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Produced and Edited by:

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Caroline Dinkel
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Lori Zhao

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Saverio Giovacchini

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The Poisonous Night: Miasmatic Theory and Medical Astrology in 19th Century Britain

By Kaylie Bergeson

*“The Vampyre! The Vampyre! Avoid him! His breath
Is the reek of the charnel, the poison of death:
He has broken his prison of pestilent clay,
And the grave yields him up, on the living to prey.”¹*

“The Vampyre,” a short poem published in *Punch* in 1847, personifies the night air as a living vampire – a malicious, vengeful entity preying on the citizens of Victorian London in the form of miasma, or “bad air.” The author describes vicious attacks in victims’ sleep; a child is attacked in its cradle, and a widow falls ill from sleeping restlessly on her couch.² “The Vampyre” is an artful example of 19th century fears surrounding nighttime plagues and bad air in Britain. Traditional beliefs such as the moon influencing fevers and bad smells causing disease melded with new medical research in an attempt to create new solutions to public health crises. By analyzing these two beliefs in the 1800s, it is clear that the nighttime was the source for several fears in 19th century Britain regarding contagion.

“Bad air,” or the miasmatic theory, stems from Hippocratic scholarship in ancient times that links foul smells with infection and disease. Ranging from decomposing corpses to rotting vegetation that emitted unpleasant odors, miasmatic theory postulated that these smells, or “miasmas,” would enter the human body and introduce disease.³ Widespread belief in the miasmatic theory continued until the mid-19th century, when sanitation reforms against miasmas in Britain proved unsuccessful in subduing the cholera epidemics. Medical astrology, another theory dating back to the ancient world, sparked renewed interest in the 19th century. Celestial influence over the body has been attributed to spiritual and scientific reasons, but the primary focus in the 19th century stemmed from new interest in the effects of gravity and Newtonian physics. Medical astrology did not garner the same support as the miasmatic theory by the modern period, but many scholars were inspired by theories that the moon could influence water movement in the body, potentially leading to disease.

Acknowledging the fact that neither of these theories are considered valid by scientists or physicians today, their influence over the public sphere and sanitation reform remains an important discussion. A tumultuous and exciting period in medical history, 19th century Britain provides a unique perspective on illness at night. Poised on the brink of the Scientific Revolution and the development of germ theory in the mid-1800s, it is fascinating to see the miasmatic theory and medical astrology on its last legs. There is little historical research into their persistence into the modern age – for example, Mark Harrison, historian of science and medicine at the University of Oxford, acknowledges in a 2000 article that it is commonly assumed that medical astrology largely died out before the 1800s.⁴ The miasma theory in the late 18th and

¹ “The Vampyre (No Superstition),” *Punch*, 13, (1847), p. 134.

² “The Vampyre,” p. 134

³ Ajesh Kannadan, “History of the Miasma Theory of Disease,” *ESSAI* 16, no. 18 (2018): 41.

⁴ Mark Harrison, “From Medical Astrology to Medical Astronomy: Sol-Lunar and Planetary Theories of Disease in British Medicine, c. 1700–1850.” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 33, no. 1 (2000), p. 25.

early 19th century is more widely studied. In Britain and North America, scholars have discussed the effects of public belief in the miasmatic theory, such as technological developments and improved public health practices. Previous literature on these topics often coincides with discussion about religion's role in medicine, as well as the importance of using medical history as a contextual tool for viewing social history. Discussed separately, both the miasmatic theory and medical astrology reveal unique aspects of medical history. Together, it is evident that nighttime fears around contagion still inform many public health reformations and ideas about disease, as well as reveal an enduring fascination in ancient medicine.

The miasmatic theory and medical astrology are concepts dating back to ancient medical thinkers, whose influence has contributed significantly to the longevity and popularity of these theories until the mid-19th century. The term "miasma" is one that survives in its original Greek form, which even then held several meanings. Its first use in a medical context comes from the Hippocratic Corpus in the 5th century.⁵ Jacques Jouanna, a prominent French scholar of ancient medicine, defines two separate uses of the term miasma; the religious medicine definition, which connects miasma to the "notion of contagion," and miasma in rational medicine, which connects it specifically to air quality.⁶ The Hippocratic Corpus forms the basis of the rational medical thought that informs much of the popular belief in miasma up until the 19th century. Establishing miasma as a natural force, rather than one inflicted on someone due to a failure in morality or responsibility, significantly changed the way in which disease was treated.

Miasmas in rational medicine may be confronted by means of preventing inhalation of bad smells or removing patients from miasma-infested environments. In the treatise *On the Nature of Man*, a part of the Hippocratic Corpus, it is shown that the source of the illness seems to affect everyone regardless of people's differences. As they write, "It is plain that the cause is not regimen but what we breathe, and that this is charged with some unhealthy exhalation."⁷ Mirroring this language, researchers such as W. Adams and Patrick Murphy in the late 18th and early 19th century emphasized this concept. Their respective inquiries refer to Hippocrates, Galen, and other classical thinkers throughout their texts, while weaving in more modern practices. Both works, while examining slightly different angles, acknowledge the "mystery" of miasmas.⁸ The continued focus on miasmatic theory demonstrates that its research, while empirically shaky and underdeveloped, gained its roots in classical scholarship. Centuries later, it remained highly influential in academic circles.

Having breathed new life into the miasmatic theory, despite medical improvements and new research, scholars clung to "bad air" as an explanation for a plethora of public health problems plaguing British society in the 19th century. The cholera epidemics of the 19th century

⁵ Jacques Joanna and Neil Allies, "Chapter 7: Air, Miasma, and Contagion in the Time of Hippocrates and the Survival of Miasmas in Post-Hippocratic Medicine (Rufus of Ephesus, Galen, and Palladius)," in *Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen: Selected Papers*, edited by Philip van der Eijk. Leiden: Brill, 2012. p. 122.

⁶ Jouanna, *Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen*, p. 122.

⁷ Hippocrates, Heracleitus, *Nature of Man*, translated by W. H. S. Jones. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931, p. 27.

⁸ See W. Adams, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of Fever, More Especially the Intermitting: Containing an Investigation into the Nature of Miasmata, and the Manner of Its Action upon the Human Body*. Edinburgh: Schaw and Pillans, 1797. and Patrick Murphy, *Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of Miasmata, More Particularly Illustrated in the Former and Present State of the Campagna Di Roma*. London: Clowes, 1825.

fueled public interest in the causes of the disease, while academics squabbled behind the scenes about solutions to the crises. As tensions built, people used the miasmatic theory to inform their preventative measures, with varying success. One cartoon, published in March 1832, depicts a “cholera preventative costume,” – a man bulkily covered in the myriad of ways people warded off bad smells. A mask, a pocketful of coriander, and a branch of acorns across the mouth are just some of the techniques depicted, with the sarcastic caption concluding with the warning, “By exactly following these instructions you may be certain that the cholera...will attack you first.”⁹ Adding fuel to the fire, *Punch* published a short anonymous piece entitled “Poison Gas Works” in 1846, which explains how someone with malicious intentions may wish to commit mass murder via poison gas. The author explains that “these [chemicals], ascending into the atmosphere, will mingle with it, and contaminate it for miles around, affecting all who may happen to breathe it.”¹⁰ The author warns that these “poison-magazines” truly exist for the sake of money.

Night air was seen as especially malicious, likely because the objective evidence existing at the time seemed to support miasmatic theory more than refute it. The fear of miasma is easy to fall into – as historian Peter Baldwin points out, urban smells are impossible to avoid and difficult to get rid of. Even in the home, where one can close windows to the outside world, homes of the 1800s were more interconnected than ever through sewers, water lines, and other utilities.¹¹ People did seem to get sicker at night; in America, 19th-century physicians cited sources such as malaria, nighttime moisture, and the emission of harmful vapors from vegetation at night, restrained by light during the day.¹² Responding to these theories, people took extreme measures to shut off their homes, reducing ventilation and isolating themselves from the potential of breathing in bad air.

Similarly, modern scholars often parroted the language surrounding celestial influence on the body, or medical astrology, from ancient times. Richard Mead, an 18th-century scholar and physician, sought to combine the natural philosophies of the classical period with brand-new Newtonian physics. He “reasoned that when the Earth was closest to the Sun in its orbit, the Sun's gravitational pull would increase, causing a decrease in air pressure and some difficulty in breathing. The lighter the air, according to Mead, the harder it was to breathe...”¹³ It is not difficult to follow the logic of these beliefs. His ideas and beliefs surrounding the influence of particular stars or celestial bodies, especially the moon, often coincided with ancient beliefs about particular diseases such as epilepsy (the subject of Hippocrates’ treatise *The Sacred Disease*) and mental illnesses.¹⁴ The influence of Newtonian physics and other scientific developments led to an influx of theories such as Mead’s, carried by an interest in combining new and old ideas and an eagerness to explore old knowledge with fresh eyes. Even without mainstream acceptance, the possibility of an astrological connection to disease is clearly one that held interest. Lauren Kassell’s fascinating study of casebooks in early modern medicine reveals that astrologers kept remarkably detailed data on their clients, producing astrological charts and

⁹ Meifred, Lemercier and Company. “Cholera Preventive Costume”, Print. London: Thomas McLean, 1832.

¹⁰ “Poison Gas-Works,” *Punch*, 10-11, (1846), p. 185.

¹¹ Peter C. Baldwin, “How Night Air Became Good Air, 1776-1930.” *Environmental History* 8, no. 3 (2003), p. 416.

¹² Baldwin, “How Night Air Became Good Air,” p. 417.

