigor had swept through the halls of the newly established colleges. A part of the old Yale had died, perhaps never to return.

The university’s administration did not attempt to deny the impact that these changes had made on the undergraduate experience. In his annual report for the academic year 1946-47, President Seymour accepted that conditions on campus had become so cramped that the University had struggled “to maintain the personal intimate quality which has traditionally characterized a Yale education.”²⁵ Seymour also suggested that the adjustments made to Yale’s housing system would be reversed in time, promising “a return to our pre-war size for which we are organized as a faculty and in our physical equipment.” His conclusion to this section of the report was, if anything, still more explicit: “We have rightly opened our doors to the extreme limit for the benefit of the returning service men. But this should be regarded as an emergency measure, to be terminated with the graduation of the veterans.”²⁶ In public, Seymour claimed that the University had in no way returned to normality, and that the housing situation must be restored to what it had been before the war; in private, he was leading the institution in an entirely different direction.

At the same time that Seymour was filing this report, the University was making offers to applicants who hoped to join the freshman class and matriculate at Yale in the fall of

²¹ “Admissions Board Accepts One-third of Applications,” *Yale Daily News*, September 18, 1947. Print.

²² James Graham Leyburn, *Pierson College: War and Peace, 1943-1946* (New Haven, CT: Privately printed, 1946), 5-9.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “Faculty Educational Authority Cites Need For Extra-Curricular Activities,” *Yale Daily News*, October 21, 1947. Print.

²⁵ Charles Seymour, *Report of the President, 1946-47*, n.d., Record Locator HM 214, Self-Service Microfilm Drawer 6, Reel 20.

²⁶ Ibid.

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1947. In spite of the widespread overcrowding on campus and continuing housing shortages, enrollment did not return to pre-war norms, as Seymour had promised. The University instead welcomed 1,165 freshmen to New Haven.²⁷ During the five years before the outbreak of war, freshman enrollment had averaged around 850 students a year; these new figures represented an increase in enrollment of forty percent. We should remember that the tuition fee benefits contained in the GI Bill made it possible for veterans to have their college tuition fees paid by the government, and caused surging enrolment at universities and colleges nationwide.²⁸ Yale's own challenges need to be considered within this context; however, the long-term structural changes that Seymour's administration introduced were clearly a matter of administrative choice. This is evident from the fact that freshman enrolment in the 1950s and 1960s totalled over 1000 in every year bar one, creating an undergraduate population far closer to the immediate post-war years than to pre-war norms.²⁹

Yale's graduate and professional schools offer further evidence to show that policy, not necessity, dictated the surge in enrollment throughout the post-war years. The Law School's student population rose from approximately 380 in the pre-war years to 520 afterwards; the Music School's student body, which had typically numbered around 90 before the war, increased to over 130 during the years that followed. The Divinity School saw a forty percent enrollment increase.³⁰ As Figure I demonstrates, the overall impact on the size of the University was substantial and sustained. With the institution of shared bedrooms and cafeteria-style dining halls, the college system, set up to emulate Oxford and Cambridge, had departed dramatically from its British models. Yet, in an important sense, Yale had become more akin to its British forefathers; with over four thousand enrolled undergraduates, the University appeared to be well on its way to educating as many students in its ten colleges as Oxford did in more than thirty.³¹

What might have motivated Yale's decision to continue increased levels of enrollment? Though detailed financial records from the era remain classified,³² certain economic realities are nevertheless evident: although the University reduced accommodation costs for those students allocated particularly small rooms, the greatest part of the Yale term bill – tuition – was not reduced. Since new faculty members were not hired, educational costs did not increase significantly. The only real expense that had to be accounted for was the purchase of furniture for the increased student ranks; administrators reached an agreement with a local office of the United States Navy to “purchase...all of the Navy furniture, including 1200 beds, together with blankets [and] sheets.”³³ The use of ex-military

²⁷ Abraham Pierson, *A Yale Book of Numbers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 9–10.

²⁸ Keith Olson, “The G.I. Bill and Higher Education: Success and Surprise,” *American Quarterly* 25, no. 5 (1973): 596–610.

²⁹ Pierson, *A Yale Book of Numbers*, 10–11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9–10.

³¹ *Ibid.*; *Oxford University Gazette: Supplement (2) to No. 4783* Student Numbers, n.d.,

http://www.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwoxacuk/localsites/gazette/documents/statisticalinformation/studentnumbers/2006/2_4783.pdf. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Oxford was educating roughly six thousand undergraduates.

³² Yale's financial and treasury records are classified for seventy-five years from the time that those individuals mentioned in the archives left the University, or until their deaths.

³³ *Reports of the Housing Committee, February 27, 1946*, February 27, 1946, Record Unit 49, Box 192, Folder

supplies ensured the inexpensive achievement of increased enrollment. Though the effect on expenditure was insignificant, its impact on income was pronounced.

Evidence from Yale's endowment strongly supports this hypothesis. During the pre-war years, the endowment's value stagnated at between 100 and 110 million dollars, and the University was forced to rely on funds from the endowment to sponsor around fifty percent of its operating expenditures.³⁴ Beginning in 1943, the endowment's market value began to increase significantly, a trend that would last for the next twenty-six years. This trend accelerated from 1946 onwards: whereas the endowment's market value had increased by only 13.7% between 1936 and 1946, in the decade that followed it would perform more than three times better, yielding a total gain of 42.9%.³⁵ Moreover, as annual income increased, the University no longer required the same degree of support from the endowment to cover general expenses; endowment spending fell to around a third of overall operating costs, compared to a half before the war.³⁶ Thus, the rapidly growing endowment that led Yale to become one of the richest universities in the world was a product of the post-war years. Whilst many universities were making extensive use of federal funding during this era, such research support did not play an important part in improving Yale's financial situation. The University was slow to recognize the opportunities that government programs provided for its scientific departments; if anything, the sciences remained a financial burden well into the 1950s, with William Clyde DeVane, the Dean of Yale College, complaining in 1953 that expenditure on a new physics laboratory had necessitated cutbacks elsewhere.³⁷

Still more striking is the direct connection that can be drawn between income from tuition, room and board fees, and endowment growth. In 1940, the University received two and a half million dollars from these sources; by 1950, that figure had risen to well over six million dollars.³⁸ This remarkable increase – totaling almost 140% over the ten-year period – is all the more notable considering that similar income had risen by only 12% during the previous decade, and that income during the war had fallen significantly, reaching a low point of under two million dollars in 1945.³⁹ Taking into account the fact that the University offered many students significant discounts on room charges in the immediate aftermath of the war, and encouraged some students not to take a board contract at all, this unprecedented improvement in Yale's financial position can be attributed to one factor alone – increased enrollment.

Despite Seymour's rhetoric, the University did little to alleviate the problems that overpopulation brought to campus. No new dormitory projects were announced, and existing buildings did not see comprehensive refurbishment even though they were now

"Housing Bureau.", Records of the Secretary of Yale University, Yale University, Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, CT.

³⁴ *Summary of Endowment, 1900-2010*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Roger L. Geiger, *Research and Relevant Knowledge: American Research Universities Since World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 82–91.

³⁸ *University Income by Source, 1800-2010* (New Haven, CT: Office of Institutional Research, Yale University, n.d.), <http://oir.yale.edu/node/357/attachment>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

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called upon to serve very different purposes than those for which they were originally designed. Between 1945 and 1952, the University spent only \$292,000 on renovations and construction; in 1946, it did not spend any money whatsoever on such operations.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, in the seven years that followed, spending on facilities would surge to a total of over fifteen million dollars.⁴¹ The increased financial security that came with the growing endowment and expanded income offered Yale unprecedented opportunities. Such rapid improvement in the University's economic position, however, came at the cost of fundamental changes to the student experience. Yet these changes did not happen by accident. Yale *chose* to continue with a program of cutbacks and overcrowding; how could it not, when the financial logic of the decision was becoming clearer with every passing year?

It was a desire to increase enrollment still further, among other motivating factors, which inspired the University's decision in the late 1950s to build two new colleges. Under the leadership of President A. Whitney Griswold, a site surrounded by Tower Parkway, Broadway, and York Street, formerly a local high school, was selected, and the prominent architect Eero Saarinen retained to build the new colleges.⁴² In a press release announcing the construction of two new colleges, the University's spokesman Steve Kezerian pledged that they would have a positive impact upon the campus as a whole: "The two new colleges will enable Yale to relieve serious overcrowding in the existing 10 colleges as well as to permit a modest increase in undergraduate enrollment."⁴³ For the first time since the construction of the ten original colleges, the administration was ready to initiate a major residential project, as well as the first time since the immediate post-war years that it promised a solution to the cramped conditions that had become a routine part of everyday campus life.

Student input played an important role in shaping the designs of the new colleges. In an interview with *Progressive Architecture* in November 1962, Saarinen argued that the individual was integral to his concept of an undergraduate residence: "Somehow, the architecture had to describe them as *colleges*, not as dormitories...their emphasis as colleges must be clearly on the individual as an individual, not as an anonymous integer in a group."⁴⁴ Before the advent of overcrowding at Yale, the defining factor of its housing system was the provision of individual *and* group space for students, through the combination of single bedrooms and shared common rooms. But with those single rooms having been turned into doubles, socializing had gone from being a choice to being a permanent way of living. Saarinen, constrained by a limited budget, faced the unenviable dilemma of having to choose what type of space would be provided for students in the new colleges. As the *Yale Daily News* noted in a later interview with his colleague Cesar Pelli, Saarinen allowed himself to be heavily influenced by student opinion: "After talking with close to 200 students when designing the colleges, [Pelli] said, [the] architects found that the lack of single rooms was a

⁴⁰ *Capital Spending on Facilities, 1940-2010* (New Haven, CT: Office of Institutional Research, Yale University, n.d.), <http://oir.yale.edu/node/353/attachment>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² "A Brief History" Ezra Stiles College, n.d., <http://ezrastiles.yalecollege.yale.edu/brief-history>.

⁴³ Steve Kezerian, "Press Release, Yale University Office of Public Affairs," n.d., Box 504, Folder 1451, Eero Saarinen Collection.

⁴⁴ Eero Saarinen, "Morse and Stiles Colleges," *Progressive Architecture*, November 1962, in Eero Saarinen Papers, Group 593, Box 504, Folder "Press Cuttings."

common complaint. For this reason, a large number of Morse and Stiles rooms are singles.”⁴⁵ Once students were given the opportunity to shape the dormitories in which they lived, it became clear that they desired a residential experience very different from that currently offered by the University.

Just as Saarinen conceived of the internal structure of his colleges as distinctive from the rest of the University, he also embraced the Modernist architectural style. The colleges, centered around two large towers, were inspired by the Italian hilltop town of San Gimignano, and were devoid of right angles. One opinion piece published in the *News* described student excitement at the radically different design of the two colleges: “We greet Mr. Saarinen’s new plans as messianic relief from the tyranny of the unrelieved right angles and regular repetition of forms which characterizes so much modern architecture.”⁴⁶ Interest in the architectural merits of academic building projects was not confined to Yale. New colleges with Modernist designs were also built at Oxford and Cambridge; notable amongst these projects was Arne Jacobsen’s St. Catherine’s College at Oxford, which sought to emphasize the communal nature of collegiate life through radical all-glass external walls.⁴⁷ At new universities like Essex, Lancaster and York in the United Kingdom, and the University of Illinois at Chicago in the United States, architects were granted free rein to shape campuses as they saw fit. In the case of Kenneth Capon’s Essex, the whole campus was compared to San Gimignano; like the Saarinen colleges at Yale, towers formed the focal point of the project, but Capon went further, introducing a group of tiered platforms designed to foster interactions between students, and hiding roads and thoroughfares below these platforms and out of public sight.⁴⁸ Instead of adopting established architectural methods, post-war universities sought to reconsider traditional campus structures and uncover new ways to facilitate their social and educational goals.

No applicant to Yale today could accuse the University of attempting to paper over potentially undesirable aspects of campus life; instead, the Yale’s policy towards its own post-war reforms has become one of unmitigated enthusiasm. When prospective students view the University’s admissions video, they are greeted by a vision of a beautifully kept double room, home to two excited freshmen who are delighted to find that the bedding that they have brought to college have “matching sheets,” and a dining hall in which students enthusiastically pile their trays high, taking advantage of the cafeteria-style service.⁴⁹ The aspects of campus life that once represented an undesirable post-war compromise have been comprehensively redefined as an integral part of the collegiate experience. As one contemporary *Yale Daily News* editorial noted, where student housing was concerned, “sharing space came with the territory.”⁵⁰ Administrators continue to argue that deficiencies

⁴⁵ “The Saarinen Colleges,” *Yale Daily News*, February 19, 1988. Print.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Caroline Berson, “Decades Ago, Two New Colleges Greeted Eagerly,” *Yale Daily News*, October 31, 2007, <http://yaledailynews.com/blog/2007/10/31/decades-ago-two-new-colleges-greeted-eagerly/>.

⁴⁷ Stefan Muthesius, *The Postwar University: Utopianist Campus and College* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 73.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 153–161.

⁴⁹ Yale Admissions Office, *That’s Why I Chose Yale*, 2010, <http://admissions.yale.edu/cinema-yale>.

⁵⁰ Helen Vera, “Palaces Not Required, but Garrets Don’t Cut It,” *Yale Daily News*, April 15, 2005, <http://yaledailynews.com/blog/2005/04/15/palaces-not-required-but-garrets-dont-cut-it/>.

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in housing quality are alleviated by the strong sense of community that students acquire through living together; when Berkeley College freshmen were transferred from the recently renovated Vanderbilt Hall to the decaying Lanman-Wright Hall, the college dean's office issued a statement welcoming the change: "Future freshmen will be more connected than ever to the Berkeley community, and Freshmen Counselors will be closer to the great friends that they have in the upper classes."⁵¹ ⁵² Living in close proximity to others is now marketed as a virtue – 'small' has become 'cozy.'

Although it is implausible that Yale could ever return to offering all students single rooms and providing formal dining every evening, it is ironic that many of the attributes that today seem so central to the Yale undergraduate experience were not introduced along with the original residential colleges, but instead were the products of a hastily prepared plan designed to ensure that every new undergraduate and returning veteran had a bed to sleep in when the University fully reopened after the Second World War. That plan served its purpose, and also proved highly profitable; as a result, most of its defining features remained permanently in place. When the Seymour-led administration decided that reconversion would be the norm, it irrevocably changed the ethos of the University, and laid the foundations of the Yale that we know today.

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⁵¹Sam Greenberg, "Swing Space to Serve as Annex," *Yale Daily News*, n.d., <http://yaledailynews.com/blog/2011/01/19/swing-space-to-serve-as-annex/>.

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“KEEPERS OF SONG, KEEPERS OF TRADITION” RACE AND THE SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF MISSISSIPPI HILL COUNTRY BLUES

“Keepers of Song, Keepers of Tradition” is a thoughtful investigation of the cultural pressures faced by Hill Country Blues artists in a changing music industry. Joseph explores the way Blues musicians and their communities responded to conflicting demands for authenticity, mass-marketing campaigns, and the kinds of cultural and racial stereotypes used by Blues purists and commercial popularizers alike. This senior essay, which won the Edwin W. Small Prize, is remarkable for its extensive use of original interviews with Hill Country Blues artists and their patrons conducted by the author.

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Senior Essay for the History Major
Winner of the Edwin W. Small Prize
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Edited by Trevor Davis and Jacob Anbinder

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s ethnomusicologists, filmmakers, record producers, and blues aficionados trumpeted the discovery of an “authentic” form of blues tucked away in the deep recesses of the Mississippi Hill Country. They were entranced by the music of Hill Country artists R.L. Burnside, David “Junior” Kimbrough, and Jessie Mae Hemphill. (See Appendix I, Figures 1, 2, and 3, respectively.) What excited these enthusiasts was the conviction that, unlike the Hill Country variant, virtually all other forms of rural blues had either lost their originality or simply died out. With such initial fanfare, one might suspect that Mississippi Hill Country blues artists and music would receive serious attention from scholars, the record industry, and Mississippi’s blues tourism industry. None of this has come to pass. It is the contention of this essay that a key contributing factor is the subgenre’s failure to conform to the dominant narrative of blues history. Blues historiography remains overly linear, with its privileging of the transformation of rural blues into urban forms. So canonical is the narrative of migratory blues that President Barack Obama—himself a blues enthusiast—reflexively subscribes to it. As recently as February 21, 2012, while honoring the blues at a White House concert, the President declared: “The music migrated north—from [the] Mississippi Delta to Memphis to my hometown in Chicago.”¹ My intervention seeks to augment more familiar narratives of blues musicians as migratory subjects and of the blues as a cultural form that has transitioned long ago from folk tradition, rooted in the Mississippi Delta, to a mass-mediated, commercial commodity.

An additional question that inspires my research is why Hill Country blues has endured and remained dynamic while so many other blues traditions have stultified. To best answer the questions of longevity and continued creativity, I employ analytical tools that privilege place over displacement and address the social reproduction and hybridization of local musical forms, performance contexts, and musicians. Although I employ below such terms as “place,” “locality,” and “community,” I recognize that there is no ideal or broadly accepted way to define or designate these sites as actual social forms. As social theorist Arjun Appadurai rightly observes, each designation has its strengths and weaknesses.² What I do hope to capture with this choice of terminology is a sense of shared history, sociality, and immediacy, as well as reproducibility through cultural performances and social practices. At the same time, I recognize that “place” need not be exclusively a fixed locality; it is also imagined and embodied by individuals. Thus, several of my interviewees shared that, although they no longer reside in the Hill Country, they still *belong* to that place and its musical traditions continue to infuse their beings and their music.³

My discussion below conforms to the long-accepted premise that the origins and distinct styles of particular musical forms, like the blues, are highly influenced by the cultural traditions, social organization, and demographic composition of the context in which they

¹ Matt Compton, “President Obama Sings ‘Sweet Home Chicago,’”

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2012/02/22/president-obama-sings-sweet-home-chicago> (February 22, 2012). Shortly after delivering these lines, President Obama sang part of Robert Johnson’s Delta blues classic “Sweet Home Chicago.”

² Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 206.

³ Interview with Robert Belfour on July 26, 2011; Interview with David Kimbrough, Jr. on July 17, 2010.

develop.⁴ But it also adopts the more recent understanding that social forms of place have to be socially reproduced continually to keep these sites viable. In this spirit, I suggest that the performance of Hill Country blues has helped to perpetuate local black communities and keep its residents tied to place. Whether and how this synergy between music and place can be sustained in the twenty-first century is a concern I address in the concluding section.

In privileging place, stability, and communalism, I remain mindful of the dangers inherent in essentializing Hill Country communities, residents, and culture as somehow removed from larger historical, cultural, and social forces. Indeed, I describe in the essay's penultimate section just such an essentializing move adopted by a group of individuals I call "blues purists." They took this stance in "defense" of certain Hill Country artists whose personhood and music, they believed, were irrevocably sullied by a commercial record company, Fat Possum, that aimed to bring Hill Country blues to a national audience.

In relating the struggle between blues purists and commercial popularizers, I demonstrate the ways in which the blues artists themselves navigated between these two extremes in the mid-1990s. In doing so, they confronted a difficult balancing act of attempting to remain true to their societal and musical traditions, to continue to stretch themselves as performers of a still vital blues genre, and to benefit financially from an enlarged audience for their distinctive blues style. This same vexed balancing act continues to challenge the children and grandchildren of this first generation of Hill Country artists to expand their popularity while still remaining firmly rooted in place. Indeed, the unreasonable tension between two equally unhealthy extremes – an essentialized authenticity that stifles a tradition's ability to adapt and grow, versus a forced, inorganic adaptation to styles for commercial purposes, is one of the tensions that defines this story.

My study concludes by considering larger questions that this history of Hill Country blues raises. It prompts us to consider those elements that seem essential to maintaining a musical tradition over time. It also obliges us to address an intriguing paradox. Impoverished communities like those in the Hill Country are becoming ever more peripheral to the generators of national and international economic growth. Yet, at the same time, such locales are connected to an increasingly cosmopolitan, globalizing, wired-in society with an attendant public eager to sample so-called authentic difference. What do contemporary examples of the management of this paradox reveal about the social viability of rural communities and local traditions in the United States?

THE HILL COUNTRY AND THE PERPETUATION OF ITS BLUES TRADITION A GEOGRAPHIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

Mississippi's Hill Country region is geographically situated between the foothills of the South Appalachia Mountain range and the fertile lowlands of the Mississippi Delta region. The Hill Country includes the following counties: DeSoto, Marshall, Benton, Tippah, Alcorn, Tishomingo, Tate, Union, Prentiss, Panola, Lafayette, and Pontotoc. (See Appendix I, Figure 4.) With the major exception of DeSoto County and parts of Lafayette County, the region is predominantly rural.

⁴ For an early and somewhat problematic work on music and "place," see Alan Lomax, "The Evolutionary Taxonomy of Culture," *Science* (July 21, 1972): 228-239.

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The Hill Country does not have nearly as many black residents as does the Delta, where blacks represent the majority of residents in many counties. The Hill Country’s Marshall County comes the closest, with African American residents accounting for just under fifty percent of the total population.⁵ Accordingly, Marshall is known as the “Black County” and its largest town, Holly Springs, was and is a hotspot for Hill Country music.⁶ (See Appendix I, Figure 5.) Marshall and Alcorn are the only Hill Country counties with an African American population of over 30,000.⁷ This essay focuses principally on black rural communities in the western Hill Country and especially in Marshall County.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HILL COUNTRY BLUES MUSIC

Numerous genres of post-bellum secular black music have historically been played in the Hill Country region. Many of these genres have directly or indirectly influenced Hill Country blues, which is believed to have crystallized in the early years of the twentieth century.⁸ The musical forms that preceded blues were fiddle and banjo music, the string band, and fife and drum music.⁹ (For an in depth analysis of post-bellum music that influenced Hill Country blues, see Appendix II, Figure 1.)

There has been some debate over the appropriate classification of Hill Country blues, since it shares certain similarities with Delta blues, such as lyric content, slide guitar technique, a vocal style slightly removed from a speaking voice, and the fact that both subgenres are meant to promote dance. Despite these commonalities, the two subgenres diverge in significant ways. In general, Hill Country blues is more strongly rhythmic and percussive than Delta blues, and Hill Country blues songs tend to last longer than their Delta counterparts.¹⁰ While both subgenres are characterized by harmonic minimalism, the riff patterns of Delta blues tend to exhibit more chord progressions.¹¹ Indeed, most Hill Country blues songs feature one or two chords and are thus described as more “droning” or “hypnotic” than Delta blues.¹² Unlike most Delta blues musicians, Hill Country blues artists rarely employ the twelve-bar blues structure, but rather “avoid or subvert” it.¹³

Historically speaking, Hill Country blues must also be seen as a separate tradition from Delta blues. There is no doubt that a black Hill Country musical tradition was present long before its Delta counterpart. As will be discussed below, the Hill Country was settled well before the Delta and black migrants to the Delta often originated from the Hill Country. Although the two subgenres would later influence each other, initially Hill Country blues

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, *United States Census of Population and Housing, 2010: Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: Mississippi* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2010).

⁶ Sylvester W. Oliver, Jr., “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi” (PhD diss., University of Memphis, 1996), 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸ Interview with David Evans on July 29, 2010.

⁹ Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 334.

¹⁰ Blues historian Scott Barretta notes that one Hill Country blues song can last an hour or more. Interview with Scott Barretta on July 23, 2010.

¹¹ A riff is a short repeated melodic phrase, frequently used as a background to solo improvisation. The repetition over improvisation builds excitement.

¹² David Evans, “Hill Country Blues,” *Living Blues*, April 2007, 78.

¹³ Evans, July 29, 2010.

must be seen as a precursor to Delta blues. Indeed, when ethnomusicologist and Hill Country resident Sylvester W. Oliver, Jr. asked Delta bluesmen like Sunnyland Slim, Son Thomas, Sam Chatmon, and John Lee Hooker where blues first originated in Mississippi, they responded that their parents' generation had brought to the Delta fragments of the blues from northern and southern hill regions.¹⁴ So too, Hill Country blueswoman Ellen Jeffries, born in 1910, remembered that "blues had always been here as far back as I can remember.... the Delta bluesmen were the first, I believe, to put blues on record, but we all were doing it, you know."¹⁵

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF MIGRATION TO AND FROM THE HILL COUNTRY IN THE 1800S

Early ethnomusicologists like Alan Lomax initially failed to study Hill Country music on the grounds that the region had a comparatively small black population when compared to the Delta, which was viewed as the cultural center of black Mississippians.¹⁶ The historical record reveals another truth, however. The Hill Country, along with Natchez and Jackson, was one of the earliest and major hubs of Mississippi slavery. Indeed, the slaves who arrived to the Hill Country in the 1820s (specifically to Red Banks, Marshall County) counted among the first slaves in the state to toil on economically productive cotton plantations.¹⁷ Contrary to popular belief, the Delta remained largely undeveloped in the antebellum period due to malarial conditions and constant flooding from the Mississippi River. By 1830, the tremendous success of cotton crops in the Hill Country attracted growing numbers of white farmers and planters to the region, accompanied by their black slaves.¹⁸ The slave population was largely concentrated in the more fertile western section (particularly Marshall County), although the majority of whites inhabited the eastern portion of the region near the Alabama border.

From the 1830s to the 1860s, Marshall became one of the most densely populated counties in the state and was home to as many slaves as whites.¹⁹ In an era and region in which "cotton was king," Marshall became known as "The Empire County;" Holly Springs was considered a commercial Mecca.²⁰ By 1850, Marshall had a larger black population (15,417) than any county other than Hinds (which encompasses Jackson, the state capital) and boasted the largest population in Mississippi.²¹ In 1850 and 1860, Marshall County also

¹⁴ Oliver, "African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi," 393-394.

¹⁵ Ibid, 398.

¹⁶ Indeed, Oliver postulated that scholars studying black music "perhaps assumed that for years the Northeast Mississippi region was musically barren or that the music activities there were too inconsequential to document." Ibid, 3. Such scholarly neglect meant that Hill Country music was not recorded until 1942. Stephen Wade, Liner Notes, *Black Appalachia: String Bands, Songsters and Hoedowns*, Rounder compact disc 11661-1823-2, 1999.

¹⁷ Oliver, "African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi," 56.

¹⁸ Ibid, 57.

¹⁹ Ibid, 60.

²⁰ Mary Carol Miller, *Images of America: Marshall County, From the Collection of Chesley Thorne Smith* (Portsmouth, NH: Arcadia Publishing, 1998), 15; Alice Long and Mark L. Ridge, *Images of America: Holly Springs* (Portsmouth, NH: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 7.

²¹ Oliver, "African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi," 83, 62.

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produced the most bales of cotton in the entire state.²² While large plantations existed in Marshall County, small farms with fewer slaves proliferated throughout the rest of the Hill Country. No doubt, the success of slavery in the region greatly contributed to the increase and spread of slavery statewide. Slavery in Mississippi skyrocketed from 70,000 enslaved blacks in 1830 to 436,631 slaves by 1860.²³ By 1860, Mississippi was one of the few states in the South in which whites were in the minority.²⁴ State demographics would change dramatically in the aftermath of the Civil War. In the post-bellum period, the economic development of the fertile Delta region led a large number of Hill Country planters to relocate to the Delta. One planter, who would ultimately remain in the Hill Country, enumerated the concerns of Hill Country farmers: “there is a great feeling manifested by the planters of the hill country to go to the bottom lands [the Delta], for our hill country is exhausting so fast.”²⁵ Many ex-slaves, some courted by labor contractors, participated in the exodus and became sharecroppers in the Delta.

THE EMERGENCE OF A BLACK LANDOWNING CLASS: CONSEQUENCES FOR POPULATION STABILITY AND THE SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF HILL COUNTRY MUSIC

The relocation of white planters spurred a market for lesser-quality land in the Hill Country. Ex-slaves bought much of this land and an African American small-holding class was born. In fact, during a 1908 trip to Mississippi, Booker T. Washington wrote that the blacks of Marshall were exemplary models for African Americans to emulate across the South. Washington attributed the lower incidences of racial problems (including lynchings) in Marshall to the fact that blacks in the county had developed commerce and business and owned as much land as their white neighbors.²⁶ Washington was not incorrect in his assertion.²⁷ Indeed, one mixed-race planter, James Holmes Teer owned thousands of acres of land in Marshall County and was even able to hire sharecroppers to tend his land.²⁸

Unlike other black small-holding populations across the state, which were threatened initially during Southern Redemption and eviscerated in the 1940s and 1950s by federal policies aimed at eliminating the South’s labor-intensive rural order,²⁹ the black Hill Country landowning class continues to endure. Even today, black ownership of property is extremely

²² Ibid, 72; Hubert H. McAlexander, *Strawberry Plains Audubon Center: Four Centuries of a Mississippi Landscape* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 29.

²³ Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 76-77.

²⁴ Ibid, 77.

²⁵ McAlexander, *Strawberry Plains Audubon Center*, 42.

²⁶ Booker T. Washington, “A Cheerful Journey Through Mississippi,” in *Mississippi: A Chronology and Documentary Handbook*, eds. Robert I. Vexler and William F. Swindler (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1978), 113-117.

²⁷ While I am not arguing that the Hill Country was a racial utopia devoid of lynchings, there were events that challenged the Jim Crow status quo. For example, in 1919, prominent black landowner Ben Ingram, Jr., of Byhalia, was acquitted of murdering his white neighbor by an all-white jury. Sue Watson, “Ben Ingram Story in the Works,” *The South Reporter*, April 14, 2011.

²⁸ McAlexander, *Strawberry Plains Audubon Center*, 101.

²⁹ Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 41.

high in the Hill Country.³⁰ Throughout the twentieth century, the percent of landowners who were black was far greater in the Hill Country than it was in the Delta. In addition, Hill Country blacks, on average, owned much more land and a larger percentage of total land than did their Delta counterparts.³¹ (See Appendix I, Figures 6 and 7). That this healthy black small-holding class was able to pass land down to future generations meant that there was less outmigration and more generational continuity in the Hill Country than there was in the Delta.

In stark contrast to Delta blacks, who often toiled in a brutal sharecropping system and continued to work under white overseers, many Hill Country blacks prospered and enjoyed greater control over their time and labor.³² The benefits associated with landownership contributed to the lower rates of outmigration from the Hill Country, as compared to the rest of Mississippi.³³ Indeed, from 1940 to 1970 (a period commonly referred to as the Second Great Migration) the black population of Marshall County fell by only 17.1 percent, while the black population of a representative Delta county, Sunflower County, plummeted by a whopping 52 percent.³⁴

In addition to a high rate of black landownership, the Hill Country also featured a viable sharecropping system. Many former tenants have reported that the sharecropping system was not particularly brutal and that most sharecroppers did not live in perpetual debt. When interviewed in 2003, James Elihue Howell, who was in his late sixties, asserted that “If I lived with you, you know, you funds me during the...year....In the harvest year, I’d cancel my debt when I paid you. But if I didn’t get too much *debt*, it wasn’t too hard to clear a profit.”³⁵ Howell recollected that in addition to selling bales of cotton, sharecroppers could also profit by selling cottonseeds.³⁶ Describing the viability of the sharecropping system, one former tenant remarked that the landowner who employed her father had “the reputation as

³⁰ Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 55.

³¹ These statements are based on statistical research I conducted using volumes of the U.S. Census of Agriculture. The charts that I created can be found in Appendix I, Figures 6 and 7. In the charts, I compare black landownership in Marshall County and Sunflower County (a representative Delta county). From these statistics, one can draw conclusions about black landownership in the Hill Country and Delta.

³² As Junior Kimbrough’s elderly bassist Joe Ayers bluntly stated, “I think they had more freedom in the Hill Country than they did in the Delta....They had too many... cotton plantations down there, and they didn’t have that many around here. We grew up here in a little bit better shape than the people who was in the Delta...Owned our own land and had a little more privilege, had a little more education, went to school more than the ones in the Delta.” Interview with “Little” Joe Ayers on July 11, 2010.

³³ Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 184.

³⁴ Marshall County’s total black population was 17,965 in 1940 and 14,891 in 1970. Sunflower County’s black population was 48,477 in 1940 and 23,261 in 1970. The U.S. Population Census corroborates my assertion that Sunflower County’s black population drop was representative of Delta outmigration during the Second Great Migration. U.S. Census Bureau, *United States Census of Population and Housing, 1940: Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: Mississippi*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1940; U.S. Census Bureau. *United States Census of Population and Housing, 1970: Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: Mississippi*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1970.

³⁵ James Elihue Howell, “An Oral History with James Elihue Howell,” interview by Robert Hawkins, in *Mississippi Oral History Program: The Strawberry Plains Oral History Project, Part 1*, eds. Elizabeth Brister et al. (Hattiesburg, MS: The University of Southern Mississippi Press, 2009), 298.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 298.

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a fair man. In the fall, he always gave his hands their fair half [half of the yield of cotton produced by the hands].”³⁷

Indicative of the fact that many Hill Country residents remained little affected by mid-twentieth-century federal policies aimed at promoting land consolidation and agribusiness, former sharecroppers recollect that their families practiced subsistence farming. This allowed sharecroppers to better provide for their families. Interviewed in 2003, octogenarian Idalia Holloway remembered that her family “didn’t have to buy” produce.³⁸ She proudly mentions that her family’s garden yielded cabbage, tomatoes, onions, greens, beans, English peas, and potatoes.³⁹ For his part, Howell recalled that his family cultivated a similar subsistence garden and also raised livestock like chickens, cows, and pigs.⁴⁰ Howell exclaimed, “Back then we raised most all of our food.”⁴¹ Like many of his peers, Howell and his family supplemented their diet through hunting and gathering.⁴² Sharecroppers would often hunt for rabbit, squirrel, and opossum; fish for bass and catfish; and pick wild apples, pears, and peaches.⁴³

Over the course of the twentieth century, a relatively stable agrarian economy characterized by sizeable black landownership and a viable sharecropping sector helped to root many blacks in the region. The economy was never robust and diverse enough, however, to attract many newcomers to the Hill Country. This relative lack of in-migration to the region also affected Hill Country music. As former editor of *Living Blues* magazine Scott Barretta observed, “[T]raditional music has survived in a way, just because you haven’t had as much turnover demographically, or it hasn’t been as traumatic.”⁴⁴ Musical genres like fiddle and banjo and string band lasted far longer in the Hill Country than they did elsewhere in the South. Today, black fife and drum music exists only in the Hill Country and the region boasts one of the few active blues scenes in the state. Unlike the Delta, which experienced a constant stream of young black migrants from across the state who brought with them the latest cultural forms, the weight of tradition remained substantial in the Hill Country.⁴⁵ Moreover, while the Delta is situated on the Mississippi River, through which black, white, Francophone, Caribbean, and Latin cultures flow, the Hill Country was hardly such a diverse cultural entrepôt.

The reality of black landownership further influenced the development and perpetuation of Hill Country music. Because Hill Country blacks tended to have more control over their time than Delta blacks, they had more leisure time to play music. As Hill Country resident and former juke joint proprietor Sammie Greer reminisced:

³⁷ McAlexander, *Strawberry Plains Audubon Center*, 110.

³⁸ Idalia Holloway, “An Oral History with Idalia Holloway,” interview by Brooke Butler and Robert Hawkins, in *Mississippi Oral History Program: The Strawberry Plains Oral History Project, Part 1*, eds. Elizabeth Brister et al. (Hattiesburg, MS: The University of Southern Mississippi Press, 2009), 167.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴⁰ Howell, “An Oral History with James Elihu Howell,” 369.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 310.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 311; 369.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 369; McAlexander, *Strawberry Plains Audubon Center*, 117.