¹³ Harrison, “From Medical Astrology to Medical Astronomy” p. 30.

¹⁴ Harrison, “From Medical Astrology to Medical Astronomy,” p. 31.

observations comparable to the style of a physician's notes on their patients.¹⁵ Kassell writes that "conceptually, astrology and medicine were predictive arts, founded in the reading of signs, whether celestial or somatic."¹⁶ This demonstrates that while astrology may not have been granted a formal place in scholarship in the 19th century, its relationship to medicine is an established one, forming the grounds for a scientific belief in the moon's effect on the body.

Modern research diverged from ancient thinking in a major way, however; as Harrison writes, "Rather than attribute ill health to some vague, supernatural 'influence', they began to construe the relationship between the human body and the heavens in mechanical terms."¹⁷ Newtonian physics, for instance, inspired scholars to draw a connection between the moon's effect on tides and the possibility of a similar effect on fluids within the body. In the 18th century, scholar and physician Erasmus Darwin wrote prolifically on the influence of lunar cycles, heat fluctuations, and other natural changes affecting the onset and severity of fevers. Other scholars such as John Gadbury drew connections between the sun and moon's influence on climate, which in turn has an effect on human health.¹⁸ While evidence remained questionable and heavily criticized by academics at the time, certain facts and traditional beliefs about disease and well-being were often quoted. Scholars such as Mead pointed to the connection between the length of the menstrual cycle and the moon cycle, while Hippocratic ideas such as the moon influencing fevers were also perpetuated. This latter theory was explained by tide levels and atmospheric impact. For example, in 1820, British surgeon Reginald Orton asserted that barometric pressure changed around the new and full moons, which was linked to the onset of illness and death. He also claimed that these periods created electrical deficiencies in the atmosphere, which in turn depleted energy in humans, making them more vulnerable to disease.¹⁹

Faced with new public health crises such as the onset of the cholera epidemics, scholars turned to new explanations for their problems, often referring to ancient knowledge to see if there was anything scholars had missed before with the lack of modern technology and new scientific knowledge. Meanwhile, new research and cultural connections inspired more research into medical astrology, which remained present in formal academic thought despite its fringe status. As public tensions began to rise and more attention began to focus on public health and sanitation reform, it is clear how classical influence on medical thought sparked increased fear of the nighttime.

The cholera epidemics between 1831 and 1866 shone a spotlight on the miasmatic theory and the resurgence of medical astrology. As a letter to the *Times* in 1847 professed, "As with typhus, so with cholera, the first attraction is a vitiated atmosphere. Both these devourers of human existence flourish best in a climate thoroughly impregnated with the odours of decayed vegetable and animal matter; a pure air is their destruction."²⁰ The author recommends several

¹⁵ Lauren Kassell, "Casebooks in Early Modern England: Medicine, Astrology, and Written Records." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 88, no. 4 (2014), p. 624.

¹⁶ Kassell, "Casebooks in Early Modern England," p. 605.

¹⁷ Harrison, "From Medical Astrology to Medical Astronomy," p. 28.

¹⁸ Harrison, "From Medical Astrology to Medical Astronomy," p. 27.

¹⁹ Harrison, "From Medical Astrology to Medical Astronomy," p. 46.

²⁰ Sidney Godolphin Osborne, Letter to 'The Times', 27 December 1847.

preventative measures such as new coats of paint, removing garbage, and regularly cleaning bedsheets. Several articles and cartoons published in the 1840s desperately call for better ventilation, drainage, and other improvements for public sanitation, based on the recommendations of physicians and academics that blame the “bad air.”

Night air invited even more discussion; considered colder and damper, the chemicals that leached from decomposing bodies, sewers, and people’s own bodily excretions were generally considered fouler in the dark and less easily escaped. The air inside the home was not considered much safer. People feared a build-up of “carbonic acid” (carbon dioxide, as it is known today) in poorly ventilated rooms, while candles, lamps, and gas burners were said to be even more poisonous.²¹ Caught between the impure air of the unsanitary city and the lack of ventilation indoors, victims were depicted in media and in academic circles as being significantly more helpless at night. “The Vampyre,” for instance, showed the victims of miasmas succumbing only in their sleep. Cartoons such as the cholera preventative costume and writings such as “The Vampyre” showed cholera as an intangible villain while also teasing their audiences for believing in it; comparing miasmas to a vampire, for example, reduces them to mythical monsters. In his article “Grounding Miasma,” Wietske Smeele explains that these popular depictions of miasmas and cholera played a large part in developing alternative explanations for the spread of cholera. As the epidemics continued to brutalize Great Britain, they inspired and fueled research into other ideas, when the miasmatic theory was clearly faltering in the eyes of the public.²²

While miasmas in the night air were considered malicious compared to the natural, yet detrimental, effects of the moon, both inspired fear in the 19th century due to longstanding cultural beliefs in these theories. Fears of miasmas in the night air were only exacerbated by the ever-changing phases of the moon and the combined havoc these effects wrecked on the fluids of the body. Mark Harrison muses that much of the attraction of these comparatively weak theories lies in their ancient roots. Scholars were reluctant to give up the traditional thinking and break the continuity of several centuries of research. For the miasmatic theory, it was not until John Snow’s well-known experiment on London water quality that truly shifted focus from the air to the water in 1854 – although his conclusions were dismissed and widely ignored until after his death in 1858.²³ It was not until the end of the 19th century, upon developing proper drainage systems in London, were practitioners and the British government forced to see the impact of clean water. Marking the true end of miasmatic theory was the discovery of *cholera bacillus* in 1884 by Robert Koch, a discovery which changed cholera “from intangible threat to manageable bacteria”.²⁴ Medical astrology, not having enjoyed the same popularity or mainstream research, fell off less dramatically. Modern empirical research techniques simply provide more explanations than celestial influence is able to account for. Many studies since the 20th century have reported that the influence of the moon has no impact on smaller bodies of water such as

²¹ W. B. Tegetmeier, “Chapter XIII: Air and Ventilation,” in *The Scholar’s Handbook of Household Management and Cookery*. London: Macmillan, 1876. pp. 78-79.

²² Wietske Smeele, “Grounding Miasma, or Anticipating the Germ Theory of Disease in Victorian Cholera Satire.” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 49, no. 2 (2016), pp. 15-16.

²³ Stephen Halliday, “Death and Miasma in Victorian London: An Obstinate Belief.” *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 323, no. 7327 (2001), p. 1470.

²⁴ Smeele, “Grounding Miasma,” p. 15.

lakes and ponds. On the human body, therefore, there is no possibility of tides being a significant influence on immunity and diseases.²⁵

Neither miasmatic theory nor medical astrology has retained any formal place in medical scholarship since the 19th century, due to developments such as germ theory and more widespread education regarding the causes of specific diseases. Regardless, elements remain present in alternative medicine, and socially we retain several parts of both theories. This implies that beyond the practical and medical applications of these theories, the nighttime induces fears of contagion. Today, it is still possible to see the remnants of miasmatic theory and medical astrology, despite having left mainstream medical thought. A quick Google search reveals a plethora of sources questioning the moon's association with disease and madness, citing spikes in hospital visits during the full moon and reports of uncharacteristic behavior during the same time as evidence.²⁶ While no results proving a connection between the full moon and psychiatric problems have been reliably produced, many relevant studies have been conducted throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, proving a continued fascination with the possibility of a correlation. Many of these correlations are dismissed as a "Transylvannia effect," or an illusory effect rather than a real statistical correlation. As Alina Iosif and Bruce Ballon conclude in their article, the popularity of medical astrology may be due to "a lack of understanding of physics, psychological biases (e.g., selective recall or selective perception), sensationalism, and the entertainment value of a belief in lunar influence."²⁷ Indeed, interest in celestial activity and the mystery of night is one that has been present since ancient times and persists in the present day.

The role of the moon and night air looks very different in the modern period and continues to evolve with new technologies and scientific developments. In terms of illness and contagion, we see how certain elements still inform the choices we make for our health today; improved ventilation, better drainage, and more regulation of urban sanitation practices, among others. A fixation on classical medicine and the desire to combine the new with the old, the traditional and the rational, underlies many of these concepts. The interpretation of miasmas and the moon over time raise interesting questions about the evolution of medicine over time – both theories were informed by legitimate observations, but lacked the technology and research to come to the conclusions accepted as accurate today. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, miasmatic theory was brought up in relation to preventative measures against the airborne disease. A combination of masking, better ventilation, and more vigilant sanitation practices were key to beginning to curb the worst effects of the pandemic – all measures originally taken against miasmas.²⁸ It is evident that regardless of the accuracy behind these theories, the cultural responses keep them highly relevant in both medical and social spaces. With that in mind, what role do inaccurate medical theories have in modern research? Are they worth a second glance?

²⁵ Alina Iosif and Bruce Ballon, "Bad Moon Rising: The Persistent Belief in Lunar Connections to Madness." *CMAJ: Canadian Medical Association Journal* 173, no. 12 (2005), p. 1499.

²⁶ Iosif and Ballon, "Bad Moon Rising", p. 1498.

²⁷ Iosif and Ballon, "Bad Moon Rising," p. 1499.

²⁸ See Melanie A. Kiechle, "Revisiting a 19th Century Medical Idea Could Help Address Covid-19," *Washington Post* (2021).

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An Amazing Fantasy: The Sensational Story of the Spectacular Spider-Man By Noah Jones

Introduction

*“Who am I? You sure you want to know? The story of my life is not for the faint of heart.”*¹

These are the opening words spoken by Peter Parker in the classic 2002 film *Spider-Man*. In the film, Peter is referring to the story of how he became Spider-Man. However, the quote could also be applied to the story of how Spider-Man came to be in the real world. As the brainchild of writer Stan Lee and artist Steve Ditko, Spider-Man was beset by a number of challenges from the moment he was conceived. These include Stan Lee’s alleged struggles to find the proper artist to bring his idea to life, pushback from the owner of Marvel, and attempts to appeal to the cynical teenagers of the 1960s. In this paper, I will show how Spider-Man was able to overcome all of these and other early struggles on his way to becoming the phenomenon that he is today.

I will first look at where the idea of Spider-Man came from, by examining the comic book landscape of the early 60s and the accounts of the character’s origins given by his creators. Next, I will look at the resistance Lee and Ditko faced from Marvel when they initially proposed the character to the owner of Marvel, Martin Goodman. From there, I will analyze the early comics from the Lee-Ditko era of Spider-Man, in order to explain what made them so innovative. Lastly, I will look at how the character was received by contemporary audiences during the first few years of his existence. While some may scoff at the idea of devoting a scholarly paper to a comic book character, it is important to remember that Spider-Man is one of the most influential characters in the history of American popular culture. Beyond the character himself and his iconic supporting cast, these early comics either introduced or popularized many storytelling elements that have become commonplace in the popular culture of the last sixty years, such as having a child protagonist with powers who do not have the help of a wise adult mentor and the concept of a superhero with deep personal flaws. Thus, an understanding of Spider-Man and his origins are crucial to understanding modern American popular culture.

The Compelling Context

In order to understand where the idea for Spider-Man came from, one must first understand where the superhero genre was at the start of the 1960s. The first generation of superheroes, including notable names such as DC’s Superman and Marvel’s² Captain America had launched the genre during the late 1930s and early 1940s. During this period, referred to as

¹ *Spider-Man*, directed by Sam Raimi (Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures, 2002.), DVD.

² Technically speaking, Marvel and DC did not acquire their current names until the 1960s and 70s respectively. However, for the sake of clarity and convenience, I will refer to them by these names throughout the entire paper, even though it is anachronistic.

the “Golden Age of Comics,” superheroes were extremely popular in the United States, especially during the Second World War.³

Once the war ended, however, superheroes dramatically declined in popularity, for reasons that are still being debated to this day.⁴ There were sporadic attempts to revive the genre in the early 50s, but none of them stuck. This changed in 1956, with DC’s relaunch of the Flash, by writer Rob Kanigher and artist Carmine Infantino. With a revamped origin and a sleek new costume, the book was a huge hit. The Flash was followed by the relaunch of another Golden Age superhero, the Green Lantern, in 1959. This was a success as well, prompting DC to create the Justice League in 1960, which saw the aforementioned heroes team up with Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, and a number of other DC heroes⁵.

This superhero resurgence was noticed by the head of Marvel at this time, Martin Goodman. By the beginning of the 1960s, Marvel had been out of the genre for over a decade, shifting their focus to romance, western, and sci-fi themed books. After seeing DC’s success, however, Goodman wanted to re-enter the field. Thus, in 1961, he commissioned one of his best writers⁶ to create a superhero team for Marvel. This writer was the now legendary Stan Lee.⁷

When Goodman came to him with the request, Lee was considering leaving the comics industry altogether. In his 2015 memoir, he states that he saw the superhero stories of the day as “juvenile” and “simplistic”, starring heroes who lack any “connections to humanity”.⁸ This was deeply unsatisfying work for a man like Lee, who had spent much of his childhood reading works from literary giants like Edgar Allen Poe and William Shakespeare.⁹ Lee wanted to write deep and substantial stories as they had but felt handicapped by the perceived limitations of the comics genre. However, after receiving encouragement from his beloved wife Joan, Lee decided to go ahead and make the type of superhero story he had always wanted to, defying the conventions of the medium.¹⁰ This led to the revolutionary introduction of the Fantastic Four in 1961.

³ Ben Saunders, “Series Introduction,” in *The Amazing Spider-Man (Penguin Classics Marvel Collection)*, ed. Ben Saunders (New York, NY: Penguin Classics and Marvel, 2022), xi. Saunders argues that superheroes were so popular during this period because they epitomized the moral certainty that was widespread in the United States as the country entered the Second World War.

⁴ In the page xii of the series introduction, Ben Saunders posits that it may have been due to the zeitgeist of moral ambiguity brought forth by political and social events in America during the decade following the end of the war. Other possible causes are the moral panic caused by comics’ supposed link with juvenile delinquency and the rise of television.

⁵ Saunders, “Series Introduction,” xii.

⁶ Prior to 1961, Lee had proven his worth as a writer with his work on a number of western and sci-fi titles, as well as a few of the early issues of *Captain America* in the 40s.

⁷ Stan Lee and Peter David. *Amazing Incredible Fantastic: A Marvelous Memoir* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 57.

⁸ Lee, *Amazing Incredible Fantastic*, 58.

⁹ Lee, *Amazing Incredible Fantastic*, 3-5.

¹⁰ Lee, *Amazing Incredible Fantastic*, 58.

With the help of acclaimed artist Jack Kirby, Lee created a uniquely down-to-earth and relatable spin on the superhero team. Rather than being ideal people, The Fantastic Four were written like a real family: they bickered with one another and had a number of neuroses they had to deal with.¹¹ While there was still plenty of action and powers to impress readers, there was also a large focus placed on creating three-dimensional characters who felt like actual people. This emphasis on character development and good storytelling made the Fantastic Four a hit, leading Goodman to ask Lee for another super character. This became the Hulk, a misunderstood monster who often found himself at odds with the law and just wanted to be left alone by society. The Hulk was another hit for Marvel and another successful proof-of-concept for Lee's more naturalistic approach to superhero stories.¹²

The Outstanding Origin

In order to keep the streak going, Goodman asked Lee to come up with yet another super character, which ended up being the Amazing Spider-Man. The story of how that idea came to be is complicated, as there are two competing accounts of what happened. One comes from Lee and the other comes from Steve Ditko, Spider-Man's other co-creator. The two men were polar opposites: Lee was an outgoing, liberal cheerleader for Marvel, while Ditko was an introverted Objectivist hermit. Despite their differences, the two men made a great creative team, working together on the title *Amazing Adult Fantasy* in the early 1960s, which featured a number of paranormal stories with twist endings.¹³

Instead of Lee coming up with the stories and Ditko simply making the art for them, Lee and Ditko collaborated through the use of the "Marvel Method".¹⁴ Essentially, this is how it worked¹⁵:

1. The artist and writer would discuss the plot of the upcoming book.
2. The artist used the discussion as a basis for penciling the entire book.
3. The artist showed the finished artwork to the writer and they had a second conference.
4. The writer added the dialogue in.

Lee liked this method because it gave the artist a role in deciding the plot of the book, creating a collaborative spirit that DC lacked.¹⁶ However, it also made assigning credit difficult, as someone credited as an "artist" may have had a big role in the plotting of the story. This may be what is responsible for the vastly different stories of Spider-Man's creation given by both co-creators.

¹¹ Saunders, "Series Introduction," xiii-xix.

¹² Lee, *Amazing Incredible Fantastic*, 60.

¹³ Ben Saunders. "Volume Introduction," in *The Amazing Spider-Man (Penguin Classics Marvel Collection)*, ed. Ben Saunders (New York, NY: Penguin Classics and Marvel, 2022), xxiii-xxiv.

¹⁴ Saunders, "Volume Introduction," xxiv.

¹⁵ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. "How Stan Lee and Steve Ditko Create Spider-Man!" from *The Amazing Spider-Man Annual #1* (1964). in *The Amazing Spider-Man (Penguin Classics Marvel Collection)*, ed. Ben Saunders (New York, NY: Penguin Classics and Marvel, 2022), 332-334.

¹⁶ Saunders, "Volume Introduction," xxiv.

Generally, Lee claimed that after Goodman asked him for another superhero, he came up with the idea of someone who could climb up walls like a bug. While thinking through bug names, he eventually landed upon “Spider-Man”. He liked it because it reminded him of “The Spider,” a pulp hero that he had loved as a child.¹⁷ While the details of this story vary from interview to interview (sometimes he claimed that he was inspired by seeing a fly climb on the wall and simply chose the name “Spider-Man” because he thought it sounded dramatic¹⁸), this is the basic version of the story that he generally stuck to.

From there, Lee went on to flesh out the details of the character by himself. Firstly, Lee wanted him to be a teenager in order to appeal to that demographic. This idea was probably influenced by the fact that children made up a large portion of the comic book reader base at the time. While detailed demographic data about comic book readers from this time does not exist, there is evidence that this was the case. A poll conducted in San Francisco in 1960 found that 41% of fourth grade boys read at least 9 comics a month.¹⁹ Similarly, a survey conducted in the same year in Southern California found that 64% of sixth graders and 34% of high schoolers in the entire region read comic books.²⁰ So many children read comic books in the Golden Age that by 1954, there was a moral panic around the supposed links between comics and juvenile delinquency, prompting a hearing on the issue undertaken by the US Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency.²¹ This led to the creation of the Comics Code Authority, a self-censorship board that only approved comic books that followed certain guidelines in order to ensure they were kid-friendly.²² From this point on, it was generally assumed that comic books that carried the CCA’s seal of approval (including all of Marvel’s) were generally targeted at children and adolescents. Considering all of this information, it makes sense why Stan Lee wanted Spider-Man to be a teenager.