⁴⁴ Barretta, July 23, 2010

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

See, in the Delta you probably couldn't sit on the porch and just play your music... [In the Hill Country] you *owned* the land...So, music developed in the Hills of Mississippi, I think, because you had idle evenings. Like in the Delta, I'm sure a person probably work until dark...But here, daddy and them would always cut off [stop working], and the time that he would cut off, they would go sit on the porch...[with] a quart of corn whiskey or a gallon and some water over here, and he would just sit there and he would sing.⁴⁶

Hill Country blues guitarist Steve "Lightnin'" Malcolm concurred that black landownership helped forge and develop Hill Country music:

When you move to the city, you [live] in an apartment complex. You can't like just sit up in the porch... [I]t ain't the same as like throwing a yard party and just getting raw [with those] electric amps...There's more control—when you live out on a farm, you can play all night and your kids can get to play. Over the years, that stuff develops into a serious thing...[Y]ou don't see that in cities as much, it ain't available. You gotta go rent rehearsal space. It ain't the same thing as having barbeques and just playing all day.⁴⁷

While black landowners did employ day laborers, small farmers also relied on nonwage communal relations of production. Sammie Greer recalled that "[W]e [Hill Country blacks] would sometimes have ten different families out in the field, all of us working—nobody's getting paid—we help each other to get your crops out of the field, to pull the corn, to pick the cotton. And then, you rotate around and help each other."⁴⁸ This same communal ethos came to characterize Hill Country music and local performance events.

THE HILL COUNTRY'S RELATIVE ISOLATION AND LONG-LIVED AGRARIAN ECONOMY

While the Hill Country's small-holding and sharecropping blacks were poor, most were able to provide for their families over the generations. They managed to do so in tight-knit communities that remained largely removed from the modernizing trends affecting their neighbors in the Delta. Such matters as rural isolation and economic marginality must be considered when one searches for explanations for why a vital blues tradition has continued to endure in the Hill Country when it has passed elsewhere into a practice that finds traveling musicians playing old Delta and Chicago favorites in clubs for almost exclusively white audiences. It was with respect to both isolation and marginalization that in the early 1990s filmmaker Robert Palmer opined: "Spending time in those hills can be like visiting another country or another time."⁴⁹ Although Palmer's rhetoric reproduces popular tropes of dynamic urban modernity versus timeless rural tradition, it was the case that until the late twentieth

⁴⁶ Interview with Sammie Greer, July 11, 2010.

⁴⁷ Interview with Cedric Burnside and Steve "Lightnin'" Malcolm on June 25, 2010.

⁴⁸ Greer, July 11, 2010.

⁴⁹ Robert Mudge, director, *Deep Blues: A Musical Pilgrimage to the Crossroads*, DVD (Los Angeles, CA: Shout! Factory, 2003).

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century many small Hill Country African American communities could not be found on any state maps.⁵⁰

Much of the Hill Country’s rural isolation and economic marginality owes to the fact that, unlike the Delta, the former never experienced major economic booms. While the Delta emerged over the late 1800s and early 1900s as a major hub of plantation agriculture, the Hill Country was unable to boast “large-scale agricultural production” or “big business.”⁵¹ Despite the creation of some industrial plants in the region starting in the first half of the twentieth century, the Hill Country economy is still marked by scant diversity.⁵² Small, subsistence farming endures alongside the employment of unskilled black workers in furniture manufacturing plants, in textile factories, and in poorly remunerated services and trades. It is noteworthy that until the 1960s Civil Rights campaigns, racial codes had effectively foreclosed the employment of Hill Country blacks in local manufacturing and industrial sectors.⁵³

This pattern of social isolation and economic marginality helped shape Hill Country music and blues. The Hill Country’s blues scene was marked by the region’s relative insularity. As late as the 1980s, it was difficult to hear live popular music from outside the region. The Hill Country did not have many privately owned clubs or roadhouses where visiting popular artists could perform, as they did so often in the Delta.⁵⁴ Moreover, whereas in the 1930s and 1940s, a young Muddy Waters in the Delta city of Clarksdale could listen to a “newfangled jukebox,”⁵⁵ which had all the latest “urban”⁵⁶ big band and swing songs, the Hill Country could not boast such amenities. Indeed, the few Hill Country jukeboxes tended to play “older music.”⁵⁷ There were hardly any nearby record shops, and it would have been difficult for most black Hill Country residents to afford records. Perhaps the only way to hear modern black music was on the radio. Hill Country residents may have heard the broadcasts from Memphis’s WDIA and Helena, Arkansas’s KFFA, which broadcast popular blues programs starting in 1941. This may account for the fact that many Hill Country blues artists, like R.L. Burnside, covered the Delta and Chicago blues of Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker. Yet, as Hill Country resident Sammie Greer explains, “You didn’t have record players, radios, things of that nature.... [A] battery for the radios, you had to get it charged for fifty cents every week. And fifty cents is like a thousand dollars back then. So, the only music you had was the thumping of the old guitar.”⁵⁸

Finding themselves largely marginalized from the more commodified entertainment markets, Hill Country residents turned to each other and to local venues to bring music and enjoyment into their lives. As R.L. Burnside’s grandson Cody Burnside reminisced, listening

⁵⁰ Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 338.

⁵¹ Barretta, July 23, 2010.

⁵² Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 185.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁵⁴ Evans, July 29, 2010.

⁵⁵ Robert Gordon, *Can’t Be Satisfied: The Life and Times of Muddy Waters* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2002), 21.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 313–314.

⁵⁷ Up until the 1950s, Hill Country jukeboxes carried mostly “sweet music” that was recorded in the 1910s and 1920s. These songs were written and recorded in New York’s Tin Pan Alley. Barretta, July 23, 2010.

⁵⁸ Greer, July 11, 2010.

to the radio or the jukebox was less popular among Hill Country bluesmen than was the communal playing of music with their peers. Cody remembered, “They [bluesmen] sit on the porch and probably hook up and just start playing.... They wasn’t really trying to just spread out [i.e., attempting to master other musical styles], they was trying to entertain their friends, because, basically, a lot of them didn’t even just listen to the radio.”⁵⁹ As Cody’s comment suggests, Hill Country artists developed unique local styles, in part, because they did not have to compete with and adapt to popular musical forms or bow to recording industry pressures.⁶⁰ According to Barreta:

[B]lack audiences in the cities are extremely tough. And they want the bands to be able to play the modern hits...A lot of artists have talked about how they were competing with the jukebox...Being idiosyncratic or doing your own thing is a way of getting fired, because the clients will go up to the bar and say, “Tell this guy to shut up and put the jukebox on.”... So I think, by virtue of being the only game around, and being in this relatively isolated rural area, that had a lot to do with it.... They weren’t trying to ever cut records, they weren’t trying to keep up with anything...Junior’s [juke joint] was it.⁶¹

COMMUNITY-ORIENTED PERFORMANCE VENUES AND THE SOCIAL REPRODUCTION OF HILL COUNTRY LOCALITIES AND MUSIC

In Hill Country counties, like Marshall, family picnics, house parties, fish fries, and juke joints have helped to keep local music relevant and vital. Such musical events were extremely important, because, prior to 1960, they were often the only occasions in which blacks could go to dance and socialize with one another.⁶² (See Appendix I, Figures 8, 9, and 10.) In the 1920s and 30s, blacks were only allowed to go into towns for entertainment on Saturdays, and even after this ban was lifted, community dance halls and fraternal organizations remained segregated.⁶³ Moreover, with the exception of Holly Springs, the Hill Country did not have much of a club or concert scene and was therefore largely unable to attract traveling musicians. Although proprietors of local juke joints often asked for a small entrance fee, other community-oriented gatherings were either free of charge or designed to solicit donations for local schools, churches, and Masonic organizations.⁶⁴ This of course made Hill Country musical events different than most privately-owned clubs, in which the profit motive dominated. Since almost no families owned telephones, Hill Country residents used rudimentary forms of communication to publicize musical events. As late as the 1980s, it was not uncommon for fife and drum bands to advertise events by playing on the backs of flatbed trucks that rode through rural communities.⁶⁵

Hill Country musical events typically occurred on weekends and were moments of enjoyment for the entire community after a long workweek. While these gatherings featured

⁵⁹ Interview with Cody Burnside on July 30, 2010.

⁶⁰ Evans, July 29, 2010.

⁶¹ Barretta, July 23, 2010.

⁶² Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 421.

⁶³ Ibid, 420; 421.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 443.

⁶⁵ Bill Ferris, Judy Peiser, and David Evans, directors, *Gravel Springs Fife and Drum*, 16mm (1971); Bradley Beesley and Andrew Mayer, directors, *Hill Stomp Holler*, VHS (1999).

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more polished “musicianers” (a vernacular term for performers), all participants were encouraged “to show off what music they wanted.”⁶⁶ This open and communal sense of creating Hill Country music continues to persist today. It is evidenced by the insistence of juke joint manager Robert Kimbrough, Sr. (one of Junior Kimbrough’s sons) that this author take his best shot at singing the blues for those assembled at his establishment.

As former juke joint proprietor Sammie Greer recalled, jukes and picnics were popular among poor Hill Country residents in the 1970s and 1980s for the same reason they were popular in the 1920s and 1930s: “There was no other place to go. There was nothing else to do.... The only enjoyment in life was the blues on the weekend.”⁶⁷ Perhaps reflecting his own origins in a sparsely populated community, bluesman and fife and drum player R.L. Boyce exclaimed, “Ooo, playing at picnics, you see more people than you ever seen in your life. Didn’t matter what color it was, they was there.”⁶⁸ “Little” Joe Ayers, the bassist for and contemporary of Junior Kimbrough, described the communal experience of juke joints as follows: “Oh, God Almighty, it wouldn’t be anything but a whole lot of fun, man. I mean everybody was like sisters and brothers. It looked like a big family of peoples....young [and] old, they knew everybody.”⁶⁹ Kinship is a real and symbolic mechanism through which communities are forged and imagined.⁷⁰ Ayer’s recollection reveals that juke joints and Hill Country music were sites in which Hill Country residents came together to experience and recreate community and place. Moreover, as Boyce indicates, occasionally the sense and sentiments of collectivity fostered in these venues managed to cross the color line.

Musicians and their audiences together forged the feelings of community created at Hill Country blues events. The artists and crowd were not physically separated as they were at many Mississippi clubs. Artists performing at picnics, juke joints, fish fries, and house parties would often dance with the audience.⁷¹ By virtue of living together in a small isolated region, the musicians often knew audience members intimately. For Sammie Greer, this is the reason why Hill Country musical events were different than those in the Delta. He explains:

Junior had about one hundred people who gon’ be there every weekend. R.L. Burnside was known and they loved him. And then they played and you could enjoy it and you *knew* him. Like probably Muddy Waters... and B.B. King, you couldn’t get close to those musicians. But here, you came here and Junior was sitting in the corner and he was going to talk to you and if you had nice legs and you looked good, he was going to encourage you to go to his cabin afterward. They got to know the people they was playing for, they were more friendly.⁷²

Junior Kimbrough often asserted that he held his house parties to “bring the community together and... keep the blues going.”⁷³ Thus, Kimbrough understood and reproduced the

⁶⁶ Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 422.

⁶⁷ Greer, July 11, 2010.

⁶⁸ Interview with R.L. Boyce on July 18, 2010.

⁶⁹ Ayers, July 11, 2010.

⁷⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

⁷¹ George Mitchell, *Blow My Blues Away* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 54.

⁷² Greer, July 11, 2010.

⁷³ Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 433.

vital synergy between community and music: “Bringing the community together” was essential to maintaining the local blues tradition, just as the sustaining of blues music and blues performance events helped to solidify and perpetuate Hill Country communities.

“Bringing the community together” could and did have some highly earthy dimensions, which no doubt increased the appeal of these blues events for many locals. As Oliver writes, part of the attraction was that they “symbolized everything that is most profane in the secular world of rural African-Americans.”⁷⁴ Sammie Greer expressed it more bluntly, “Good food, music, dancing, drinking, sex.”⁷⁵ Greer described the picnics he went to as a child in the 1970s and the events hosted by his juke joint, the Chewalla Rib Shack, in the 1990s, exclaiming: “It was very exciting...everybody came there and they sit around with gallon jugs of corn whiskey, and there was a craps game going on somewhere... [Someone would pull out a guitar] and the next thing you know, they gambling, and they’re dancing, and the cooking was going on... fish cooking—you could smell it a half a mile away.”⁷⁶ Greer spoke fondly of a backroom called “the cathouse” where he and Junior Kimbrough would have sex with attractive women who had come to the juke joint.⁷⁷

PROMINENT MUSICAL FAMILIES AND THE PERPETUATION OF HILL COUNTRY BLUES

The communal nature of the Hill Country, with its perpetuation of a broad range of non-commodified social relations, extends to how individuals have managed to master the playing of instruments and the musical styles integral to Hill Country blues. In contrast to most localities, where novices have to pay for musical training and where skills may be jealously guarded as private property, Hill Country families and neighbors have typically passed on their musical traditions to kin and neighbors freely. Since families are the building blocks of community, it is significant that a major driving force behind the creation, innovation, and preservation of Hill Country music has been the members of several prominent local families. Members of the Hemphill, McDowell, Kimbrough, Burnside, and Turner families have passed the music down from generation to generation, taught it to members of the wider community, and performed with each other. Ethnomusicologist and Hill Country resident Sylvester W. Oliver, Jr. aptly referred to these musical families as “keepers of song...keepers of tradition.”⁷⁸

The family with the oldest documented musical tradition is the Hemphills, who boast five to six generations of musicians. Born in 1876, Sid Hemphill, a blind multi-instrumentalist who in 1949 became the first Hill Country artist to be recorded, learned music from his father and was part of a family band that included his six brothers.⁷⁹ Sid Hemphill would later teach his three daughters (Sidney Lee, Rosa Lee, and Virgie Lee Hemphill), niece (Ada Mae Anderson), and granddaughter (Jessie Mae Hemphill) how to play.⁸⁰ Jessie Mae would go on to play fife and drum music with another prominent family of

⁷⁴ Ibid, 421.

⁷⁵ Greer, July 11, 2010.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Interview with Sylvester W. Oliver, Jr. on July 28, 2011.

⁷⁹ Alan Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began* (New York: The New Press, 1993), 333.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 337; Mitchell, *Blow My Blues Away*, 101.

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musicians, the Turners. Her death in 2006 unfortunately ended the Hemphill musical lineage.

The McDowell clan was led by “Mississippi” Fred McDowell, who was born (ironically) in southwestern Tennessee in 1904 and moved to the Hill Country in the early 1920s. McDowell often played with his aunt, Fannie Davis, his sister Becky, and his wife Annie Mae McDowell.⁸¹ While Fred and his wife were the last McDowells to play Hill Country music, he was instrumental in helping to teach blues to R.L. Burnside and Junior Kimbrough and his brothers.⁸² Junior recalled that throughout the 1940s, Fred McDowell would visit the Kimbrough house every Sunday morning.⁸³

Junior Kimbrough, his older brothers Duke, Felix, and Grady, and his older sister Callie all learned how to play the guitar from their father David Kimbrough, Sr. and from McDowell.⁸⁴ Junior, in turn, taught many of his thirty-six children. Junior’s sons David, Jr. and Kent (“Kinney”) formed part of Junior’s last band, and son Robert, Sr. currently leads a Holly Springs-based blues group. David, Jr. and Kinney have children who also play. Junior often played with R.L. Burnside and his sons, Joseph, Daniel, Duwayne, Dexter, and Garry,⁸⁵ with R.L.’s grandsons Cedric, Cody, and Kent, and with R.L.’s son-in-law Calvin Jackson. (See Appendix I, Figure 11.) The latter, in turn, drummed alongside fife player Otha(r) Turner.

Otha(r) Turner led the Rising Star Fife and Drum Band, which included several of his relatives (including his daughter, Bernice Turner Pratcher and his nephew, R.L. Boyce) and members of other prominent Hill Country musical families, like Calvin Jackson and Jessie Mae Hemphill. Before his death in 2003, Turner taught his granddaughter Shardé Thomas (born in 1990) how to play the fife. (See Appendix I, Figure 12.) Thomas currently leads the Rising Star Fife and Drum Band, which is one of only two active black fife and drum bands in the United States.⁸⁶

This list of past and present musicians reveals that Hill Country music is, without a doubt, a communal and family affair.⁸⁷ Moving forward, Robert Kimbrough, Sr. stresses the importance of maintaining ties with the other families: “It means a lot [still having an inter-family connection]. Dad and ‘em gone now. And I knew if they could see this, they would really, really be happy with what they’re seeing. You know, the boys carrying on.... They want us to keep it going. And the only way we gonna keep it going—we got to stick together.”⁸⁸

⁸¹ Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began*, 352; Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 469.

⁸² Ibid, 468.

⁸³ Ibid, 469.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 479-480.

⁸⁵ Of R.L. Burnside’s thirteen children, twelve played with him at some point. Beesley and Mayer, *Hill Stomp Hollar*.

⁸⁶ The other group is a family band based in the Hill Country town of Senatobia.

⁸⁷ For more information on the current generation of Kimbroughs, Burnside, and Turners, see Scott Barretta, Mark Camarigg, Mark Coltrain, and Bill Steber, “Mississippi Hill Country Blues: The Next Generation,” *Living Blues*, April 2007, 8-39; “The Burnside/Kimbrough Families,” *Living Blues*, March/April 1995, 80.

⁸⁸ Interview with Robert Kimbrough, Sr. on June 25, 2010.

Most Hill Country artists I interviewed stressed that no one formally taught them how to play—instead, they were expected to learn by watching other musicians. Reflecting the centrality of music to Hill Country culture, most interviewees indicated that they were so eager to learn that formal lessons were both unthinkable and unnecessary. Just as a young Junior Kimbrough used to stand on his sister’s shoulders to take his older brothers’ guitar from the attic when they were at work,⁸⁹ Junior managed to stoke musical curiosity in his own children by declaring his practice room “off limits.”⁹⁰ Shardé Thomas told Scott Barretta that she started playing the fife because “I seen my grandfather doing it and it was something that I wanted to do... He wouldn’t tell me [when I played correctly]. He would just make a smile and I knew I was doing something right.”⁹¹

No matter how they came to learn their craft, members of musical families were expected to play in front of community audiences at an early age. R.L. Boyce remembers that when he was fifteen, his uncle, Otha(r) Turner declared, “Hey boy, come here. I believe you gon’ have to play this drum one day.”⁹² Boyce soon found himself playing at picnics with his uncle. Cedric Burnside told me that when he was ten and his uncle Garry was eleven, both were expected to play with R.L. and Junior at Junior’s Place. On those occasions, when the police came to investigate the juke joint, the two boys hid under beer coolers.⁹³ Likewise, female artists often played in front of crowds at young ages. Sid Hemphill would often stop playing, and shout, “Y’all girls can take it,” at which point, his daughters, niece, and granddaughter would commence to play.⁹⁴ Jessie Mae Hemphill, the youngest member of this so-called “woman group” was just nine when she started playing publically.⁹⁵ She was not tall enough to reach the drums, so she had to stand on a chair to play.⁹⁶

The family-based nature of Hill Country music meant that local artists hardly fit the conventional stereotype of the macho, itinerant bluesmen who never slept in the same bed or with the same woman twice. While some artists like Junior Kimbrough certainly had their fair share of women (having fathered thirty-six children), Kimbrough and other Hill Country artists played almost exclusively in the Hill Country and featured family members in their bands. Moreover, in contrast to the blues traditions of most regions of Mississippi (like the Delta), Hill Country music was not exclusively thought of as a man’s profession. Patriarchs like Sid Hemphill and Otha(r) Turner encouraged their female relatives. Blueswoman Jessie Mae Hemphill was as popular as any male performer. In stark contrast to the stereotypical itinerant bluesman, Hill Country blues artists often viewed music as a

⁸⁹ Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 480.

⁹⁰ As his son, Robert Kimbrough, Sr., recalled: “[H]e would say, “Don’t go in there and mess with no instruments.” But it didn’t stop us, ‘cause every time he left, we was in there. So we learned to play, me and my brothers and them. We started on boxes and then when dad got the instruments, there we was, in there, breaking strings and busting drums. You know, he would come in and trip out, but he knew one day it would pay us [pay off].... He wanted us to pick it up for ourselves. That’s why he kept us around him at all times.” Robert Kimbrough, Sr., June 25, 2010.

⁹¹ Scott Barretta, “Sharde Thomas: Carrying On,” *Living Blues*, April 2007, 20.

⁹² Boyce, July 18, 2010.

⁹³ Cedric Burnside and Malcolm, June 25, 2010.

⁹⁴ Mitchell, *Blow My Blues Away*, 106.

⁹⁵ Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began*, 337.

⁹⁶ Mitchell, *Blow My Blues Away*, 87.

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second job, or even as a hobby. Although some artists like Sid Hemphill were “straight musician[s]” who made their living entirely off of music,⁹⁷ the vast majority were farmers first and musicians second.⁹⁸ Because many of the musical events were free of charge, most artists never saw much money and played for personal enjoyment. Indeed, many did not believe that they could make a living by cutting records or touring.⁹⁹ As Junior Kimbrough asserted, “We didn’t even think about making records in the old days....We just went from house to house playing parties. We didn’t think anybody else would like what we were doing.”¹⁰⁰

Finally, far different from the image of the wandering bluesmen whose “home” was on the rails, most Hill Country bluesmen forthrightly chose their places of origin over the road. While he was performing at colleges and music festivals throughout the United States and Europe in the 1960s, Fred McDowell continued to live in his trailer in Como and pump gas at Stuckey’s Store. McDowell refused to leave the Hill Country, because, as he told his agent, “All my friends are here, so you know I’m going to be here.”¹⁰¹ While R.L. Burnside briefly lived in Chicago in the late 1940s (before he had made any recordings), he returned to the Hill Country and lived there for the rest of his life. Burnside left Chicago following the murders of his father and two brothers who were living in the city. Thus, even after achieving fame Burnside, like McDowell, chose to remain in the Hill Country. He too appreciated that the Hill Country was a tight-knit, secure community where he could raise a family.¹⁰² Not only did Junior Kimbrough remain in the Hill Country, but he also hated to leave the region to tour.¹⁰³ He far preferred audiences to come to his juke joint, touring only sporadically until the final years of his life when he participated in many Fat Possum concerts.

In large part due to the example set by their forbearers, the vast majority of Junior and R.L.’s children and grandchildren continue to reside in Mississippi today. As Robert Kimbrough, Sr. explained, “My dad was here his whole life, and myself, I wouldn’t want to leave Mississippi. I would rather stay here in Mississippi, and just travel to play my music. And my family, which is my brothers, is still here in Mississippi and they enjoy it. I don’t think they’ll leave either.”¹⁰⁴ Remembering his grandfather’s legacy, Cody Burnside stated, “You should never leave where you come from. Most people make money ... [and] they run off. But, if you really love what you’re doing and love your craft and how you get started, you’ll stick with where you came from.... I’ve been all over the world touring with my

⁹⁷ Ibid, 61.

⁹⁸ Perhaps the secure, yet marginal economic lifestyle in the Hill Country meant that there was less pressure to advance financially through music. This orientation contrasted with the Delta where musicians often based their livelihoods solely on their performances. When Delta artists proved unsuccessful locally, they were commonly forced to relocate to Northern cities, like Chicago.

⁹⁹ Evans, July 29, 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Geoffrey Himes, “Playin’,” *Replay*, March 1997, 17.

¹⁰¹ Steve Cheseborough, *Blues Traveling: The Holy Sites of Delta Blues* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 242.

¹⁰² Michael Pettengell, “R.L. Burnside: ‘Well, Well, Well!’,” *Living Blues*, September/October 1994, 17.

¹⁰³ Tom Freeland, “David ‘Junior’ Kimbrough (1930-1998),” *Blues Access*, Spring 1998, 46.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Kimbrough, Sr., June 25, 2010.

brother and I still haven't seen a place that would make me leave Mississippi."¹⁰⁵ These words of third-generation Hill Country bluesman Cody Burnside eloquently capture a central theme of this section. Hill Country blues has been nurtured and firmly rooted over the generations in family, community, and place.¹⁰⁶

A NATIONAL STAGE: REPRESENTATIONS OF RACE, BLACK MASCULINITY, AND RURALITY IN THE HILL COUNTRY BLUES

Throughout most of the twentieth century, Hill Country blues received scant attention outside the region. This lack of wider attention both reflected and helped to promote the rootedness of Hill Country artists and their music in communal values, and within highly localized forms of social organization. Events in the early 1990s, however, came to challenge these patterns. Members of the media, record companies, and scholars "discovered" Hill Country blues and proceeded to bring certain artists (most notably R.L. Burnside and Junior Kimbrough) to the attention of a national audience. This discovery eventually led to struggles and accommodations over matters of symbolic representation, musical authenticity, and appropriate marketing strategies.

THE FOUNDING OF FAT POSSUM RECORDS AND THE POPULARIZATION OF HILL COUNTRY BLUES

Hill Country blues gained a modicum of popular attention following the success of Robert Palmer's 1991 documentary film *Deep Blues: A Musical Pilgrimage to the Crossroads*.¹⁰⁷ While the film included performances by artists from across Mississippi, most critics and viewers felt that it was the Hill Country musicians (R.L. Burnside, Jessie Mae Hemphill, and Junior Kimbrough) who stole the show.¹⁰⁸ The film helped introduce Hill Country artists to blues fans—the film's target audience—many of whom were largely unaware that there were blues traditions outside of the Delta.¹⁰⁹ One blues fan who was

¹⁰⁵ Cody Burnside, July 30, 2010.

¹⁰⁶ It is by no means surprising that several of the songs that Cedric and Cody Burnside performed at an April 21, 2011 concert at Yale University contained lyrics that celebrated "Big Mama" Burnside and R.L. Burnside. Yet, it is not my intention to overly romanticize family sentiments and relations among Hill Country residents. Particularly for those members of Hill Country blues families who now perform under contract in clubs and concerts, family ties can sometimes be overly freighted with grievances and knowledge of past and present transgressions (e.g., drug abuse that makes the reliability of musicians suspect). As Holly Springs resident, blues photographer, and local music historian Willie Wilkinson explained, such family tensions have led to the disbanding and reconfiguration of Hill Country blues groups and to the inclusion of non-family members. Interview with Willie Wilkinson on April 22, 2011.

¹⁰⁷ Mugge, *Deep Blues*.

¹⁰⁸ Anthony DeCurtis, "Mississippi Musings: Two New CDs Bring the Blues Alive," *Men's Journal*, March/April 1993; Carle V.P. Groome, "Creem Media: Deep Blues, A Film by Robert Mugge with Commentary by Robert Palmer," *Creem*, 1992.

¹⁰⁹ After watching the film, the Rolling Stones, Sting, and U2 ventured to Junior's Place with Palmer to sit in with Kimbrough's band. While Palmer initially attempted to conceal the identity of these artists, he realized that most Hill Country residents had little knowledge of or interest in rock musicians. Palmer told Oliver of one incident where a couple of these visiting musicians were unable to keep up with Kimbrough's band. An irate

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deeply impacted by the film was University of Mississippi student Matthew Johnson. In 1991 Johnson used a student loan to found the Oxford, Mississippi-based Fat Possum Records, in collaboration with former *Living Blues* magazine editor Peter Redvers-Lee.¹¹⁰ Johnson and Redvers-Lee, in turn, recruited Palmer to produce Junior Kimbrough’s *All Night Long* and R.L. Burnside’s *Too Bad Jim*. These albums, both released in 1992, were some of the label’s earliest releases.

While *All Night Long* and *Too Bad Jim* were critically acclaimed, they did not sell enough copies to keep the company afloat.¹¹¹ Indeed, like *Deep Blues*, the albums were marketed to and purchased by a small group of blues fans (also known as “blues purists”) who actively sought the albums out. These purists¹¹² were excited about Hill Country music, because it showed that there was still original, so-called authentic blues being played in Mississippi. To the dismay of Johnson, who struggled to keep his business solvent, the very small and specialized consumer base for Hill Country blues proved financially restrictive.

Sales picked up considerably when Fat Possum, now with Johnson alone at the helm, altered its marketing strategy. In the mid-1990s, the record company elected to pair Hill Country bluesmen with alternative rock bands in an effort to appeal to a larger demographic— young, white, alternative rock fans. Johnson hoped that white alternative rock groups would act as cultural mediators and expose Hill Country blues to a larger white audience, in much the same fashion that 1950s folk revivalists like Pete Seeger and 1960s blues-rockers did with Delta bluesmen such as Son House and Muddy Waters. Johnson surmised that fans of alternative rock, with its “unpolished,” “wild,” do-it-yourself ethos, might find the mainstream blues of Waters, B.B. King, and Buddy Guy to be “too slick.”¹¹³ In an attempt to appeal to alternative rockers, Johnson elected to represent and market Hill Country blues as “outsider” music.¹¹⁴ He reasoned correctly that this repackaging would resonate with the alternative rock subculture. Johnson asserted that Hill Country blues was “totally lacking in sophistication.”¹¹⁵ In stark contrast to Lomax’s portrait of restrained and unvarnished rural folk, Fat Possum argued that Hill Country bluesmen evinced a “fuck you attitude.”¹¹⁶

Confident in his new marketing strategy, Johnson paired R.L. Burnside with the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion and Junior Kimbrough with Iggy Pop. (See Appendix I, Figure 13.) New blues-alternative fusion albums like R.L. Burnside and the Jon Spencer Blues

local bluesman allegedly told the rock stars, “you can’t play no guitar; give it here, and let me show you how to play it.” Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 435.

¹¹⁰ Michael Dixon, “Fat Possum: A Rocky Road for the Roots Label,” *Blues Access*, Winter 1997.

¹¹¹ As Fat Possum cofounder Peter Redvers-Lee told me, early on the company was lucky to sell one thousand copies of any of its records. The company’s highest selling record, Junior Kimbrough’s *All Night Long*, sold a mere two-thousand copies. Redvers-Lee and the rest of the Fat Possum executives worked for free and spent their own money in order to make the recordings. Phone interview with Peter Redvers-Lee on March 25, 2011.

¹¹² Blues purists are individuals who listen primarily to traditional acoustic or electric blues. They desire ‘authentic’ blues and are opposed to fusing blues with other musical genres like rock, hip-hop, and funk.

¹¹³ Barretta, July 23, 2010; Matthew Johnson, “We’re trying our best,” in *Darker Blues*, David Raccuglia (Oxford, MS: Fat Possum Records, 2003).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Himes, “Playin’,” 17.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

Explosion's *A Ass Pocket of Whiskey* sold many more copies than previous records. To cement his ties with alternative rock fans, Johnson began severing his relations with those blues purists who disagreed with his new marketing approach. Thus, Peter Redvers-Lee was driven out of the company. As if liberated, Johnson adopted a new motto: "Not the Same Old Blues Crap."¹¹⁷ In the Fat Possum-funded documentary film, *You See Me Laughin': The Last of the Hill Country Bluesmen*, Johnson defiantly asserts that Fat Possum was making blues "relevant" and that "[t]here are not enough purists around to support a company that just makes records that all sound like they were done in 1931....[We] bring it [blues music] into this century."¹¹⁸ He might well have added, we transport Hill Country blues from the rural margins to a popular, national stage.

The great irony is that, in order to entice his coveted alternative rock audience to purchase Fat Possum's brand of *modern* blues, Johnson deployed decidedly *old* racial stereotypes.¹¹⁹ Fat Possum stressed the themes of rurality, hyper-sexualized black masculinity, and violence in album liner notes, accompanying artwork, and advertisements. Company representatives also appear to have written denigrating stereotypes into song lyrics. Johnson summed up his portrayal of his artists when he argued, "Old bluesmen are supposed to be bad people."¹²⁰

Fat Possum attempted to underscore the immorality and transgressiveness of their artists in the cartoon "The Rude Blues," which accompanied the release of the company's promotional book *Darker Blues* in 2003. (See Appendix I, Figure 14.) The cartoon "tells the story" of Fat Possum recording artists R.L. Burnside, T-Model Ford (a Delta-born bluesman who often plays in a Hill Country-style), and Paul Jones (a Delta bluesman). The cartoon is set inside a rural juke joint and immediately opens by equating this "backwoods" location with violence and vice: "[The music] comes from the deepest South, from the land that America forgot, impoverished and violent and crack-ridden Mississippi."¹²¹ Amidst this forgotten and rural state, the bluesmen portrayed in the comic are described as, "specimen[s] of a mysterious far-away time." Whether or not this depiction is meant to be satirical, it manages to evoke unsettling images drawn from such colonial classics as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*¹²² and from later Hollywood epics featuring bloodthirsty blacks in the deepest recesses of primeval Africa.

Not only is the Hill Country now represented as lawless, but it is the region's black men who are specifically labeled as dangerous and prone to violence. Indeed, when the cartoon first introduces R.L. Burnside, it immediately points out that he murdered a man and served time at Parchman Farm.¹²³ Not content with portraying Burnside as murderous,

¹¹⁷ Jay McInerney, "White Man at the Door: One man's mission to record the 'dirty blues' – before everyone dies," *The New Yorker*, February 4, 2002, 55.

¹¹⁸ Mandy Stein, director, *You See Me Laughin': The Last of the Hill Country Bluesmen*, DVD (Oxford, MS: Fat Possum Records, 2005).

¹¹⁹ I attempted to interview the current heads of Fat Possum, Matthew Johnson and Bruce Watson, but both rejected my request. Fat Possum is currently being sued by the families of many of their former artists (including the Burnside and Kimbroughs) and is reluctant to grant interviews.

¹²⁰ Johnson, "We're trying our best."

¹²¹ Joe Sacco, "The Rude Blues," in *Darker Blues*, David Raccuglia (Oxford, MS: Fat Possum Records, 2003).

¹²² Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Tribeca Books, 2011).

¹²³ A still-functioning prison and work farm located in the Delta town of Parchman.

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he is further depicted as a hyper-sexualized black male who wants nothing more than to have sex with young white women. In one frame of the cartoon, Burnside looks on with glee as fellow bluesman T-Model Ford “fondles the proffered breasts and rubs himself against the willing asses of [white] women half a century his junior.”¹²⁴ One can assume that Burnside either has or will join his friend in the action. We confront here references to the powerful and highly disturbing stereotype of “the black buck as rapist.” This trope of black masculinity and sexuality emerged in the South in the wake of emancipation and eventually circulated nationally.¹²⁵

The image of Burnside as a backwoods, violent, sex-crazed individual who was obsessed with white women was further perpetuated in the artwork, lyrics, and liner notes of many of his Fat Possum albums. On his most famous and commercially successful album, *A Ass Pocket of Whiskey*, Burnside is again stereotypically depicted in cartoon form. (See Appendix I, Figure 15.) Two blonde, scantily-clad white women dressed in Daisy Duke cutoffs stand behind a thrusting Burnside. Burnside looks menacing and brandishes a belt that is looped in his hand. The viewer wonders whether the bluesman, who served time in Parchman, will beat these white women into submission. This violent and misogynistic streak continues in the album’s lyrics. In the aptly-titled song “The Criminal Inside Me,” Jon Spencer asks Burnside for “forty nickels for a bag of potato chips,” to which Burnside replies, “If you don’t get out of my face quick, I’m gonna kick yo ass, you son of a bitch...I’m gonna put my foot right in your ass.”

The sound of Burnside’s Fat Possum music is similarly violent. Most songs on *A Ass Pocket of Whiskey* feature blood-curdling screams and shouted vocals. Such songs have been utilized in bloody episodes of the television show *The Sopranos* and during a cockfighting scene on the series *Eastbound & Down*. Finally, liner notes from Burnside’s albums portray him in a stereotypical fashion. The notes for *Too Bad Jim* describe him as a “connoisseur of chaos” who was violent enough to “wave a pistol in the middle of a packed juke joint.”¹²⁶

Fat Possum portrayed Junior Kimbrough in much the same racialized, stereotypical way as it did R.L. Burnside. In 1994, when Kimbrough was sixty-three, Johnson told the *Chicago Tribune* that “Junior still parties like hell....He’s still making his own liquor and just the other day he ended up in jail for running over road signs in his car. The cops pulled him over and found a jar of ‘battery juice’ [corn whiskey] next to him and a .357 [magnum revolver] between his legs.”¹²⁷ Consistent with the reference to Kimbrough’s gun, Fat Possum

¹²⁴ Sacco, “The Rude Blues.”

¹²⁵ Riché Richardson, *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2007). In light of the highly provocative and potentially incendiary nature of the cartoon frame, an empirically-based observation is in order. It is the case that white women often attended house parties and juke joint events; some even had relationships with black men. Yet, according to Oliver, and contrary to the violent tone of the cartoon, “Hardly ever did the scene turn abusive or threatening.” Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 441.