Being a teenager was not enough for Lee, however. Instead of a handsome jock, he wanted his hero to be a nerdy loser who had had to deal with the typical problems of teenage angst, bullies, and loneliness. He also wanted him to be an orphan who lived with his aunt and uncle.²³ This made Spider-Man a clear continuation of the realistic approach to superheroes Lee had established with the Fantastic Four and the Hulk. In short, Lee believed that he came up with all of the defining characteristics of the character, besides his appearance.

Ditko had a very different version of the story of Spider-Man’s creation. According to him, Lee just came up with the name and the basic idea of a teenager with a magic ring that

¹⁷ *Stan Lee’s Mutants, Monsters, & Marvels*. (Culver City, CA: Destination Films, 2002), Web video.

¹⁸ Web Stories - Life Stories of Remarkable People, “Stan Lee - Creating ‘The Hulk’, ‘Spider-Man’, and ‘Daredevil’”, YouTube video, 4:58, June 20, 2016.

¹⁹ Jean-Paul Gabilliet, Bart Beaty, and Nick Nguyen. *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 166.

²⁰ Gabilliet, Beaty, and Nguyen, *Of Comics and Men*, 166.

²¹ David Palmer, “The Evolution of the American Comic Book Industry: Are We Entering the Third Wave?,” *Advances in Business Research* 1, no. 1 (2010): 234.

²² Palmer, “Evolution”, 234.

²³ Lee, *Amazing Incredible Fantastic*, 73.

would transform him into an adult hero called Spider-Man. As was typical with the Marvel Method, Ditko took Stan's idea and expanded upon it, creating the character's iconic costume and conceiving of his wall-crawling power. From there, the two worked together to flesh out the details of the story, eventually leading to the Spider-Man we know today making his debut in 1962's *Amazing Fantasy* #15.²⁴

Deep down, Lee believed that Spider-Man was clearly his creation, while Ditko saw himself as a co-creator because he was the first person to "bring the character to life". Lee disagreed, believing that whoever comes up with the idea for a character is that character's sole creator. However, he respected Ditko enough to be credited as a co-creator of the character and has been for the last sixty years.²⁵

While we will never know which story is true, it is clear that both men were instrumental in the creation of Spider-Man and deserve equal credit for making him into what he is. Lee's quippy dialogue and naturalistic writing style made Spider-Man feel special when compared to the other heroes of his day, while Ditko's quirky art made his appearance memorable and unique. Ditko's own reclusiveness and introversion are also believed to have been a notable influence on Spider-Man's loner nature.²⁶

Regardless of how the idea came about, Lee needed the approval of Martin Goodman in order to make Spider-Man a reality. After he had already had success with the Fantastic Four and the Hulk, and considering how successful the character turned out to be, one would probably assume that gaining that approval was easy for Lee. In reality, it was not so straightforward.

The Repulsive Resistance

Goodman had three main objections to the idea of Spider-Man. The first was that a teenager could not be the main star of a superhero comic book; he could only be a sidekick.²⁷ Considering the superhero landscape at the time, this made sense. Almost all of the notable superheroes of the day, including Marvel's, were full-grown adults. Teenagers in these stories generally served as sidekicks who, while being capable in their own right, nonetheless depended on their wiser adult mentors to be of much use. Among the few exceptions were Marvel's own Human Torch of the Fantastic Four, who was part of a superhero team, and Fawcett Comics' Captain Marvel²⁸ who had to turn into an adult to possess any real power, which presented a somewhat condescending message to children. Thus, it is understandable why Goodman was not sure that a teenage hero could carry a comic book by himself.

²⁴ Steve Ditko, "An Insider's Part of Comics History: Jack Kirby's Spider-Man," in *Avenging World*, ed. Robin Snyder (Bellingham, WA: SD Publishing, 2002), 57-58.

²⁵ Stan Lee's Mutants, Monsters, & Marvels. (Culver City, CA: Destination Films, 2002) Web video.

²⁶ Bradford Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 211

²⁷ Edward Gross, *Spider-Man Confidential: From Comic Icon to Hollywood Hero* (New York, NY: Hyperion, 2002), 9.

²⁸ Captain Marvel is better known today as DC Comics' Shazam.

Goodman's second objection was that Lee's desire to make Peter a skinny loser with lots of personal issues went against what a superhero should be. In Goodman's view, superheroes were strong and attractive and were too busy fighting crime to worry about prosaic concerns such as finding a date. He thought Lee's Spider-Man sounded more like a comedy character than a real superhero.²⁹ Again, this objection is understandable, as the majority of superheroes at this point were still well-adjusted members of society, especially the stable of heroes at DC. However, Marvel itself had already proven that neurotic superheroes could be commercially viable with the Fantastic Four and the Hulk, making this objection somewhat puzzling.

Goodman's final objection was that people found spiders disgusting³⁰. While it is true that many people are scared of spiders and they are generally viewed in a negative light by most societies, this did not necessarily mean that a hero based on the animal would be a failure. Bats arguably had just as bad of a reputation as spiders did, but DC's Batman was a huge success, making this objection curious as well.³¹

Nonetheless, Goodman would not budge, so Lee had to find another way to get him to approve of the character. He decided to ask Goodman to allow him to include the first Spider-Man story in the last issue of *Amazing Adult Fantasy*. Since the book was going to be canceled³² anyway, Goodman acquiesced.³³ According to Lee's account, once he had the idea fully formed in his head, he then sought out an artist for the story. Initially, he went to Jack Kirby, but Lee thought his rendition of the character looked "too heroic". Lee wanted his superhero to feel unique and different, so he then went to Steve Ditko, as he believed that his weird art style would fit the character perfectly.³⁴ From there, the two men worked together on Spider-Man's debut story in *Amazing Fantasy*³⁵ #15, leading up to its publication in August 1962.

The Bold Beginning

Amazing Fantasy #15 was an anthology, featuring a number of short stories in addition to Spider-Man's debut. The other stories all featured paranormal and sci-fi elements such as aliens and time travel, and they all concluded with some sort of unexpected twist ending. While being a superhero story, Spider-Man fits in well with the type of fare published in the rest of the book. The sci-fi element is represented by the radioactive spider that bit Peter and gave him his powers

²⁹ Lee, *Amazing Incredible Fantastic*, 58.

³⁰ Les Daniels. *Marvel: Five Decades of the World's Greatest Comics* (New York, NY: Abrams, 1993), 95.

³¹ Note that only record we have of these objections come from Lee himself and his retellings of events are infamous for being far from infallible.

³² Even this part of the story is contested, with there being some evidence that Goodman only decided to cancel the book *after* *Amazing Fantasy* #15 came out, such as an editorial comment on page 11 exalting readers to "See the Next Issue of *Amazing Fantasy*".

³³ Lee, *Amazing Incredible Fantastic*, 74.

³⁴ Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, 211.

³⁵ In an announcement within *Amazing Fantasy* #15, Lee claims to have dropped the "Adult" from the title of the book due to complaints from teenager readers. This serves as another indicator that teenagers made up a sizable portion of the Marvel reader base at this point in time.

after it had inadvertently absorbed “a fantastic amount of radioactivity”³⁶ during an experiment. The twist ending is that the same burglar who Peter allowed to escape after a robbery went on to kill his Uncle Ben in a tragic coincidence.³⁷ There are also a number of typical elements of the superhero genre that are present in the story, such as Peter’s supernatural powers and now iconic red-and-blue skin tight costume.

This is where the similarities with the past stop. While built on the pre-existing conventions of superhero comics, Spider-Man was far from an average superhero³⁸, and many of the innovations that set him apart are apparent from his very first appearance. One of these innovations is the character of Peter Parker himself. On the first page, he’s introduced to us as a skinny, bespectacled, and lonely teenager who is shunned and bullied by his peers. The popular girl at school goes so far as to refer to him as “Midtown High’s only professional wallflower”, as he stares gloomily from a distance.³⁹ This is about as far from the ultra-confident Superman as one can get. Beyond his appearance and struggles at school, Peter’s characterization is also unusual for a superhero. Once he receives his powers, instead of instantly choosing to use them to help humanity as DC’s Flash did⁴⁰, he immediately decides to use them to become rich and famous by heading into show business. In a thought bubble, he muses that, besides his kind aunt and uncle, “the rest of the world can go hang for all I care!”⁴¹. He even allows a burglar to escape when he could have easily stopped him, and when confronted by a police officer about it, he declares that “From now on I just look out for number one — that means — me!”⁴². This amount of callous selfishness was alien to superheroes of the time and even stands out today as being so coldhearted to the point that later retellings of the story, such as in the 2002 movie and *The Spectacular Spider-Man* television series have tried to make Peter’s decision feel more understandable by making the person who was robbed a skinflint. Peter only decides to fight crime when he finds out that someone killed his uncle and ran off to an abandoned warehouse. This leads him to put on his Spider-Man suit and find the killer. When Peter confronts him, he discovers that it’s the same burglar he could have stopped earlier on, and finally realizes the error of his ways.⁴³

With *Amazing Fantasy* #15, Lee and Ditko completely flipped the superhero archetype on its head. In truth, one could argue that there is no superhero in the origin story of Spider-Man. Peter Parker lacks all of the traditional qualities of a superhero, uses his powers for selfish reasons, and fails to save the day in the end. Even his decision to chase down the burglar came more from a desire for revenge rather than anything altruistic. All of these traits made Spider-

³⁶ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. “*Amazing Fantasy* #15 (1962),” in *The Amazing Spider-Man (Penguin Classics Marvel Collection)*, ed. Ben Saunders (New York, NY: Penguin Classics and Marvel, 2022), 5.

³⁷ Lee and Ditko, “*Amazing Fantasy* #15,” 13.