¹²⁶ Robert Palmer, Liner Notes, *Too Bad Jim*, R.L. Burnside, perf., Fat Possum compact disc 80307, 1992. As if this stereotyping were not sufficient, Johnson’s liner notes from *Mr. Wizard* also depicts R.L.’s grandson Cedric Burnside as hyper-sexual: “Oo wee, Cedric likes them girls on the road.” Matthew Johnson, Liner Notes, *Mr. Wizard*, R.L. Burnside, perf. Fat Possum compact disc 80301-2, 1997.

¹²⁷ Greg Kot, “Living the blues: Specialty label chronicles a different kind of music from an unusual place,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 7, 1994.

constantly reminded record buyers that Kimbrough was so sexually insatiable that he fathered thirty-six children.¹²⁸

SIGNIFYING, SEXUALITY, AND VIOLENCE IN THE HILL COUNTRY

It would be erroneous, however to place the onus for the circulation and perpetuation of meanings about black male sexual prowess and violence solely on the shoulders of whites, who over the centuries have expressed their fears and fantasies about the black other, or on record companies that seek to profit from these stereotypes. Albeit for wholly different motives, ranging from aesthetic creativity and play to the forging of solidarity and protest, black cultural agents have developed such tropes in their own practice of signifyin'.¹²⁹ They do so, for example, to boast about black males' unrivaled physical and sexual desirability. In Junior Kimbrough's "You Better Run," we find an instance of signifyin' on the trope of the black rapist. The song advances a wholly different rendering of racial and gender politics than that found in conventional white deployment of the same tropes. Performing his song to predominantly black audiences, Kimbrough would sing: "You better run, don't let him get you / If he gets you, babe, he gonna rape you." There is a spoken break in the song where Kimbrough says, "On the way home, I said, 'Baby, you might still get raped.' She said, 'Mr. Junior, you don't have to rape me, 'cause I love you.'" Here, Junior inverts the very notion of rape by claiming that the woman so desires him that she declares her love. While certain local residents may well have concluded that "decent" women had best avoid Junior's Place and its proprietor, others no doubt appreciated the bluesman's macho playfulness about charged gender politics.

Similarly, the violence inscribed by company owners and advertisers on the bodies and life histories of their Hill Country artists was not simply a market ploy divorced totally from reality. Rather, it was the case that many of the blues artists who had performed in Holly Springs clubs and frequented its red light district had been officially charged and jailed for violent acts. For example, in 1955, R.L. Burnside was incarcerated for six months at Parchman after killing a man in self-defense.

¹²⁸ Matthew Johnson, Liner Notes, *God Knows I Tried*, Junior Kimbrough, perf., Fat Possum compact disc 80320-2, 1998. Of course, Fat Possum was not the first entity to use a stereotypical marketing strategy that highlighted false black pathology in order to sell a product. This approach was and continued to be used for virtually all forms of black popular music, including other subgenres of blues. Indeed, by the mid-1990s, contemporaneous with Fat Possum, record companies marketed hip hop music by deploying the same tired racial stereotypes that "distort racial and sexual fantasy." The recording industry had long deemed the "hood" to be as sexually transgressive and violent an environment as the "backwoods" South. As cultural critic Tricia Rose argues, white audiences' desire or need to view African Americans in a pathological light has a destructive effect both on black communities and black cultural forms. Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk about Hip Hop – And Why it Matters* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2008), 55, ix; Murray Forman, *The 'Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002); Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994);

¹²⁹ Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

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While most of my informants indicated that incidents of violence at picnics and juke joints were rare, they were also quick to point out that when a fight did occur, it usually involved a repudiated sexual advance. According to Sammie Greer:

What would create problems was one man get up and start dancing with another woman [in a suggestive fashion], and the woman would not like that. And you had to shut it down quick before they get angry, because they full of whiskey and pork, blood-pressure zooming up sky-high. And everybody carried a knife, and they've been known to cut back in the day. It wasn't no... guns, because they were too poor to have guns; they can't even buy bullets then.¹³⁰

While Junior Kimbrough and Sammie Greer were extremely successful at preventing altercations in their co-owned juke joint, the threat of violence and the reality of explicit sexuality meant that such musical events, and blues in general, were often looked down upon by middle-class blacks and whites.¹³¹ R.L. Boyce, who would later play blues at musical events, told me that, when he was a boy, his parents forbade him to go to see Junior play.¹³²

HILL COUNTRY MUSICIANS AND THEIR FAMILIES RESPOND TO FAT POSSUM

Although a few of the marketing vignettes deployed by Fat Possum were factual and well known in the Hill Country (such as R.L. killing a man or Junior's fathering many children), neither Junior and R.L. nor their families wanted such information disseminated to a broader public. As Scott Barretta explained, neither of the bluesmen were “conservative kind[s] of guy[s], but still, there's the issue of respectability.”¹³³ Referring to the cover art for *You Better Run: The Essential Junior Kimbrough*, Junior's son David Kimbrough, Jr. stated, “Ain't no way in the world I'd put a man of that age on a cover of a CD with no shirt on! Yeah, they [Fat Possum] did a lot of bad things like that.”¹³⁴ Every musician who contributed to *A Ass Pocket of Whiskey*, including Burnside, detested the cover, which was Johnson's idea.¹³⁵ Several members of the Burnside family tried to ensure that R.L.'s wife Alice never saw it.¹³⁶ Sympathizing with Hill Country families, exiled Fat Possum cofounder Peter Redvers-Lee called Johnson's marketing campaigns “exploitative...a complete croc...It's nonsense, it's just not true. It's just made up.”¹³⁷

Junior also resisted Fat Possum's decision to pair him with punk rocker Iggy Pop. Junior viewed this decision as indicative of the company's desire to alter his music. Kimbrough adamantly asserted: “I play Junior, and nobody else.”¹³⁸ It is clear that Kimbrough felt that his music was ill-suited to be paired with Iggy Pop's. He could not understand or relate to Iggy Pop's violent and frenetic performances, and he often called the

¹³⁰ Greer, July 11, 2010.

¹³¹ Interview with Bill and Annie Hollowell on July 23, 2011.

¹³² Boyce, July 18, 2010.

¹³³ Barretta, July 23, 2010.

¹³⁴ David Kimbrough, Jr., July 17, 2010.

¹³⁵ Bill Friend, “Play the Blues, Punk,” *Postmodern Culture* 9:7 (1997), 9.

¹³⁶ Barretta, July 23, 2010.

¹³⁷ Redvers-Lee, March 25, 2011.

¹³⁸ Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 484.

rocker “crazy.”¹³⁹ Kimbrough further showed his disdain by referring to his stage-mate as “Lolly Pop.”¹⁴⁰

While Kimbrough contested Fat Possum’s new marketing, Burnside appears to have played along with its stereotypical representations of his violent past. Consider how R.L.’s story about his imprisonment in Parchman changed over time. In 1994, shortly after the release of *Too Bad Jim*, Burnside told *Living Blues* that he was imprisoned because “I had the car and some boys had stole some stuff and I didn’t know it was stole. And I was hauling it. They got me for transporting stolen goods.”¹⁴¹ In reality, Burnside went to jail for shooting a man in self-defense. Yet the story Burnside initially related likely made him seem more respectable in the eyes of *Living Blues*’ overwhelmingly white readers. Far from being pathologically violent, Burnside portrayed himself as little more than a hapless victim of the unjust and possibly racist Mississippi legal system. This was a narrative well suited to the magazine’s readership—consumers who held somewhat romanticized views of humble and downtrodden blacks. Yet, a few years later, at the same time that Fat Possum began marketing him as a “bad,” “dangerous” black man, Burnside changed his tale. He told reporters how he shot a man in self-defense, but had not intended to kill him: “I didn’t mean to kill nobody. I just meant to shoot the sonofabitch in the head and two times in the chest. Him dying was between him and the Lord.”¹⁴² Not surprisingly, Fat Possum used the revised narration in many of its marketing campaigns. The company even included a variation of the story in the aforementioned cartoon, “The Rude Blues,”¹⁴³ as well as in their documentary film, *You See Me Laughin*’.¹⁴⁴

Perhaps Burnside resigned himself to a certain amount of negative stereotyping, since it appeared to make him more money. Referring to the *A Ass Pocket of Whiskey* cover art, Cody Burnside, stated:

My grandma [R.L.’s wife Alice] hated it; all of us looked at it and we didn’t really just take to it... You got these pair of two, half-naked white women back there. Why did there have to be any women at all? Why couldn’t it have been a black woman, a Chinese woman or a Mexican woman, whoever? They wanted to feed off [the fact that] my granddaddy killed a dude way back in the day.... And they played on that, like, “R.L. Burnside is a killer, he’ll do [anything].” Like on that, *You See Me Laughin*’, [Johnson asks:] “R.L., what happened, how many times you say you shot him?” Why the fuck do that matter? ... [Y]ou know, my granddad was very intelligent, he thought, “Whatever, as long as y’all keeping me straight, keeping me happy with my money, I’m good.”¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ Stein, *You See Me Laughin*’.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. Since Kimbrough died in 1998 (only a few years after Johnson began his plan to win over alternative rock fans), he was not subject to as many of Fat Possum’s new marketing strategies as was Burnside. We are therefore left to wonder about the ways in which Kimbrough might have resisted and accommodated to the company’s evolving policies and forms of symbolic representation

¹⁴¹ Pettengell, “R.L. Burnside: ‘Well, Well, Well!’” 17.

¹⁴² Richard Grant, “Delta Force,” *The Observer*, November 16, 2003

¹⁴³ Sacco, “The Rude Blues.”

¹⁴⁴ Stein, *You See Me Laughin*’.

¹⁴⁵ Cody Burnside, July 30, 2010.

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Perhaps such marketing worked. By 1998, the 73-year-old Burnside was the face of Hill Country blues, the highest selling artist on the Fat Possum label, and the music video for his song “Snake Drive” could be seen on MTV.¹⁴⁶

THE BLUES PURISTS REPUDIATE FAT POSSUM

A group of journalists, scholars, and blues aficionados, whom I call blues purists, were quick to challenge Fat Possum around issues of marketing, symbolic representation of Hill Country artists, and musical authenticity. Many purists felt that Fat Possum had “corrupted” Hill Country bluesmen by forcing them to play nontraditional music in an unprincipled attempt to make greater profits. Blues fans also charged that the talents of old Hill Country bluesmen were being wasted. Purists reasoned that elderly bluesmen like Junior Kimbrough and R.L. Burnside should be allowed to create their own music and not be forced by outsiders to make blues/alternative rock fusion albums. R.L.’s music came under the most scrutiny. In his review of Burnside’s *A Ass Pocket of Whiskey*, *Living Blues* contributor Jim DeKoster asserted that the alternative rock group the Blues Explosion, “annihilated” Burnside’s contributions with “incompetent...[and] tasteless” accompaniment.¹⁴⁷ DeKoster summed up the album by declaring, “Despite stiff competition, this may well be the worst blues album ever made.”¹⁴⁸

Critics charged that the pairing of Hill Country bluesmen with urban alternative rockers divorced perhaps the last remaining subgenre of traditional, rural Mississippi blues from its roots and backwoods “authenticity.” Purists contended that by brokering such associations and arranging worldwide tours for Kimbrough and Burnside, Fat Possum had literally and figuratively removed these leading Hill Country bluesmen from the environment that had so long nurtured and shaped their music. While this critique may have some validity, it also suffers from a good dose of essentialized thinking. The notion here is that rural blues is largely unchanging—a form of music that has been frozen in time since the days of slavery. Mississippi bluesmen are especially subject to this characterization because they continue to play a “traditional” genre of music in a state that is itself often described as “un-modern” and “backwards.”

For many blues purists, Hill Country blues came to epitomize rural authenticity. Yet, in advancing such a notion, these purists offered up a host of problematic stereotypes about the region’s African American communities, traditions, and residents. For example, music journalist Ted Drozdowski described Junior Kimbrough’s brand of Hill Country blues as being as “primitive as bearskins and flints,” and as “ancient and troubled...[as the music] of

¹⁴⁶ For the music video, the song was remixed and re-titled “Come On In.” Not surprisingly, the video portrays Burnside as violent. It begins with Burnside stating that although people say that you should call 911 if you are in trouble, “I believe it’s the best, it’s quicker to call 357” [a reference to the .357 Magnum revolver]. The video ends with Burnside reiterating that he did not mean to kill the man whom he shot: “That’s up to them and the lord about dying;” Lou Friedman, “Mississippi Remix: How 73-year-old R.L. Burnside found the hip-hop audience,” *Blues Access*, Fall 1999, 14.

¹⁴⁷ Jim DeKoster, Album Review of R.L. Burnside’s *A Ass Pocket of Whiskey*, *Living Blues*, September/ October 1996, 71.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 71.

slaves coming off the ship to the plantation-era Delta.”¹⁴⁹ Such references to African tribal societies and to the slave-trade were rendered even more explicit by journalist Geoffrey Himes, who linked Malian artist Ali Farka Touré and Kimbrough: “You might even swear that these two musicians must have come from the same neighborhood...Of course, their ancestors may well have lived in the same neighborhood, some long-forgotten West African village that was one day attacked by slave traders...Lucky or unlucky, all those villagers carried with them the secret musical code of hypnotic rhythms and uninhibited singing.”¹⁵⁰ In a few strokes of the keyboard, the Hill Country and Mali had become one.¹⁵¹ The pioneering ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax had also depicted Hill Country music as unchanging and quintessentially African. In the span of ten pages, Lomax had labeled the music “primitive,” declaring that much of it had not changed since “time immemorial,” and asserting that he heard similar sounds “deep in the Congo,” in the “the lion-hunting music of the Niger,” among the African Pygmies, and in the Sudan.¹⁵²

Certain purists undoubtedly believed that, if left to their own devices (that is to say, “uncorrupted” by Fat Possum), Hill Country bluesmen would continue to play African-based, plantation-era music. This was certainly the perception many held of R.L. Burnside, who was typecast by purists as an “old-time, acoustic” bluesman. What few realized was that when R.L. was first recorded, his electric guitar (Burnside’s primary instrument) was broken. Consequently, he was forced to play an acoustic guitar.¹⁵³ Thus, while blues purists thought they were righteously mitigating Fat Possum’s stereotypes, they managed to advance several objectionable and misleading stereotypes themselves.

Portrayed by purists as the few remaining guardians of authentic blues, Hill Country bluesmen like Kimbrough and Burnside were often depicted more as endangered species than as dynamic artists. In his own essentialist characterization of bluesmen, Oliver wrote that artists like Kimbrough are part of “a vanishing breed of country blues singers whose music is distinct and uninhibited by conventional blues forms and structures.”¹⁵⁴ Like species nearing extinction, Hill Country bluesmen’s environment and social grounding were purportedly being taken away from them by commercial entities, like Fat Possum, whose agents positioned the rural artists on a national stage. Separated from place, Hill Country bluesmen were losing what had made their music “authentic” and unique.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Ted Drozdowski, “‘Doin All Right:’ Junior Kimbrough is a loud, proud American original,” *Boston Phoenix*, 1998.

¹⁵⁰ Geoffrey Himes, Album Review of Ali Farka Touré’s *The Source* and Junior Kimbrough & The Soul Blues Boys’s *All Night Long, Request*, September 1993.

¹⁵¹ Of course, by equating the Hill Country with Mali, Himes engaged in a more ‘nuanced’ form of essentialization. Rather than generically calling Hill Country music “African,” Himes linked guitar-driven Hill Country blues to a specific African locale with a prominent string instruments tradition. Himes is not the first critic to describe Malian music as “bluesy.”

¹⁵² Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began*, 326, 325, 317, 316, 325, 326.

¹⁵³ Beesley and Mayer, *Hill Stomp Hollar*.

¹⁵⁴ Sylvester W. Oliver, Jr., High Water Records press release to promote Junior Kimbrough and the Soul Blues Boys’s “Keep Your Hands Off Her” and “I Feel Good, Little Girl,” 1982.

¹⁵⁵ Of course, as noted above, there is some truth to these observations. The general lack of commodification helped shape Hill Country blues and make it different from other subgenres. Although commodification had standardized and formalized other blues subgenres, the Hill Country variety remained more fluid.

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In portraying Hill Country bluesmen as innocent victims, seemingly unaware that they were being manipulated by Fat Possum, blues purists denied will and agency to Hill Country artists. They failed to entertain the possibility that it was the artists themselves who sought to change their music by adding outside musical elements. Yet, there is evidence to support the fact that R.L. Burnside welcomed the new musical directions proposed by Fat Possum. It is clear that he was receptive to diverse musical genres even before Fat Possum asked him to record with an alternative rock group. Indeed, in 1980 he released the funk-influenced album *Sound Machine Groove*. In the 1990s, Burnside listened to hip hop music with his grandchildren.¹⁵⁶ While Burnside preferred blues music, he nonetheless encouraged his children and grandchildren to play whatever music appealed to them. As Cody Burnside remembered, “[my grandfather] told me when he heard me rapping the first time... ‘Just do what you do.’ I did it [rapped], and he sat there and looked at me and then he was like, ‘You know what, I want you to stick to that, stick to rapping,’ cause he said, ‘We got the blues covered, so you stick to rapping and just mix it up [blues and hip hop].’”¹⁵⁷ Perhaps deriving inspiration from his grandchildren, R.L. used to rap onstage during his performances with the Blues Explosion.¹⁵⁸

Regarding his hip-hop/blues or alternative rock/blues fusion recordings with Fat Possum, R.L. declared, “The first time I listened to it, I said, ‘I don’t know’...But the more I listened, the more I liked it.”¹⁵⁹ It is clear that Burnside saw a connection between blues and other genres. Referring to his hip hop-influenced album *Come On In*, which features remixed blues songs, Burnside observed, “A lot of old timers ain’t happy with what I did...But the blues is the root of all music, including this stuff [hip hop].”¹⁶⁰ Cody Burnside firmly believes that no musical style was forced on his grandfather. Rather, he argues that his grandfather was innovative and receptive to change: he recalls that R.L. used to say, “We’ll try anything once.”¹⁶¹ This principled, innovative spirit belies the beliefs and representations of both the blues purists and the representatives of the music industry.

A NEW GENERATION INHERITS THE MANTLE

After the deaths of Junior Kimbrough and R.L. Burnside (in 1998 and 2005, respectively), most of their blues-playing sons and grandsons cut ties with Fat Possum and signed with several recently formed record companies that specialize in Hill Country blues.¹⁶² This gave the heirs more artistic options: they had greater say over how they were

¹⁵⁶ Friedman, “Mississippi Remix,” 14.