³⁸ In fact, Spider-Man is never actually referred to as a “superhero” in his debut story. Instead, he’s referred to as a “costume hero” and “fantasy character”.

³⁹ Lee and Ditko, “*Amazing Fantasy* #15,” 3.

⁴⁰ Robert Kanigher and Carmine Infantino. “*Showcase* #4 (1956).” in *The Flash: A Celebration of 75 Years*, ed. Rachel Pinnelas (New York, NY: DC Comics, 2015), 71.

⁴¹ Lee and Ditko, “*Amazing Fantasy* #15,” 10.

⁴² Lee and Ditko, “*Amazing Fantasy* #15,” 10.

⁴³ Lee and Ditko, “*Amazing Fantasy* #15,” 13.

Man feel like a unique and fresh take on the superhero genre. In the following years, Stan Lee and Steve Ditko would go on to build on this foundation, making Spider-Man into the hero we know today.

The Fantastic Follow-Ups

Spider-Man's struggles with doing the right thing became a constant feature of his solo title, *The Amazing Spider-Man*. In the first issue, he immediately goes back to trying to make money as Spider-Man, even *after* the traumatic death of his uncle. He even considers robbing a bank for a moment, until he realizes that that would be wrong.⁴⁴ He does not do anything remotely heroic until page 8, after his entertainment career had fizzled. In the second issue, he initially only chases down the supervillain Vulture in order to get pictures in exchange for money from a local paper, rather than trying to stop him. Fortunately, from this point on, he consistently acts as a hero but is still hounded by doubts. He has at least one moment where he questions if he even wants to be Spider-Man in nearly every one of the early issues. In issue #3, he considers quitting after being defeated by Doctor Octopus, asking himself "Is this the end of Spider-Man?". Similarly, in issue #17, he throws his Spider-Man suit against the wall in frustration and miserably claims that he wishes he never even heard the name "Spider-Man". This also reflects another innovation present in the early Spider-Man comics: the heavy use of monologue. Peter spends much of these comics musing to himself, usually trying to make light of the situations he finds himself in or struggling to figure out what to do next. According to Lee himself, he added so much monologuing to the stories to "help the exposition" and express "interesting thoughts that weren't relevant to the current panel, but would still hold the reader's interest."⁴⁵ In practice, they made Spider-Man feel more fleshed out and three-dimensional than any of his contemporaries.

Giving a superhero such doubts and insecurities and giving the reader a detailed insight into his mind were huge steps forward for the genre, which at the time was dominated by levelheaded adults. This is evident when one compares the monologue for a contemporary Flash comic to that of a Spider-Man comic: "What in the world is that odd blackness?...I better investigate."⁴⁶ and "Why do I seem to hurt people, no matter how I try not to? Is this the price I must always pay for being...Spider-Man?!"⁴⁷ While the former quote is just a basic observation that leads to action, the latter gives the reader a deep look into the mind of a troubled individual.

⁴⁴ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. "The Amazing Spider-Man #1 (1963)," in *The Amazing Spider-Man (Penguin Classics Marvel Collection)*, ed. by Ben Saunders (New York, NY: Penguin Classics and Marvel, 2022), 33

⁴⁵ Daniels, *Five Decades*, 95.

⁴⁶ Gardner Fox and Carmine Infantino. "The Flash #123 (1961)," in *The Flash: A Celebration of 75 Years*, ed. Rachel Pinnelas (New York, NY: DC Comics, 2015), 105.

⁴⁷ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. "The Amazing Spider-Man #17 (1964)," in *The Amazing Spider-Man (Penguin Classics Marvel Collection)*, ed. Ben Saunders (New York, NY: Penguin Classics and Marvel, 2022), 272.

Another difference between Spider-Man and his contemporaries is that he was a lonely outcast. Besides his aunt and love interest Betty Brant later on, almost everyone else in the early stories treats Peter (and Spider-Man) with contempt and suspicion, including the very people he tries to save. The man responsible for much of this negative sentiment is J. Jonah Jameson, a miserly newspaper owner who despises Spider-Man. Within the first fifteen issues, he wrongly accuses Spider-Man of being a supervillain on several occasions, repeatedly begs the police to arrest him, and never gives him any credit for the good he does, including saving his son John Jameson's life. Jameson's libelous⁴⁸ articles influence the public perception of Spider-Man, causing him to be seen as an insane vigilante. Our hero has to listen to people say things such as "Spider-Man oughta be run out of the country!"⁴⁹ and "He must be a neurotic!"⁵⁰ These comments only served to worsen Peter's identity crisis, as he often finds himself wondering what is the point of being a hero and sacrificing so much for such an unappreciative populace.

Peter's school life was also in shambles. From his debut, he's been bullied and ignored by his peers. His main bully is Flash Thompson, who mercilessly berates Peter whenever he gets the chance. He constantly refers to him as a "teacher's pet,"⁵¹ "punk,"⁵² and a "big zero".⁵³ Most of the time, his fellow classmates either join in with Flash or simply do nothing. Peter also has no luck with girls, who were generally more interested in handsome outgoing boys like Flash, rather than the skinny introverted Parker. When Peter tries to ask out Sally Avril, she rejects him in an unnecessarily cruel way, stating that "For the umpteenth time, you're just not my type...not when dream boats like Flash Thompson are around!"⁵⁴ This abuse clearly had a deeply negative impact upon Peter's developing psyche, creating deep feelings of resentment and low self-esteem. It also created a selfish attitude that led to Peter letting the burglar escape and ultimately his uncle's death. Perhaps young Peter would have had a more pro-social attitude in the first place if his classmates had been nicer towards him. This arguably makes Spider-Man a comment on the harmful effects that maltreatment from peers, rather than authority figures, can have on teenagers and young adults, which was something decades ahead of its time.

Peter's problems did not stop there. Lee actively tried to give Peter as many problems as possible⁵⁵, such as supervillains, a doting aunt, and money troubles. This reaches its apex in issue

⁴⁸ "Slander is spoken. In print, it's libel."

⁴⁹ Lee and Ditko, "*The Amazing Spider-Man* #1," 44.

⁵⁰ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. "*The Amazing Spider-Man* #4 (1963)," in *The Amazing Spider-Man (Penguin Classics Marvel Collection)*, ed. Ben Saunders (New York, NY: Penguin Classics and Marvel, 2022), 133.

⁵¹ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. "*The Amazing Spider-Man* #2 (1963)," in *The Amazing Spider-Man (Penguin Classics Marvel Collection)*, ed. Ben Saunders (New York, NY: Penguin Classics and Marvel, 2022), 66.

⁵² Lee and Ditko, "*The Amazing Spider-Man* #4," 130.

⁵³ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. "*The Amazing Spider-Man* #9 (1964)," in *The Amazing Spider-Man (Penguin Classics Marvel Collection)*, ed. Ben Saunders (New York, NY: Penguin Classics and Marvel, 2022), 145.

⁵⁴ Lee and Ditko, "*Amazing Fantasy* #15," 4.

⁵⁵ *Spider-Man: The Mythology of the 21st Century*, directed by Josh Dreck (Culver City, CA: Columbia Tristar Home Entertainment, 2002.) DVD.

#9, in which Peter has to deal with his aunt being in the hospital, find a way to make enough money for her operation, defeat the villain Electro, study for his midterms, and listen to more insults from his inconsiderate classmates all within 25 pages. Having a superhero be forced to deal with so many problems, both super and average, added a lot of intrigue to the comics, as many times they felt insurmountable. Compared to his perfect contemporaries, Spider-Man had much more at stake in every issue than just beating the villain of the month. It also made it feel all the more impressive and inspiring when Spider-Man persevered and ended up coming out on top at the end, as he always did.

Beyond the content of the stories themselves, Lee went to great lengths to create a sense of community with the readers of Spider-Man. This can be seen as early as the *Amazing Fantasy* #15. In an editor's announcement, Lee referred to his audience as "our valued readers" and showed gratitude for their support of the book. He claims to have omitted the contents page from the book in order to have more space for story content after being requested to do so in letters, showing that he cared about what his readers wanted. He also thanked a number of fans personally for their letters and asked for more, claiming that "we carefully read each and everyone, and we are guided by your desires when we edit our magazine!". Lee took this even further in issue #3 of *The Amazing Spider-Man* by introducing an entire letters page in which fan's letters would be printed and responded to by "Stan and Steve". The responses were all written in Lee's trademark jovial style, full of lighthearted witticisms. For example, he would often refer to the fans with playful nicknames he made up rather than their actual names, such as "Morrie" from Morris⁵⁶ and "Billy Boy" from William.⁵⁷ Even the bylines became a place for humor from issue #14 onwards, as Lee always added some sort of different quip to each name for every issue. For example, issue #14 was written by "Stan Lee (The Poor Man's Shakespeare)" and lettered by "Sam Rosen (The Poor Man's Rich Man)".⁵⁸ All of these decisions made Spider-Man a hip and fun reading experience that DC could not match.

Spider-Man was an entirely new and innovative phenomenon that disobeyed almost every notion of what a superhero should be. As history has shown countless times, when it comes to new and innovative phenomena, one of two things tends to happen. They are either praised as a breath of fresh air or criticized for straying too far from what has come before. In the case of Spider-Man, Lee and Ditko had no idea if the comic book reader base would embrace their unusual take on the superhero genre or reject their weird creation, as Martin Goodman had predicted. Fortunately, the former turned out to be the case.

The Riveting Reception

Amazing Fantasy #15 was one of the best-selling books Marvel had ever published.⁵⁹ The sales of the book led to Spider-Man receiving his own solo series in March 1963. Spider-

⁵⁶ Lee and Ditko, "*The Amazing Spider-Man* #17," 271.

⁵⁷ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. "*The Amazing Spider-Man* #14 (1964)," in *The Amazing Spider-Man (Penguin Classics Marvel Collection)*, ed. Ben Saunders (New York, NY: Penguin Classics and Marvel, 2022), 241.

⁵⁸ Lee and Ditko, "*The Amazing Spider-Man* #14," 219.

⁵⁹ Daniels, *Five Decades*, 97.

Man's solo book was a hit, selling so well that it shifted from a bi-monthly title to a monthly title after just four issues.⁶⁰ The series' success helped Marvel's overall sales figures, which doubled by the mid-1960s.⁶¹ The series also provided the earliest look at the reception of Spider-Man, in the form of the aforementioned letter pages.

The most common sentiment expressed in these letters was praise for how unique and relatable Spider-Man was. Tom Jones wrote "you have a hero that reaches out to the hearts of the readers,"⁶² while Larry Brown believed that the fact that Spider-Man made mistakes was what made him "so great".⁶³ Charles Wisniewski praised Spider-Man for being a "down-to-earth human" unlike other superheroes.⁶⁴ While this was the general gist of most of the letters, there were a number of readers taken aback by Spider-Man's bizarreness. Fred Bronson saw Spider-Man as a good idea, but wanted him to become a "normal superhero".⁶⁵ Similarly, Bill Schmuck seemed puzzled that Spider-Man was not rich like other superheroes and wanted him to get his own "Spider-jet" and headquarters in future issues.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, comments such as these were few and far between⁶⁷, with most readers seeing Spider-Man as an entertaining new take on the superhero archetype. This sentiment was echoed even outside of the curated letter pages. In a 1965 article for New York City's alternative weekly *The Village Voice*, Sally Kempton highlights how Spider-Man's many problems made his stories feel much more interesting than the "thin" adventures of Batman and Superman at the time. The last line of her article sums up the general opinion towards Spider-Man among contemporary audiences: "How can a character as hopelessly healthy as Superman compete with this living symbol of the modern dilemma, this neurotic's neurotic, Spiderman [*sic*], the super-anti-hero of our time."

Spider-Man also found a strong reception among his teenagers and young adults. For instance, one high school teacher decided to implement Spider-Man into his lesson plan on "absurd heroes"⁶⁸, alongside other figures idolized by the youth of the day, such as Robert Kennedy. He describes the response from his students as being "enthusiastic, and at times,

⁶⁰ Lee and Ditko, "The Amazing Spider-Man #4," 133.

⁶¹ Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, 223.

⁶² Lee and Ditko, "The Amazing Spider-Man #3," 107.

⁶³ Lee and Ditko, "The Amazing Spider-Man #4," 132.

⁶⁴ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. "The Amazing Spider-Man #13 (1964)," in *The Amazing Spider-Man (Penguin Classics Marvel Collection)*, ed. Ben Saunders (New York, NY: Penguin Classics and Marvel, 2022), 216.

⁶⁵ Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. "The Amazing Spider-Man #3 (1963)," in *The Amazing Spider-Man (Penguin Classics Marvel Collection)*, ed. Ben Saunders (New York, NY: Penguin Classics and Marvel, 2022), 107.

⁶⁶ Lee and Ditko, "The Amazing Spider-Man #4," 132.

⁶⁷ It is important to remember that the letter pages only represent a very small portion of all the letters that Marvel received, and as such, it is possible that there were many more criticisms of the character early on. However, given Spidey's later success, it is unlikely that there was a huge backlash against him.

⁶⁸ The term was coined by philosopher Albert Camus to refer to heroes who reject traditional value systems in favor of developing their own.

uninhibited”.⁶⁹ Spider-Man was especially popular among the discontented college students of the era. An Esquire poll conducted at a college campus in 1965 found that Spider-Man was ranked as one of the students’ favorite revolutionary icons, alongside people like Bob Dylan and Che Guevara. One student claimed that Spider-Man was their favorite because he was “one of us”.⁷⁰ In *Northwest Passage*, a leftist underground college newspaper, one could find an article praising Spider-Man amidst rants about the Nixon Administration and illustrations criticizing the Vietnam War. Writer Roger Flescher claims that Spider-Man was the easiest of the Marvel superheroes for college students to relate to and praises Stan Lee for his “insight into the heads of a group of people”, referring to his age group.⁷¹ In a similar publication, the anonymous writer mentions reading Spider-Man comics at a campus party, while his classmates wore Beatles hats and sang anti-administration songs.⁷² The character’s relatability, as well as Lee and Ditko’s total rejection of conventions, seemed to have struck a chord with a group that generally viewed tradition and authority with contempt.

On the whole, Spider-Man was a smash hit with audiences, vindicating his creators’ decision to go against all the established knowledge about superheroes and make something original. The strong fan reception and sales led to the pair working together on almost 40 issues of *The Amazing Spider-Man* until Ditko left the book in 1966.⁷³ This had little effect on the character’s success, as by that point, he was already a sensation. His popularity continued to grow over the next fifty years, as new artists, writers, directors, actors, and game developers all put their own spin on the character, leaving us with the icon we have today.

Conclusion

*“Whatever life holds in store for me, I will never forget these words: with great power, comes great responsibility. Who am I? I’m Spider-Man.”*⁷⁴

In this paper, I have demonstrated how Spider-Man came to be and how he overcame all of the impediments he faced along the way. Born out of the fertile milieu of an industry that had just been revived, Spider-Man arose from the minds of two genius creators who were not afraid to take risks. Despite initial concerns that an unattractive nerd could not be a marketable superhero, Spider-Man became a huge success, going on to be one of the most popular characters in all of fiction. Along the way, Lee and Ditko introduced a number of innovations that would go on to transform storytelling across all media for the next sixty years. Spider-Man proved that a child with superpowers was capable of carrying a title by themselves, without any adult to help. He also paved the way for more complex characterization within comic books, demonstrating that personal problems and monologues could be just as entertaining as superpowers and battles.

⁶⁹ James J. Heckel, “Heroic Absurdities--An Approach to Literature,” *The English Journal* 56, no. 7 (1967): 977.

⁷⁰ Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, 223.

⁷¹ Roger Flescher, “Marvel Comics--Amazing Spiderman.” *Northwest Passage*, July 22, 1969, 16.

⁷² Anonymous, “The Winter of Our Discontent: A Few Things That Went On Winter Term.” *The Paper*, March 28, 1966, 9.

⁷³ Gross, *Spider-Man Confidential*, 20.

⁷⁴ *Spider-Man*, directed by Sam Raimi (Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures, 2002.), DVD.

Most importantly, Spider-Man showed that anyone could be a hero, even a neurotic lonely teenager who got bullied in school. The influence of these innovations can be seen everywhere, from DC's efforts over the last fifty years to add more flaws and personal problems to their superheroes' lives in comics⁷⁵, to films like *The Incredibles*, to even non-superhero media like *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, in which the leading hero is a pre-teen. This is not to mention the cornucopia of Spider-Man media released over the last sixty years, with each work generally sticking close to the template established by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko all those years ago. The wide-ranging influence of these early comics serves as proof of the immense talent of both men and the quality of their original idea. Without their contributions, it is safe to say that the world of fiction would be a lot less amazing.

⁷⁵ Examples of this trend include Alan Moore's *Batman: The Killing Joke*, which emphasizes how Batman's damaged psyche is similar to that of his archenemy the Joker, and Geoff John's *The Flash: Rebirth*, which retcons Barry Allen's origin story to be more tragic.

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Anti-Universalism in Persecutions of Manichaeism

By James Schmidlein

Introduction

Late antiquity was a time of expansive trade and interconnection in the eastern hemisphere. Interaction between cultures allowed for the spread of new beliefs and the interaction of cultures that previously had minimal connectivity due to the large distance between empires. Manichaeism was a religion created because of this interconnectivity by the prophet Mani during the 3rd century. Mani used the expanding world and emerging knowledge of foreign religions to craft a faith with a doctrine that had universal intentions, appealing to figures from various faiths and cultures to promote universalist principles and develop a massive following across the ancient world.

While Manichaeism was popular among laypeople, this universalism was met with opposition in antiquity from other religions. This paper will focus on the persecution of Manichaeism in late antiquity in the Mediterranean and Near-Eastern world. I will discuss Manichaeism as a syncretic faith, emphasizing the influence of anti-universalist doctrine on its persecution in late antiquity. I will first establish a brief background of Manichaeism and the history of its spread, clarifying how it is not only syncretic but has universalizing qualities. I will then discuss the persecutions of Manichaeism chronologically, focusing on Sasanian Persia and Rome, spanning from around 250 CE to 400 CE. In discussing these persecutions, I will undertake a comparative analysis, determining what qualities are shared between Manichaeism's persecution in these cultural centers. In doing so, it will be shown that the persecution of Manichaeism was cross-culturally predicated on a disdain for ideologies promoting universalism, which were seen as threats to state and religious power and tradition.

Manichaeism: Origins and Background

Manichaeism is a religion that rose out of Babylonia during the mid-3rd century CE under a prophet named Mani. Babylonia, which was under the control of the Parthians until 224 CE, was an area with a large Judeo-Christian population, as well as devoted pagan Semitic cults and some Zoroastrian followings.¹ Manichaeism was influenced by Gnostic Christian thought during its development, with much of its organization and doctrine influenced by Gnostic intellectuals. One of the essential beliefs within Manichaeism is dualism, or the belief in separate entities such as spirit and matter, as well as the separation of good and evil.² The Father of Greatness is the creator of light, purity, and the immaterial, the good essences of the world. The King of Darkness, the creator of physical matter, was associated with evil and impurity.³ This is a common theological belief in Gnostic sects. Asceticism was also a popular characteristic of Judeo-Christian sects in Mesopotamia, and much of Mani's doctrine pertains to personal purity

¹ Samuel N.C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 25

² *Ibid*, 37-54.