¹⁵⁷ Cody Burnside, July 30, 2010.

¹⁵⁸ Beesley and Mayer, *Hill Stomp Hollar*.

¹⁵⁹ Friedman, “Mississippi Remix,” 14.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 12.

¹⁶¹ Cody Burnside, July 30, 2010.

¹⁶² The two most prominent record companies are the Chapel Hill, North Carolina-based Devil Down Records and the Oxford-based Hill Country Records. Justin Showah, the founder of Hill Country Records told me that he started the company in an attempt to provide another option for the heirs who are disgruntled with Fat Possum. When signing artists, Showah stressed that Hill Country Records was nothing like Fat Possum. He asserted that his company collaborates with the heirs and never forces anything upon them. It bears mentioning that Kinney Kimbrough and other heirs signed to the label consider Hill Country Records to be far superior to Fat Possum. Interview with Justin Showah on August 2, 2011.

represented and marketed, could choose to stop touring, and could record whatever music they wanted. Yet, the latest generation also faces pressure from many blues purists and black Hill Country residents who clamor for them to keep the tradition alive by playing Junior's and R.L.'s music. These fans have argued that generational continuity is the only way that Hill Country blues will survive and retain its rural authenticity. As Barretta observed, "Real experimentation... is not encouraged that much. They [the sons and grandsons] are more likely to be rewarded for being able to play like Junior [or R.L.].... We like the music of their parents, that's why we want [the heirs] to sound like them."¹⁶³ Expressing the opinion of many Hill Country residents, Greer exclaimed, "If they stay with their dad's [music], they'll be millionaires.... See, they want to venture out and create their own music and they just don't want to pattern after their fathers.... Their fathers were great people.... Those guys, if somebody could just get it in their heads, say, 'Man, you *have it*. Do what your daddy did—not what you want to do."¹⁶⁴

It is ironic that purists and residents would clamor for the heirs to play Junior's and R.L.'s music when Junior and R.L. took pride in having their own deeply personal and unique styles of playing. Moreover, when purists and residents ask the heirs to imitate their forbearers, they do not want the heirs to play *all* of their parents or grandparents' music. After all, purists and residents have erased the blues/alternative rock and blues/hip hop fusion from their memories of Junior's and R.L.'s repertoire.

The degree to which the descendants play their forbearers' music differs from artist to artist. Robert Kimbrough, Sr. plays almost exclusively covers of his father's songs, while Robert's brothers, David and Kinney, play both original Hill Country material and covers. Brothers Cedric and Cody Burnside also play original Hill Country songs (mixed with hip hop), as well as some of R.L.'s songs. As Barretta observed, these heirs are "more conscious than others about preserving traditions."¹⁶⁵ Cedric Burnside told me, "I grew up in this, man. That's really all I know; my heart, soul, bones is [in] the Hill Country Blues. It's my life."¹⁶⁶ Both Cody Burnside and David Kimbrough, Jr. asserted that the survival of the Hill Country blues depends on the heirs playing their forbearers' music, because aside from the heirs, there are not many artists who play the Hill Country-style.¹⁶⁷

Despite the importance that Cody and David place on heirs playing Junior's and R.L.'s music, the former understands why certain heirs do not elect to play their progenitors' music: "[T]hey want to get their own identity. They know my granddad [and presumably Junior] was basically the king of Hill Country, so they want to get their own identity."¹⁶⁸ For

¹⁶³ Barretta, July 23, 2010.

¹⁶⁴ Greer, July 11, 2010.

¹⁶⁵ Barretta, July 23, 2010. After their father passed, David and Kinney maintained and continued to play at Junior's Place. David told reporters, "You don't miss him. He's still in there because we respect and honor and command our father's music. We're gonna play that first." Michael Donahue, "Songs of their Father," *Commercial Appeal*, April 28, 1998, C1.

¹⁶⁶ Cedric Burnside and Malcolm, June 25, 2010.

¹⁶⁷ Cody Burnside, July 30, 2010; David Kimbrough, Jr., July 17, 2010. While David noted that there are some white rockers, like the Black Keys and the North Mississippi Allstars, who play Hill Country-influenced music, he declared that such bands cannot lead and maintain the music, because they are not "natural" (read: "authentic"), like the heirs are.

¹⁶⁸ Cody Burnside, July 30, 2010.

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heirs like Duwayne Burnside, creating one’s own identity seems to be a major factor behind the decision not to play much Hill Country blues. It also seems clear that Duwayne Burnside, who grew up in Memphis, sees Memphis blues as a more urban idiom—a “more modern” sound.¹⁶⁹ Just as many urban blacks of the 1960s and 1970s saw Delta and Chicago blues as backwards, it appears as though Duwayne views Hill Country blues as too rural. However, Duwayne believes that whatever music he plays is inherently “authentic” Hill Country blues, because he is R.L. Burnside’s son. Duwayne exclaimed, “It’s still Hill Country blues, because Duwayne Burnside’s doing it.”¹⁷⁰ To borrow David Kimbrough Jr.’s terminology, Duwayne believes that he is one of the “natural” few who have Hill Country blues in their DNA.¹⁷¹ These assertions are not wholly surprising: after all, they come from individuals who were, at the very least, exposed to rural values and traditions that privileged family and place.

CONCLUSION

Hill Country blues has long been overlooked and understudied by scholars. Initially, this disregard owed to the belief that the region was too isolated to merit the attention of early folklorists who headed to the more developed and populous Delta. The continuing neglect likely also attests to the fact that the Hill Country and its blues tradition do not conform to the conventional narrative of blues as a migratory genre of music. In contributing to the scant literature on Hill Country blues and its artists, this study has sought to account for the endurance of this particular blues subgenre when most other rural Mississippi blues traditions have stagnated or died out. The lack of large-scale migration, black ownership of small farms, the low-tech, relatively isolated nature of rural life, and the communally based nature of Hill Country blues were key factors accounting for the maintenance of this genre.

Junior Kimbrough often asserted that he held his house parties and performed at them in order to “bring the community together and... keep the blues going.”¹⁷² Kimbrough and other Hill Country bluesmen understood that blues music helped to maintain their rural communities. In turn, a tightly knit community helped forge and perpetuate the blues tradition. While Oliver called Hill Country musical families the “keepers of song...keepers of tradition,”¹⁷³ the title truly applies to the whole community. Although Hill Country artists may have enjoyed playing for visitors, first and foremost, their music was for “the community.”

At the same time, from the late 1990s onward, external actors have pressured local artists in two conflicting ways. In the name of authenticity, blues purists have developed consumption styles and created narratives that have threatened to stifle Hill Country blues artists’ abilities to adapt and grow. Alternatively, to increase its sales, the Fat Possum record company demanded that Junior Kimbrough and R.L. Burnside incorporate often incongruous popular musical styles into their repertoires. The company’s representatives also advanced forms of symbolic representation that spoke far more to white fantasies of black manhood than to the lives of blues artists. It is useful to recall two observations by the

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Duwayne Burnside on July 16, 2010.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ David Kimbrough, Jr., July 17, 2010.

¹⁷² Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 433.

¹⁷³ Oliver, July 28, 2011.

descendants of Junior Kimbrough and R.L. Burnside. The first relates that Kimbrough played “Junior, and nobody else,” and the other, that R.L. would “try anything once.” These statements suggest that for the most part these two Hill Country greats managed to avoid the pitfalls represented by both the purist and commercial extremes. Their descendants appear to be following the lesson their forbearers bequeathed them.

In 2000, two years after Junior Kimbrough’s death, his still-functioning juke joint burned down. Many locals viewed the event ominously as the passing of an era. It also crystallized the daunting challenges confronting local musicians and their followers, who were charged with keeping the music and the community alive under increasingly unfavorable conditions. There are larger lessons that can be gleaned from the specific case of Holly Springs for an understanding of life in contemporary American rural communities and of the endurance or abandonment of local traditions. They crystallize around two important questions: Why has the destruction of Junior’s Place proved so vexing and how have local blacks struggled of late to keep Junior’s example and legacy alive?

As Holly Springs’ poorer residents address the challenge of maintaining the viability of their tight-knit community and its musical traditions, they face broader forces that confront rural America as a whole. These include the ever-increasing privatization and commodification of local and communal forms of popular culture, and the corresponding placement of performance venues in sites that are distant from the rural communities that inspired and long nurtured local traditions like Hill Country blues. In the face of these trends, local artists are obliged to travel farther afield to profit from their talents. This means that they are less available to meet the demand of local audiences than were their fathers and grandfathers. At the same time, Holly Springs’ residents confront a paradox typical of many contemporary rural communities: for, even as they become more peripheral to the generators of economic growth, they are increasingly connected to a cosmopolitan, globalized, wired-in society whose consumers are eager to sample “authentic” cultural styles.

One sees the imprint of these forces on the types of performance venues created in the Hill Country over the last few decades. It will be recalled that in the early 1990s Matthew Johnson recognized that there was a wider, whiter, and wealthier market for Hill Country music. So, too, did entrepreneurs in the university town of Oxford. While Holly Springs must be acknowledged as a wellspring for this blues tradition, it is currently Oxford and its privately-owned clubs where the bulk of Hill Country music can be heard. The physical distance (Oxford is thirty miles from Holly Springs) and entrance fees involved render these clubs far beyond the means of Junior’s regulars. While the world may be more connected and thirty miles may not seem like much, it makes all the difference for many poor black fans.¹⁷⁴ Equally off-putting is the racial and class profile of the audience at Oxford clubs.

The Holly Springs juke joint operated by Robert Kimbrough, Sr. managed to fulfill local needs and requirements more faithfully. Unfortunately, Robert’s own financial and employment woes led to the abandonment of this local establishment in 2011. No longer pressured into touring by Fat Possum, members of both the Kimbrough and Burnside

¹⁷⁴ Currently, the closest privately owned venue to Holly Springs is Foxfire Ranch, which is located midway between Holly Springs and Oxford (thirteen miles south of Holly Springs in Waterford, Mississippi). Perhaps due to the distance and price of admission (ten dollars), audiences for most shows are predominately white. The venue began hosting blues concerts in 2011 and has been quite successful financially.

“KEEPERS OF SONG, KEEPERS OF TRADITION”

families have expressed a desire to create their own local venues. Yet they quickly add that the profits to be gained from touring, when measured against the financial constraints imposed by the local market, make such a commitment unlikely in the short or medium run.¹⁷⁵

Owing in part to the efforts of Holly Springs’ Bureau of Recreation and Tourism, the town’s brand of local culture has gained the attention of ever-widening national and international audiences. Funded by state and federal government grants and supported and managed by local (and overwhelmingly white) businesspeople, the Bureau has always promoted the “Holly Springs Pilgrimage.” This heritage tour, which has been conducted since the late 1930s, appeals to white, upper- and middle-class consumers eager to experience vestiges of the Antebellum South. This form of tourism brought in much-coveted income to local hotel and restaurant owners, tour bus operators, and other merchants. Bureau members soon acknowledged that if stately plantations represented Holly Springs’ cultural capital within the competitive tourist economy, so too did Hill Country blues. In 2006, the Bureau funded, publicized, and helped to manage the first annual Northern Mississippi Hill Country Picnic. While the majority of the performers at the picnic were and are African Americans with homes or roots in the Hill Country, the same cannot be said for the consumers of the music. As with the private clubs in Oxford, the entrance fees are beyond the financial reach of most of Holly Spring’s black residents.

Yet black Hill Country performers and audiences have addressed these challenges. Unlike their forbearers, Holly Springs’ African American residents were recently able to extract concessions from local and state officials.¹⁷⁶ In 2011, local African Americans demanded that the Holly Springs Bureau of Tourism add the remnants of old slave quarters to their pilgrimage tour and provide local residents with a regular, easily accessible, and affordable venue to listen to Hill Country blues.¹⁷⁷ “Bikers’ Night Out in Blues Alley,” held weekly without charge during the spring and summer months and located in the town’s main Court House Square, represents the Bureau’s response to the second demand. Operating costs for these public events are kept manageable through a policy of booking performers who happen to be touring close to Holly Springs and who are willing to be flexible about their fees. Those in the community who participate in this popular local event can truly share the title of “keepers of song...keepers of tradition.”

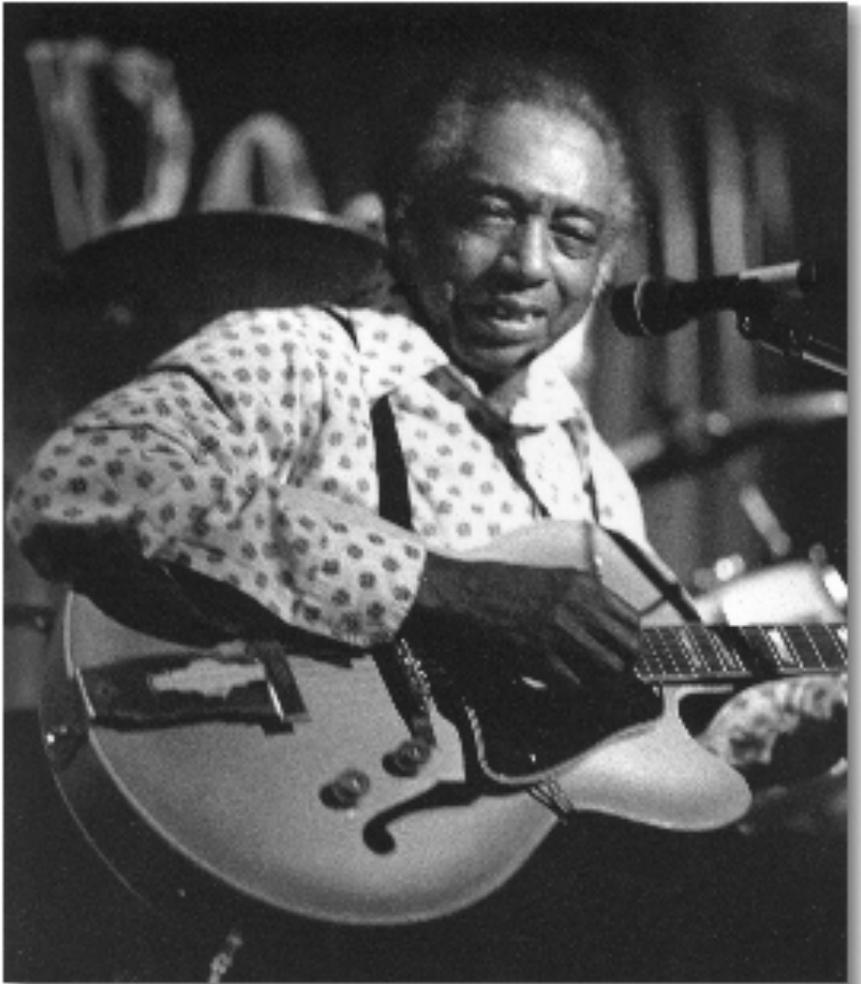
¹⁷⁵ Cedric Burnside has expressed particular interest in opening a juke joint in the future. He explained, however, that he first needed to tour more in order to make enough money to cover the costs of a juke joint. Interview with Cedric Burnside on August 1, 2011. It bears mentioning that in 2011, Duwayne Burnside attempted, unsuccessfully, to open his own juke joint.

¹⁷⁶ It is clear that times have changed in Mississippi, where the state now touts itself as “The Birthplace of America’s Music” and “The Cradle of the Blues.”

¹⁷⁷ A response to the first demand is still pending. Interview with Stephanie McKinney, Executive Director of the Holly Springs Bureau of Recreation and Tourism, on August 2, 2011.

APPENDIX I

*Figure 1*¹⁷⁸



R.L. Burnside

¹⁷⁸ All photographs and images are used with the permission of the Blues Archive at the University of Mississippi.

“KEEPERS OF SONG, KEEPERS OF TRADITION”

Figure 2



Junior Kimbrough playing at Junior's Place

Figure 3



Jessie Mae Hemphill

“KEEPERS OF SONG, KEEPERS OF TRADITION”

Figure 4



Map of Mississippi with counties

Figure 5



Map of Marshall County showing Holly Springs

“KEEPERS OF SONG, KEEPERS OF TRADITION”

Figure 6

Percent of Landowners and Part Owners Who are Black in Marshall County and Sunflower County, 1900-1974

<i>Marshall County</i>			
Year	Black Landowners and Part Owners	Total Number of Landowners and Part Owners	Percent of Landowners and Part Owners Who are Black
1900	393	1,267	31.0
1910	510	1,159	44.0
1920	488	1,063	45.9
1925	448	917	48.9
1930	452	853	53.0
1935	489	1,239	39.5
1940	411	899	45.7
1945	455	1,039	43.8
1954	567	1,147	49.4
1959	458	961	47.7
1964	416	930	44.7
1969	530	1,048	50.6
1974	330	862	38.3

<i>Sunflower County</i>			
Year	Black Landowners and Part Owners	Total Number of Landowners and Part Owners	Percent of Landowners and Part Owners Who are Black
1900	192	398	48.2
1910	191	461	41.4
1920	192	447	43.0
1925	125	387	32.3
1930	194	510	38.0
1935	164	685	23.9
1940	143	713	20.1
1945	197	999	19.7
1954	166	985	16.9
1959	142	872	16.3
1964	94	645	14.6
1969	79	624	12.7
1974	36	452	8.0

Source: Censuses of Agriculture, 1900-1974, Mississippi County Tables.

Figure 7

Percent of Total Acreage Owned by Black Landowners and Part Owners in Marshall and Sunflower County, 1925-1974

<i>Marshall County</i>			
Year	Total Acreage Owned by Black Landowners and Part Owners	Total Acreage Owned by All Landowners and Part Owners	Percent of Total Acreage Owned by Black Landowners and Part Owners
1925	45,488	103,181	44.1
1930	46,635	95,594	48.8
1935	64,697	198,453	32.6
1940	45,115	137,197	32.9
1945	53,974	201,696	26.8
1954	65,600	245,320	26.7
1959	53,845	218,846	24.6
1964	46,467	266,395	17.4
1969	53,913	257,254	21.0
1974	36,937	279,582	13.2

<i>Sunflower County</i>			
Year	Total Acreage Owned by Black Landowners and Part Owners	Total Acreage Owned by All Landowners and Part Owners	Percent of Total Acreage Owned by Black Landowners and Part Owners
1925	5,265	45,092	11.7
1930	6,335	50,005	12.7
1935	6,705	82,864	8.1
1940	7,251	114,933	6.3
1945	13,670	146,513	9.3
1954	12,786	223,063	5.7
1959	11,019	289,505	3.8
1964	6,875	191,257	3.6
1969	7,151	349,850	2.0
1974	1,987	377,168	0.5

Source: Censuses of Agriculture, 1925-1974, Mississippi County Tables.