³ Michel Tardieu, *Manichaeism*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 76-78.

in the avoidance of material goods.⁴ Manichaeism spread through missionary activity westward to Rome and Africa and eastward into Central Asia, eventually reaching China.

Manichaeism was driven by a desire to universalize faith. Calling himself the last prophet, Mani would incorporate to some extent the teachings and ideas of previous prophets (Zoroaster, Jesus, Buddha) and attempt to assimilate their religions, as well as local pagan faiths, under the broad Manichaean pantheon and mythology.⁵ Much of the demonology was derived directly from the local folk faith and popular religion.⁶ Most scholars view the dominant influence on Manichaeism as Judeo-Christian, specifically Gnostic thought. This is because the core beliefs of the religion are rooted in a spiritualized perception of the Christian faith that focuses on the conflict between the absolute good immaterialism of God and the struggle against the evil of the material world.⁷ Jesus is one of the central figures. Mani encompasses Jesus, alongside the other apostles and prophets (Zoroaster, Buddha), as figures inspired by divine intelligence handed down to them from the primordial man named Ohrmazd. They are considered “perfect men” and the founders of true religions, which Mani seeks to supersede with his new doctrine.⁸ Parts of biblical myth, with key figures such as Seth, Noah, Abraham, Shēm, and Enosh are also included.⁹ The Manichaean depiction of Jesus is not entirely the same as the traditional Catholic view. Manichaean Jesus is immaterial and never came to earth, contrary to the Catholic notion of immaculate conception. His physical presence was not a true salvation of humankind, but a representation of human suffering and the forthcoming salvation of human souls in later times.¹⁰

While the dominant influence may have been Gnostic Judeo-Christian thought, Manichaeism was also influenced by Zoroastrianism and an offshoot called Zurvanism. As was mentioned above, there are two principal deities under which all of the Manichaean pantheon falls, The Father of Greatness and the King of Darkness. Their true names indicate the inclusion of Zurvanite faith, as the King of Darkness is named Ahriman, while the Father of Greatness takes upon the name of Zurvan.¹¹ There is also some influence from traditional Zoroastrianism within the dualistic nature of the faiths; however, while Manichaeism was anti-material, believing all matter to be evil, Zoroastrians believed material creation to be a good thing. Thus

⁴ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, 28-29; Tardieu, *Manichaeism*, 63-71.

⁵ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, 24; 60-63.

⁶ Tardieu, *Manichaeism*, 81.

⁷ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, 53-54.

⁸ *Ibid*, 13-18; Tardieu, *Manichaeism*, 83-85. Interestingly, Ohrmazd is also the main figure of Zoroastrian mainstream faith, so traditional Zoroastrianism may still be seen here as couched within Manichaean thought, with Ohrmazd playing an influential role in dispersing the divine intelligence to humans, though not the primary deity.

⁹ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 128-29. This is a major component in its rejection as a heresy, associated with Arianism and other Christian minority faiths.

¹¹ Francois de Blois, “Dualism in Iranian and Christian Traditions,” in *the Journal of Royal Asiatic Society* 10, no.1 (2000): 13; Tardieu, *Manichaeism*, 82-3. Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2009), 73. Zurvanism as a popular alternative to Zoroastrianism in the early Sasanian period is emphasized by Daryaee.

Manichaean dualism is closer to an early Christian dualism, reflecting Mani's contact with other Gnostic thinkers.¹²

Mani also viewed himself as continuing the mission of each prior prophet and their religion. Mani stated that the other religions were "in order [properly instructed] as long as there were holy leaders in them," however after their leaders died, "their religions became confused."¹³ This sense of religious superiority held by Mani and his preference for Gnostic thought limited the universalizing goal of Manichaeism. While Mani views all religions to be somewhat correct, they have been led astray and need to be superseded by his own doctrine. All religions could partake in his faith, but it appears to be the case that Mani viewed his religion as greater than others, taking the best of all holy religions and making them into something more rightly guided.¹⁴ The universalizing doctrine of Mani, which was designed for proselytization, would come to be a major component in its rejection and persecution, partially because it did not fully accommodate the customs of the faiths it drew from. It was a universal faith, of which all religions were a welcome part, but it required followers to make concessions regarding their faith.

Manichaean Persecutions in the Sasanid Empire

Manichaeism began its development, growth, and spread within the Sasanian empire, and this would also be the first area where it would face persecution during the lifetime of Mani. Before discussing the persecution, it is important to mention that Manichaeism was not always vilified or marked for persecution by the Sasanids. Under the reign of Shapur I, the Sasanian empire had become prosperous, expanding into Mesopotamia and Syria by 260 CE. Having repelled the Romans and occupied much of the Near East, the Sasanids possessed a large and very diverse empire. While an early form of Zoroastrianism had been popularized between 224 and 240 under Ardashir I, his predecessor and father, Shapur himself was a patron of both Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism.¹⁵ Manichaeism was given permission to preach within the realm, and within other regions, including India, and Shapur maintained correspondence with Mani.¹⁶ For a time, it seems to have been the case that Mani served the King as a Syrian mystic doctor. In a compendium of Mani's travels, the *Kephalaia*, Mani describes being called upon by Shapur, and scholars believe it may have been due to his skills as a doctor or mystic, as Mani was known by later kings as a doctor and physician who freed people of demons and witches.¹⁷

¹² Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, 6-9; De Blois, "Dualism in Iranian and Christian Traditions," 14. De Blois emphasizes Zurvanism to show how there is a disconnect between Manichaean and Zoroastrian dualism, a disconnect likely generated by Mani's preference for Gnostic thought.

¹³ "Excerpt of Mani's Letters," trans. Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, in *Gnosis on the Silk Road: Gnostic Parables, Hymns, and Prayers from Central Asia*, (New York: Harper Collins), 216-17.

¹⁴ Ibid, 216-17; Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, 60-61. Mani directly calls his religion "the greatest" for a variety of reasons relating to inclusivity and its combination of different doctrines. Mani looked down upon the other religions for limiting themselves to country or culture and sought to surpass those boundaries by combining them all.

¹⁵ Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, 4-9.

¹⁶ Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, 6-9; "Mani's First Encounter With Shapur I," ed. Iain Gardner and Samuel Lieu, 75-76.

¹⁷ "Concerning Lord Manichaios; How He Journeyed [kephalaion excerpt]," ed. Iain Gardner and Samuel Lieu, 76-77; "The Recitation About the Crucifixion," ed. Iain Gardner and Samuel Lieu, 84; Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, 59.

Some scholars also believe Manichaeism's universal appeal could have attracted Shapur I, as he presided over a diverse empire and had trading partners from diverse religions in the east who practiced religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism.¹⁸ Regardless of Shapur's exact motives, Manichaeism was protected and given permission to proselytize.

Daryaee suggests that during the middle of the third century in the Sasanian Empire, Zoroastrianism was not an exclusive state religion, and Shapur's encouragement of Manichaeism may have been an attempt to assert imperial authority. At the time of Shapur's reign, a magi named Kerdir was attempting to establish a common doctrine of Zoroastrianism with a priestly hierarchy tied to statehood, which could threaten imperial hegemony over religious practices.¹⁹ Importantly, Shapur viewed himself as a patron of Zoroastrianism first and foremost in his *res gestae* and on the Zoroastrian Kaaba, so the dominant religion was always Zoroastrianism within the statehood, regardless of the newfound dual patronage of Manichaeism.²⁰ Kerdir, in his own reliefs, writes that he was given many titles and privileges by Shapur regarding rituals, so there was not a harsh or aggressive departure from the patronage of the Zoroastrian faith by any means.²¹ Thus, Manichaeism was certainly welcomed and spread within the empire, but as a minority faith.

Following the death of Shapur and his son, Hormizd I in 271 CE, Manichaeism would fall out of favor, as religious competition had developed between Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism. Under Hormizd, the patronage of both Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism was continued. Kerdir was given more titles, and Manichaeism continued to spread within Sasania, but his rule was brief, lasting only one year.²² Upon his death, Wahram I ascended the throne in 271 CE, and Manichaeism's support appears to have come to an end with his reign.²³ Because Wahram I's ascent was backed by Zoroastrian priest Kerdir, Zoroastrianism was given an increased status. The account of Mani's persecution showcases Wahram I's resentment of Manichaeism, as he doubts the religious legitimacy of Mani. Accounts of Mani's persecution also showcase the allegiance between Zoroastrianism and the court, as Kerdir was present and involved directly with Mani's death. Within this account, Wahram doubts that gods would confer religious wisdom to a subject and not the King, showing a desire to consolidate authority in royal religious power.²⁴ There was a consolidated religion-state identity present with Zoroastrianism which Manichaeism did not have, and an identity which did not favor Manichaeism when the state turned on it.

¹⁸ Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, 73-5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9; Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, 59. Lieu is a proponent of the perspective that because Shapur depicted himself as a Zoroastrian tributary exclusively, he didn't have any concerns for the universalism of Manichaeism, so there is scholarly discourse on Shapur's alignments.