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Figure 8



Hill Country Juke Joints: The Chewalla Rib Shack



Hill Country Juke Joints: Junior's Place

Figure 9



A woman dancing at Junior's Place

Figure 10



Napoleon Strickland playing fife at a picnic

Figure 11



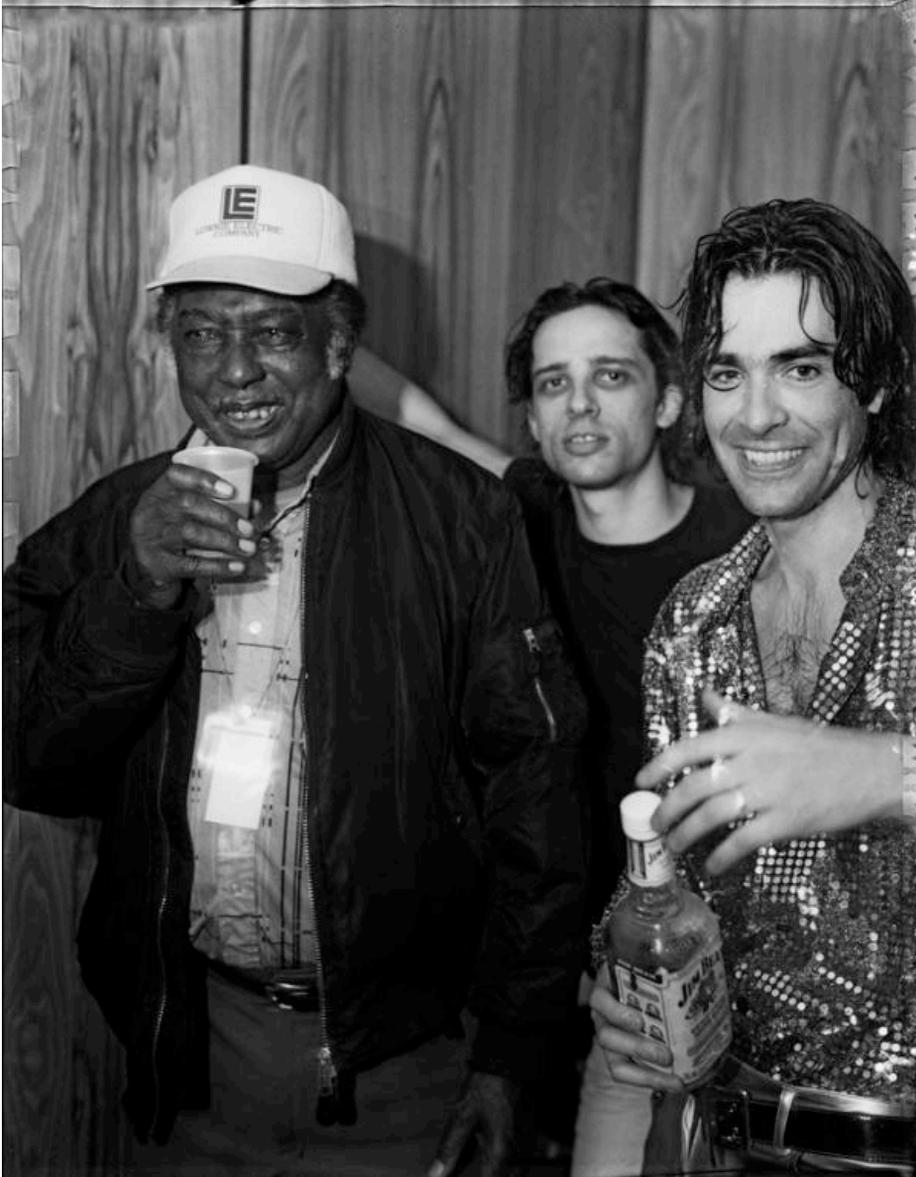
Junior Kimbrough (right) with his son, Kinney (left), and Gary Burnside at Junior's Place

Figure 12



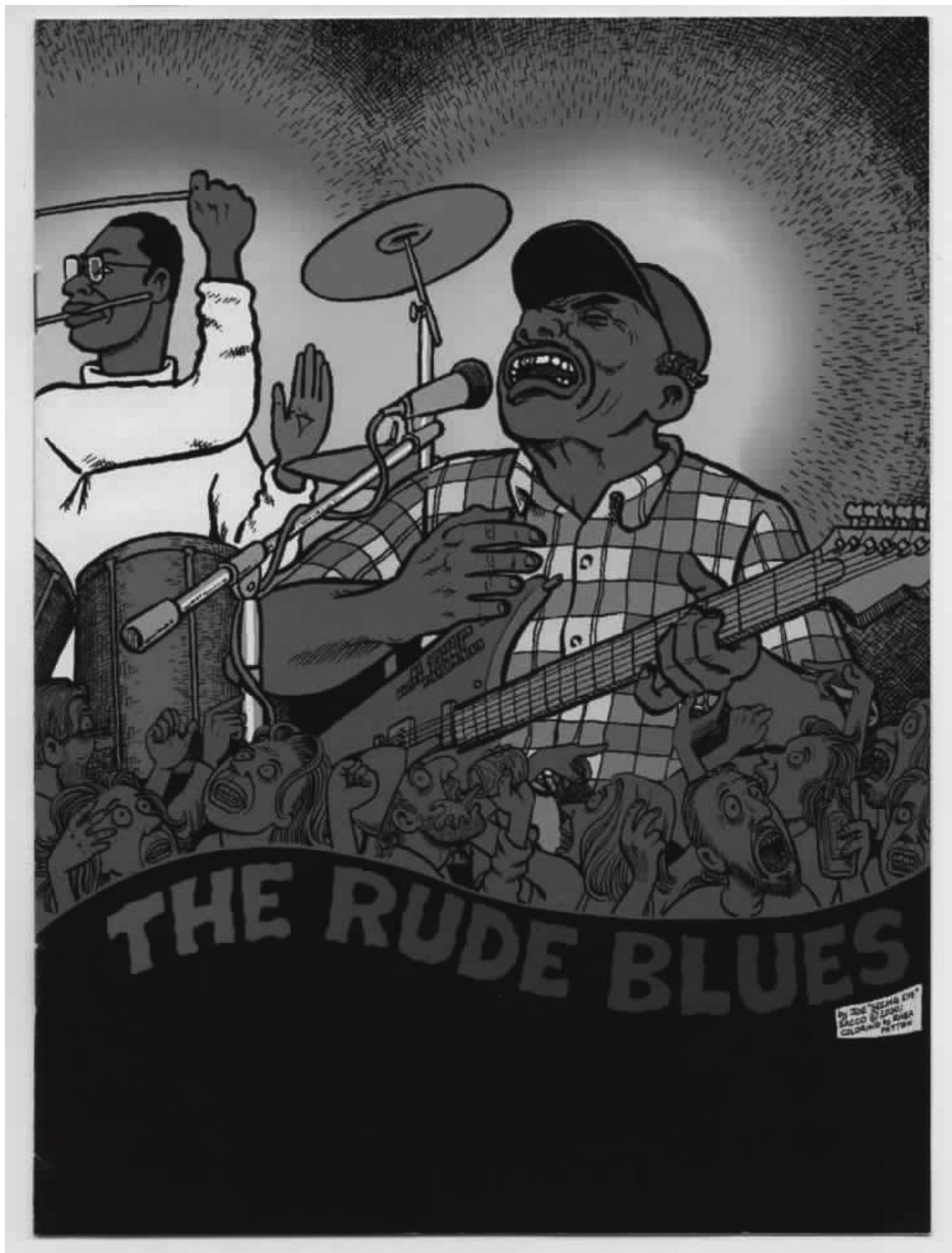
Otha(r) Turner watching his granddaughter, Shardé Thomas play fife

Figure 13



R.L. Burnside (left) with Jon Spencer (right) and Judah Bauer of the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion

Figure 14



“The Rude Blues” cartoon in *Darker Blues*



“The Rude Blues” cartoon in *Darker Blues*

"KEEPERS OF SONG, KEEPERS OF TRADITION"



"The Rude Blues" cartoon in *Darker Blues*

R.L. Burnside is the big name in this bunch. He was rescued from obscurity by Jon Spencer of the Blues Explosion, who backed Burnside up on his breakout record, *A Ass Pocket o' Whiskey*...

SHAKE 'EM ON DOWN ...

Blues purists were aghast, but white kids pricked up their ears and made a subsequent release of balley remixes, *Come On In*, a minor smash.

And that was none too soon for Oxford, Mississippi-based Fat Possum Records, founded by Matthew Johnson with a student loan.

He ordered the most expensive thing on the menu (I was buying) and told me—

I'M NOTHING BUT A BIG DEBT HOLE.

Fat Possum, which one year logged \$12,000 in check-bouncing fees and still owes one million dollars, is seemingly on a suicide mission to record the hardest, nastiest bluesmen before that species goes extinct.

At 53, Paul Jones is one of Fat Possum's youngest acts.

In any case, he still plays standing up.

I KNOW I CAN TAKE T-MODEL AND EVERY ONE OF THOSE GUNS OUT THERE.

I'M NOT BRAGGING. I CAN DO THIS.

AND YOU KNOW IT YOURSELF.

TELL ME YOU KNOW IT.

Meanwhile, T-Model, who didn't pick up a guitar until age 59, the day his fifth wife left him, threatens to quit at one gig 'cause he thinks Paul Jones has gone over his allotted time.

I CAN'T READ AND I CAN'T WRITE, BUT I CAN COUNT MONEY AND I CAN TELL TIME.

AND IF THE LITTLE HAND IS ON THE TEN AND IT GETS AROUND TO THE TEN AGAIN, THAT'S AN HOUR.

You can't fool T-Model.

I DON'T TRUST NOBODY.

NOT EVEN MYSELF.

"The Rude Blues" cartoon in *Darker Blues*

"KEEPERS OF SONG, KEEPERS OF TRADITION"



"The Rude Blues" cartoon in *Darker Blues*



"The Rude Blues" cartoon in *Darker Blues*

“KEEPERS OF SONG, KEEPERS OF TRADITION”

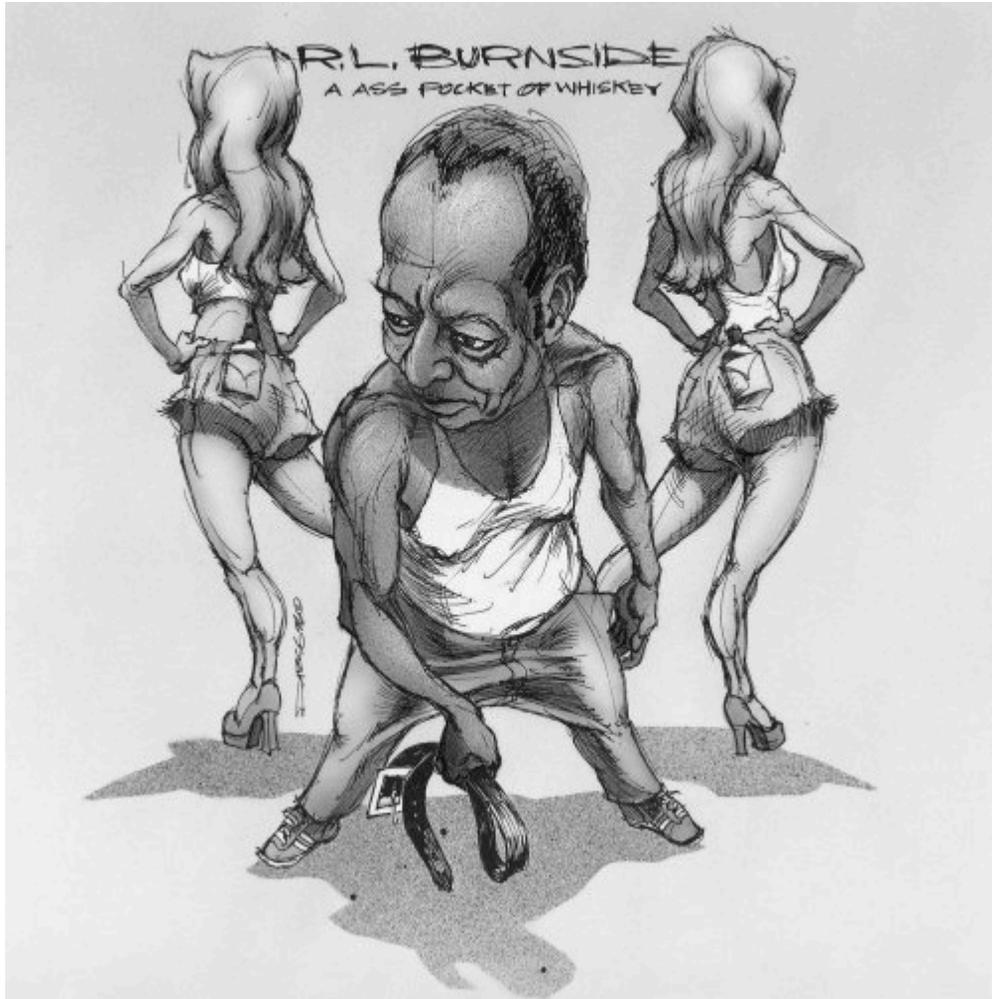


“The Rude Blues” cartoon in *Darker Blues*



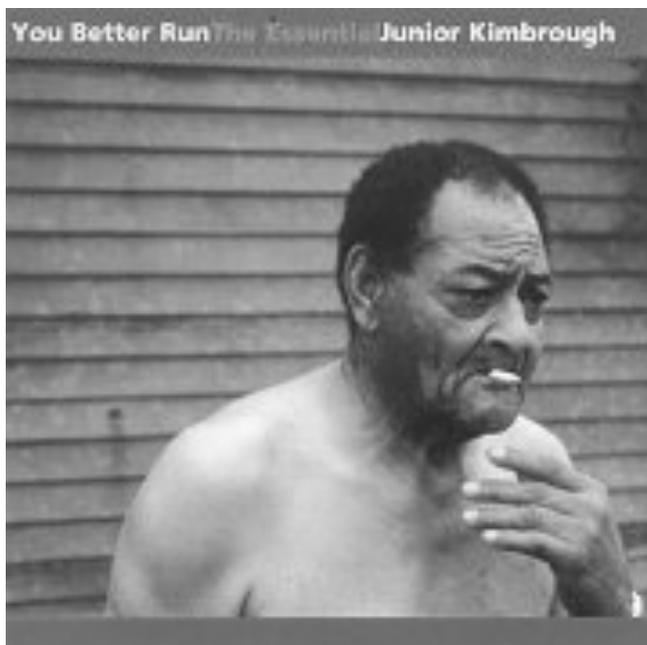
“The Rude Blues” cartoon in *Darker Blues*

Figure 15



A Ass Pocket of Whiskey album cover

Figure 16



You Better Run: The Essential Junior Kimbrough front cover



You Better Run: The Essential Junior Kimbrough back cover

APPENDIX II

Figure 1

MUSIC OF THE POST-BELLUM HILL COUNTRY

As is stated in my essay, various genres of post-bellum secular black music have historically been played in the Hill Country region. Several of these genres have influenced the Hill Country blues.¹⁷⁹ These include fiddle and banjo music, the string band, and fife and drum music.¹⁸⁰ While the growing popularity of blues music proved to be an important factor contributing to the ultimate demise of these other musical forms, their intensely rhythmic and riff-based nature left a definite mark on Hill Country blues.¹⁸¹ In recent decades, in addition to the blues, hip hop and rock (often blues-rock) are the most prevalent black genres played in the region.

Fiddle and banjo practices were carryovers from nineteenth-century black and white popular music. The genre was mostly played in rural Appalachian communities, such as the ones that border the Hill Country. Fiddle and banjo music could be heard in the Hill Country until the late 1930s.¹⁸² As local bluesman Monroe “Guy” Jackson told music historian Sylvester Oliver in 1983, “All of them [fiddle and banjo players] are gone now. But I remember Uncle Ruff Lucas who used to play the fiddle, dead and gone. Old man Nute Wilkins, dead and gone now. I never will forget Uncle Nute. When they would get to playing real good, he would put his fiddle down and do it with his mouth. I ain’t lying, he could do it too!”¹⁸³ It is noteworthy that Jackson repeats the phrase, “dead and gone” twice when referring to deceased fiddle players, and by implication, to their defunct musical tradition. This is a history of loss that today’s Hill Country blues artists recognize and work against as they attempt to keep Hill Country blues alive and vital.

The string band, which was also popular in the Hill Country in the early 1900s, represented an expansion of the fiddle and banjo tradition. Typical string bands would include two fiddles, a banjo, guitar, mandolin, and string bass. This musical genre, too, disappeared by mid-twentieth century.

Fife and drum music has been a popular form of entertainment music for Hill Country blacks since the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁸⁴ Fife and drum bands consist of a handmade fife (a flute-like instrument made from a hollowed-out cane stalk), two snare drums, and a bass drum (the drums are often handmade as well).¹⁸⁵ The genre transmuted over time from its status as military music to become a staple at such Hill Country events as barbecues, fish fries, and local picnics.¹⁸⁶ While the Hill Country is the only region in the country that still boasts active black fife and drum bands, these are increasingly rare.

¹⁷⁹ Evans, July 29, 2010.

¹⁸⁰ Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 334.

¹⁸¹ Evans, July 29, 2010.

¹⁸² Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 334.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, 355.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 373.

¹⁸⁵ David Evans, “Black Fife and Drum Music in Mississippi,” *Mississippi Folklore Register* 6:3:97 (Fall 1972): 94-107.

¹⁸⁶ Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 365.

Currently, there are only two such bands (fife player Shardé Thomas's Rising Star Fife and Drum Band and another local family band) in the region and the genre appears to be close to extinction.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

I started listening to blues music in junior high school. I was that rare Connecticut child who longed to travel to Mississippi, the cradle of the blues. In the summer of 2010, I was finally able to realize this dream. During that summer, I interned at the Blues Archive at the University of Mississippi, in Oxford, working under Dr. Greg Johnson, the curator of the Special Collections Archive. It was Dr. Johnson who helped facilitate the research for this essay. He could easily have insisted that I spend the summer making copies and stapling papers. Instead, he had enough faith in a 19-year-old college student to allow him to travel throughout the state interviewing blues artists for the Archive.

I first arrived in the Hill Country on a whim. I had only been in Mississippi for a day and had yet to fully recuperate from the grueling twenty-hour drive from New Haven to Oxford. Yet, despite my exhaustion, it was Sunday and I wanted to explore the state that had loomed so large in my imagination. Picking up a book on blues tourism, I tried to visit Holly Springs, which was only thirty minutes away from Oxford. While I was exploring an old, disheveled record shop, the proprietor, an eccentric octogenarian and local blues expert named David Caldwell, informed me that one of Junior Kimbrough's sons was performing at a local juke joint later that night. While I was only vaguely aware of Junior Kimbrough (and completely unaware of the existence of a unique Hill Country blues subgenre), I nonetheless knew what I would be doing that night. Before I could park next to the juke joint (known as "the Hut"), I was stopped by a black man, who asked me if I was lost. I quickly learned that the man was Robert Kimbrough, Sr.—Junior Kimbrough's son and the man slated to perform that night. I could not believe my luck: finding informants and conducting interviews could not be *this* easy! Robert immediately made me feel at home. It hardly mattered that I was often the only white patron at his Hut. I returned to the juke joint each Sunday to conduct interviews and to immerse myself in the unique Hill Country blues sound. While I had listened to a lot of blues, I had never heard anything like the Hill Country style.

Shortly after my first visit to the Hut, I interviewed artists at the North Mississippi Hill Country Picnic, an annual outdoors music festival that boasts the largest gathering of Hill Country musicians. As I interviewed artist after artist, I realized that a history of the Hill Country blues tradition would make a good senior essay topic.

During the summers of 2010 and 2011, with the help of Holly Springs resident, blues photographer, and local music historian Willie Wilkinson, I was able to interview fifty-two people associated with the Hill Country tradition.¹⁸⁷ While in the Hill Country, I attended performances at local juke joints (most notably Robert Kimbrough, Jr.'s establishment), blues clubs, and blues festivals. I talked to blues artists and fans at many of these venues. Mr.

¹⁸⁷ My transcribed interviews are currently held by the Blues Archive as part of the Matthew Joseph Collection of Blues Interviews. Dr. Johnson generously helped me create the Collection.

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Wilkinson also helped me interview elderly artists in their homes; many of these artists had not performed in decades. Aided by Dr. Johnson, I was able to interview music historians on the Ole Miss faculty. With their assistance, I contacted and spoke with music historians at other institutions, including David Evans, Peter Redvers-Lee, and Sylvester Oliver.

I also carried out extensive archival research at the University of Mississippi's Blues Archive and Special Collections Archive. The Blues Archive's extensive collection provided me with access to the relatively few published sources that exist on Hill Country blues and local history. In addition, the Archive's collection of blues records and CDs (second only to that of the Library of Congress) allowed me to listen to the majority of recorded Hill Country blues music and read the accompanying liner notes. The Archive's "Subject Files," which contain primary sources such as newspaper clippings, contemporary magazine articles, and photographs organized by artist, events/festivals, media, organizations, places, and record companies, proved indispensable to me. The files devoted to Junior Kimbrough, R.L. Burnside, Jessie Mae Hemphill, and Fat Possum Records were thorough, meticulously organized, and invaluable. The Archive's "Sheldon Harris Collection" also contained important articles and photographs. Dr. Johnson helped me find additional manuscript collections devoted to the history of the Hill Country region that were housed in the University of Mississippi's Special Collections Archive. The two most useful were Hubert McAlexander's "McAlexander/Marshall County Collection, 1838-2009" and his "Sherwood Bonner/Hubert McAlexander Collection, ca. 1870-1983."

I would never have found *The Strawberry Plains Oral History Project* volumes without the assistance and kindness of Dr. Ted Ownby, Director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. To my knowledge, only three published copies of the volumes exist, and the copy held by the University was not housed in the library, nor accessible through the library catalog. Dr. Ownby appreciated how important the volumes were to my senior essay. Indeed, *The Strawberry Plains Project* is the only project to document life on Hill Country plantations through oral histories. In an act of tremendous generosity, Dr. Ownby allowed me to take the volumes to New Haven, realizing that I could not copy over a thousand pages during the final few days of my stay in Oxford.

I would also like to give special thanks to Julie Linden, librarian for Political Science, International Affairs, and Government Information at Yale. Ms. Linden helped me locate and understand U.S. Agricultural Censuses. Given that these records are rarely used by Yale students and notoriously cryptic, Ms. Linden's assistance was essential.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Professor Jay Gitlin. He has relished learning about Hill Country blues, worked tirelessly to improve this essay, and given me much needed guidance and focus. From teaching me how to beat a $\frac{3}{4}$ time signature to discussing change in rural communities, Professor Gitlin has been the perfect advisor and mentor. I would also like to thank Professor Michael Veal. His classes on black diasporic music have been inspirational, and I thank him for guiding me through an earlier paper in which I analyzed Hill Country music.

Because the Hill Country region has gone largely unstudied, it was difficult to find secondary source material. Dr. Greg Johnson helped me locate the scholarship that exists. What follows is an evaluation of the relevant historiography pertaining to Hill Country blues.

The earliest research into black music in the Hill Country was conducted at the turn

of the twentieth century by Howard Odum. This research was published in 1925 in Odum and Guy B. Johnson's book *The Negro and His Songs*.¹⁸⁸ Yet, despite the fact that the volume was based on fieldwork conducted in the Hill Country, the authors neither contextualize nor analyze the region. Indeed, *The Negro and His Songs* endeavors to examine the general nature of black secular and non-secular music in the United States, and not specifically to analyze the music of the Hill Country.

Alan Lomax was the first person to record Hill Country music, and Sid Hemphill was the first Hill Country artist to be recorded, in the summer of 1949.¹⁸⁹ Hemphill's songs were recorded not in the Hill Country but in the Delta.¹⁹⁰ It took twelve more years for the first recordings of Hill Country artists to actually be made *in situ* (also done by Alan Lomax).¹⁹¹ Lomax continued to record Hill Country artists through the late 1970s. In 1978, Lomax also filmed Hill Country artists as part of his documentary *The Land Where the Blues Began*.¹⁹² Yet, with the exception of liner notes,¹⁹³ Lomax did not actually write about Hill Country music until 1993, when he published the eponymous volume *The Land Where the Blues Began*.¹⁹⁴ Even this book devotes only one chapter to Hill Country music; the remainder focuses on Delta music. Moreover, the chapter on the Hill Country does not examine how the music was influenced by the region that gave rise to it. After a brief preliminary discussion of the geographic differences between the Delta and Hill Country regions, Lomax problematically lumps Hill Country music together with Delta music, thereby eliminating any possibility of seriously examining the role of place in the music.¹⁹⁵ Ultimately, the chapter on the Hill Country merely recounts Lomax's experiences recording local artists and is far more journalistic than scholarly.

The next person to seriously research and record Hill Country music was music historian George Mitchell. Mitchell began interviewing, recording, and filming Hill Country

¹⁸⁸ Howard Odum and Guy B. Johnson, *The Negro and His Songs* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1925).

¹⁸⁹ Lomax's recordings were made for academic and folkloric purposes and were not intended for commercial release. While Lomax's recordings of Fred McDowell did become popular in the folk revival scene, Hill Country music was recorded by scholars (namely George Mitchell and David Evans) until after Fat Possum Records released records by Junior Kimbrough and R.L. Burnside in the 1990s.

¹⁹⁰ Wade, *Black Appalachia*.

¹⁹¹ Alan Lomax, Liner Notes, *Yazoo Delta Blues and Spirituals: Southern Journey 10*, Prestige International record 25010, 1960.

¹⁹² *The Land Where the Blues Began*, DVD, directed by Alan Lomax, John Bishop, and Worth Long (1979, Portland, OR: Media-Generation, 2009).

¹⁹³ See Lomax, *Yazoo Delta Blues and Spirituals*; Alan Lomax, Liner Notes, *Southern Folk Heritage Series: Sounds of the South*, Atlantic record 1346, 1960; Alan Lomax, Liner Notes, *Southern Folk Heritage Series: Roots of the Blues*, Atlantic record 1348, 1961; Alan Lomax, Liner Notes, *Southern Folk Heritage Series: Negro Church Music*, Atlantic record 1351, 1961; Alan Lomax, Liner Notes, *Southern Folk Heritage Series: The Blues Roll On*, Atlantic record 1352, 1961.

¹⁹⁴ Lomax, *The Land Where the Blues Began*, 1993.

¹⁹⁵ Of course, it is easier to make stylistic distinctions between Delta and Hill Country blues with fifty years of hindsight. During Lomax's era ethnomusicologists were not studying blues. The folklorists like Lomax who did document blues traditions were not as equipped to note musical differences as ethnomusicologists would have been.

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artists in the summer of 1967.¹⁹⁶ This research produced a wealth of recordings, many of which were later released on the Arhoolie label in 1969, the Revival label in 1970, and the Fat Possum label in 2008.¹⁹⁷ Several of these albums featured liner notes written by Mitchell.¹⁹⁸ The music historian’s fieldwork also contributed to his 1971 book *Blow My Blues Away*, which was the first substantial published work to document Hill Country blues music.¹⁹⁹ Mitchell’s liner notes and *Blow My Blues Away* examine both Hill Country and Delta music, and Mitchell refers to Hill Country music rather imprecisely as “Delta music.” Yet, despite this conflation, Mitchell is relatively successful in examining Hill Country music as a product of place. This achievement owes largely to his decision to present interviews with Hill Country artists, which he includes verbatim in *Blow My Blues Away*. The interviews shed light on how the region shaped the artists’ music and made it unique. For example, interviewee Rosa Lee Hill discusses the importance of family and community life in learning Hill Country music.²⁰⁰ Similarly, Otha(r) Turner observes that watching others play fife and drum music at local picnics inspired him to learn how to play and to develop his own style.²⁰¹

A contemporary of Mitchell, ethnomusicologist David Evans, also conducted fieldwork in the Hill Country in the late 1960s. His first recordings in 1969 are of fife and drum artists.²⁰² Based on this documentation, Evans wrote several important articles, the first of which was publicized in 1972 and released as extended liner notes that accompanied an album.²⁰³ Evans does a better job of situating Hill Country music than Mitchell. He traces the evolving communal importance of the fife and drum tradition from its original use in the military to its status a favored form of music played at local picnics.²⁰⁴ Evans continued to record Hill Country artists well into the 1980s. Many of these recordings can be found on the University of Memphis’ High Water label, which Evans helped to found. He wrote insightful liner notes for many of these albums and CDs, in which he discusses the importance of the distinct regional character of the Hill Country for particular artists’ music.²⁰⁵ He also explained how the Hill Country blues style evolved as artists performed for, and interacted

¹⁹⁶ George Mitchell, Liner Notes, *The Mississippi Delta Blues: Vol. 2*, Arhoolie record 1042, 1969.

¹⁹⁷ *The George Mitchell Collection: Volumes 1-45*, Fat Possum compact discs 1114, 2008.

¹⁹⁸ See George Mitchell, Liner Notes, *The Mississippi Delta Blues: Vol. 1*, Arhoolie record 1041, 1969; Mitchell, *The Mississippi Delta Blues: Vol. 2*; George Mitchell, Liner Notes, *Eighty Years Ramblin’*, Fred McDowell and Johnny Woods, perfs., Revival record 1001, 1970?.

¹⁹⁹ Mitchell, *Blow My Blues Away*.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 63.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 32.

²⁰² David Evans, Liner Notes, *Traveling through the Jungle: Negro Fife and Drum Band Music from the Deep South*, Testament record 2223, 1974; David Evans, Liner Notes, *Afro-American Folk Music from Tate and Panola Counties, Mississippi*, Archive of Folk Song record L67, 1976.

²⁰³ See Evans, “Black Fife and Drum Music in Mississippi;” Evans, *Afro-American Folk Music from Tate and Panola Counties, Mississippi*.

²⁰⁴ Evans, *Afro-American Folk Music from Tate and Panola Counties, Mississippi*.

²⁰⁵ See David Evans, Liner Notes, *Feelin’ Good*, Jessie Mae Hemphill, perf., High Water record 1012, 1990; David Evans, Liner Notes, *Sound Machine Groove*, R.L. Burnside, perf., High Water compact disc 6501, 1997; David Evans, Liner Notes, *Do the Rump!*, Junior Kimbrough & The Soul Blues Boys, perfs., High Water compact disc 6503, 1997; David Evans, Liner Notes, *She-Wolf*, Jessie Mae Hemphill, perf., High Water compact disc 6508, 1998.

with, locals at community juke joints.²⁰⁶ These context-specific themes were further developed in an article about Hill Country blues, which Evans wrote for *Living Blues* magazine in 2007.²⁰⁷

Noted music historian Robert Palmer was the next “blues expert” to take an interest in the Hill Country tradition. In 1990, while a professor at the University of Mississippi, Palmer made the documentary film *Deep Blues: A Musical Pilgrimage to the Crossroads*. The documentary featured performances by Hill Country blues artists R.L. Burnside, David “Junior” Kimbrough, and Jessie Mae Hemphill.²⁰⁸ The film brought a great deal of popular attention to Hill Country blues, as the performances by Hill Country artists were regarded to be the most “forceful.”²⁰⁹ As is mentioned in my essay, the film gestures to the importance of place and emplacement for Hill Country music, when Palmer (as narrator) asserts that artists learned music from their families, and explains that the relative lack of “outmigration” from the Hill Country meant that many families have been playing music for generations. Veering unfortunately toward the blues purists’ folkloric tropes of the Hill Country and its black inhabitants as timeless and spatially removed from the larger national context, Palmer states, “The pattern and pace of life doesn’t seem to have changed much in the last 100 years and the music here is steeped in tradition. Spending time in those hills can be like visiting another country or another time.”²¹⁰ Nonetheless, when Palmer and director Robert Mugge film musicians on their porches and at local juke joints, they capture visually the importance of intact families and local performance venues for the perpetuation of Hill Country blues. In this spirit, in the early 1990s, Palmer took care to record both Junior Kimbrough’s *All Night Long* and R.L. Burnside’s *Too Bad Jim* in the familiar confines of “Junior’s Place,” Kimbrough’s juke joint in Holly Springs.²¹¹ Palmer states in the liner notes for *All Night Long*, “His [Kimbrough’s] music was never designed for the recording studio; the crowd at Junior’s cues the music’s tempo and pacing and the beginning and ending of songs with their shouts of encouragement and their dancing...The performances [on the album] are as they happened; no editing, no overdubs. You don’t need that kind of stuff when lightning strikes.”²¹² Palmer certainly has a point in noting that Hill Country musicians were inspired and energized by local audiences. Nonetheless, he contributes, wittingly or unwittingly, to the dichotomous narrative that pits folkloric “authenticity” against external, commercial interests that foster pernicious change.

To date, the most extensive piece of scholarly work on Hill Country music is Sylvester W. Oliver Jr.’s unpublished 1996 dissertation for the University of Memphis, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi.”²¹³ The 668-page dissertation marked the culmination of Oliver’s fieldwork in the area since 1980.²¹⁴ Employing multiple

²⁰⁶ Evans, *Sound Machine Groove*; Evans, *Do the Rump!*.

²⁰⁷ Evans, “Hill Country Blues.”

²⁰⁸ Mugge, *Deep Blues*.

²⁰⁹ DeCurtis, “Mississippi Musings;” Groome, “Creem Media: Deep Blues.”

²¹⁰ Mugge, *Deep Blues*.

²¹¹ Palmer, *Too Bad Jim*; Robert Palmer, Liner Notes, *All Night Long*, Junior Kimbrough & The Soul Blues Boys, perfs., Fat Possum compact disc 80307, 1992.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi.”

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

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methodologies, Oliver consulted historical documents on the Hill Country, conducted interviews, attended performances, made field recordings of artists, photographed and videotaped informants, and listened to commercial and noncommercial sound recordings from the region.²¹⁵ (Much of this research was conducted under the direction of his mentor and advisor David Evans. Indeed, Oliver assisted Evans, producing some albums for the latter’s High Water label and writing liner notes for a few albums.²¹⁶) Oliver’s dissertation presents a historical, ethnographic, and ethno-musicological study of sacred and secular music traditions prevalent among the Hill Country’s African American population. He rightly notes that the Hill Country is a major cultural region of Mississippi that has been almost entirely neglected by scholars, and he characterizes his own contribution as “an introductory survey, to fill the gap.”²¹⁷ My study has profited greatly from Oliver’s pioneering scholarship. Among the ways my essay builds upon and adds to his is by fleshing out the social and economic determinants of Hill Country blues, and by including the voices and struggles of a new generation of bluesmen and women.

My scholarship and networking on this project have advanced a commitment to promoting Hill Country blues music in my own community. In an effort to broaden interest in the region’s blues music, I obtained funding for and coordinated a concert featuring Hill Country artists at Yale on April 21, 2011.²¹⁸ The show was well attended, and the audience enjoyed performances by the Cedric Burnside Project and Robert Kimbrough, Sr. and a presentation by Willie Wilkinson. I felt compelled to organize the concert because while it is important to study Hill Country blues, the music must be experienced live to be fully enjoyed. My words alone hardly do it justice. I also coordinated the concert in a small attempt to repay the people who had helped me carry out my research, and whose music continues to inspire me.

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²¹⁵ Ibid, 27.

²¹⁶ Sylvester Oliver, Liner Notes, *Do the Rump!*, Junior Kimbrough and the Soul Blues Boys, perfs., High Water compact disc 6503, 1997.

²¹⁷ Oliver, “African-American Music Traditions in Northeast Mississippi,” 3.

²¹⁸ The concert was generously supported by Pierson College, Calhoun College, and the Ethnicity, Race & Migration Program.

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FALL 2012
VOLUME II
ISSUE II

AN UNDERGRADUATE PUBLICATION