²¹ Prods Oktor Skjærvø, "Kartir, Section iii, Kartir's Inscriptions," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, XV/6, pp. 608-628. Available online at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kartir>, (Last Updated April 24th, 2012). Note: I was not able to acquire the original translation of Kartir's inscriptions on the Naqsh-e Rostam relief, so I will be relying on credible, but secondary sources for the most part for information of Kerdir, derived from those translations.

²² Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, 10; Skjærvø, "Kartir, iii, Kartir's Inscriptions."

²³ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁴ "The Recitation About the Crucifixion" ed. Iain Gardner and Samuel Lieu, 80-84.

Manichaean polemical writings can provide greater insight into tensions between Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism. Durkin-Meisterernst translates a polemical writing of Manichaeism against Zoroastrianism which showcases how Manichaeans debated and sought to refute Zoroastrianism in order to affirm their position. The account asks, “Why did you attach the son of the gods to Ahriman and his sins?” which appears to critique the idea of Ohrmazd’s role in the creation of the material realm and living things as a positive event in Zoroastrianism.²⁵ This account provides a small window into what was an ongoing polemical debate between the Manichaean and Zoroastrian faith, where Manichaeans appear to be using Zoroastrian faith principles to criticize the religion in favor of their own doctrine. This Manichaean-Zoroastrian conflict no doubt was part of Kerdir’s distaste for Manichaeism as a religion, as Kerdir was attempting to consolidate Zoroastrian doctrine, with which Manichaeism had certain profound cosmological differences.²⁶

Kerdir was also more broadly opposed to religious diversity in the Sasanian Empire. In his relief, Kerdir glorifies the punishment of “the heresy of Ahriman,” going on to describe that Jews, Buddhists, Nazarenes, Christians, Baptists and Manichaeans were “smitten from the empire... idols were destroyed, and the abodes of demons disrupted and made into thrones and seats of the gods.”²⁷ As is shown in this passage, Manichaeism’s persecution is not only due to doctrinal conflict, as it is also part of a larger mission on the part of a Kerdir’s desire to consolidate authority under one religion as he gained influence within the Sasanid state. So, while we have little evidence of Kerdir’s direct objections to Manichaeism, its existence as a separate entity appears to be enough to justify its persecution from Kerdir’s perspective. Kerdir continued to consolidate his authority over religion and state during the reign of Wahram II, who ascended the throne in 274 CE. Under Wahram II, Kerdir achieved a maxim of authority, and the Zoroastrian priesthood began to act as the main judicial authority in the empire, presiding over the holy fires, which was once the King’s role, and freely judging religions by Zoroastrian court laws. All outsider religions would be persecuted aggressively by Kerdir and his successors.²⁸ The universalism of Manichaeism here stands in stark opposition to the motivations of Kerdir, who sought to control and acquire stately authority.

Where Manichaeism’s primary goal was missionary action and mass propagation of the faith, Kerdir and early Zoroastrians sought to centralize authority and eliminate heretical groups.²⁹ The compilation and unification of the Zoroastrian faith allowed it to become exclusive, and that exclusivity turned against Manichaeism and other minority faiths lacking adherence. Manichaeism’s persecution occurred to eliminate competition within the Sasanid court, and the persecution began a religious policy of anti-universalism and intolerance, which

²⁵ Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst, “Eznik on Manichaeism,” in *Iran & the Caucasus* 16, no. 1 (2012), 8. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41723221>.

²⁶ Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, 73, 75-77.

²⁷ *Kartir’s Inscription at Naqsh-e Rostam* s11.58, ed., and trans. Mackenzie (1989) in *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire*, ed and trans. Iain Gardner and Samuel Lieu, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 81-82, footnote 90. This is a small excerpt included for context within Iain and Gardner’s work, and the only direct quotation from his inscription I have access to at this time.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-11; Skjærvø, “Kartir, iii, Kartir’s Inscriptions.”

²⁹ Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*, 75-8.

expanded beyond Manichaeism as Kerdir grew in authority.³⁰ Manichaeism was a large competitor to Zoroastrianism due to its inherent desire to subsume and include other faiths with its universalizing doctrine, aggressive proselytization, protected status in the royal court, as well as theological disagreements.

Rome in the Third Century: Diocletian's Tetrarchy

Forced out of Sasanid Persia, Manichaeism attempted to find footholds within the Roman Empire which had long maintained trade relationships with the Sasanids. Manichaeism's spread into the west can be primarily attributed to the involvement of trade networks, which gave missionaries great mobility between the near east and Rome.³¹ By Mani's death in 276, Manichaeism had taken root in the Roman east, along the Mediterranean coast from North Africa, through Asia Minor, and into Syria.³²

As Manichaeism grew in popularity within the Roman periphery, Diocletian and his Tetrarchy rose to power in 293 CE. The Tetrarchy was organized by Emperor Diocletian, who divided responsibilities for governance among two senior emperors called Augusti, and junior emperors called Caesari. Beginning with the Tetrarchy, Roman provinces were organized into twelve units called Diocese, which were further subdivided to allow for better bureaucratic and military organization of the Roman Empire, which was currently experiencing what scholars refer to as the Third Century Crisis.³³ These reforms sought to stabilize Rome and allow it to be governed more efficiently. Coinage reform was also introduced to stabilize the economy.³⁴

Diocletian, Roman State Identity, and Manichaean Persecution

To reform the Roman State and identity, Diocletian acted to suppress and persecute non-Roman religions, particularly Christianity and Manichaeism.³⁵ Manichaeism was targeted by Diocletian in legislative edicts for being of foreign origin, specifically Persian. At the time, Sasanid Persia and Rome were in conflict, and Diocletian appears to have held suspicion towards Manichaeism for its historical connection to Shapur I, although it no longer held any state support and was vilified.³⁶ Diocletian and the current Persian Emperor Narseh were both driven by tradition and state religion against non-centralized faith, placing Manichaeism under scrutiny, which would deny it a safe haven in the Mediterranean and Near-Eastern worlds.³⁷

When viewing Manichaeism's persecution in isolation, it may appear that no anti-universalist notion is present within Diocletian's anti-Manichaean rhetoric, as it can be seen as

³⁰ Ibid. Persecutions mounted from Mani's execution onward, as Kerdir gained more authority under successive kings as Wahram II.

³¹ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, 69-75.

³² Ibid, 85-6.

³³ Alan K Bowman, "Diocletian and the First Tetrarchy, A.D. 284-305," in *The Cambridge Ancient History 2nd Edition*, ed. Alan Bowman, Averil Cameron, Peter Garnsey, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005) 74-6.

³⁴ Alan K Bowman, "Diocletian and the First Tetrarchy, A.D. 284-305," 76-78.

³⁵ Ibid, 85.

³⁶ Ibid, 81-82; Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, 91-2.

³⁷ Peter Brown, "The Diffusion of Manichaeism in the Roman Empire," in *The Journal of Roman Studies* 59 no.1 (1969) 97-98.

representative of xenophobic tendencies towards foreign enemies. Upon examining Diocletian's edict, however, there is a broader statement against faiths that do not adhere to Roman tradition. According to Diocletian, "Manichaeans... in opposition to the older creeds, set up new and unheard of sects, purposing in their wickedness *to cast out the doctrines vouchsafed to us by divine favor in older times.*"³⁸ In the broad context of Diocletian's state and cultural reforms, this statement represents a rejection of all ideas not traditional to Rome, expanding beyond the persecution of Manichaeism to affect Christianity, marriage practices, and anything disruptive to a "Roman order."³⁹ The refusal of all minority faith is anti-universalist, denying broader cultural connections that expand beyond what would be considered purely "Roman." Here, religion-state consolidation appears to run against religious plurality and those who engage with pluralist faiths, especially foreign ones. This conflict was seen in the Sasanid persecutions of Manichaeism, and it is echoed again by Diocletian.

Following the same trend found in Sasanid Persia, the centralized religion is valued against cultural and ideological pluralism. This makes Manichaeism again a target because it seeks to syncretize faiths that would be rejected, in any case, for violating Roman cultural custom and state power. Roman beliefs were at times syncretic, as they had previously adopted foreign mystery cults, such as the Mithraic cult, which was Iranian in origin. Diocletian patronized Mithraism as a component of the Roman state, naming Mithra "a protector of the empire."⁴⁰ However, Mithraism had acquired a protected, traditional status in Rome by the time of Diocletian. The Manichaean religion, being new, foreign, and having values which overlapped with that of Christianity, would not be allowed that same status due to Diocletian's desire to preserve doctrines given "divine favor in olden times."

In Rome, at this time, it was additionally understood that allegiance to faith separate from the state detracted from obedience. This is because it was reasoned that the creation and worship of new gods would lead to deviation in law, custom, and culture, which could produce dissent and rebellions against the state, threatening its authority.⁴¹ As Cassius Dio states in his *Roman History*, "Those who attempt to distort our religion with strange rites you should abhor and punish... such men, by bringing in new divinities in place of the old, persuade many to adopt foreign practices, from which spring conspiracies, factions, and cabals."⁴² These words are not directly from Diocletian. However they appear to reflect a Roman sentiment in the Third Century of intolerance to "new divinities," foreign or otherwise, which Diocletian supports and appears to corroborate in his earlier quote rejecting Manichaeism. Within the 3rd century, Manichaeism and Christianity were commonly persecuted for detracting from allegiance to the state because of their new gods and practices, and Manichaeism produced a greater threat at the time for its aggressive proselytizing.⁴³ In the belief that religions beyond the central state compromise

³⁸ "Edict (Rescript) of Diocletian Against the Sect," in *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire*, ed. Iain Gardner and Samuel Lieu, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 116-18 (Emphasis added).

³⁹ Alan K Bowman, "Diocletian and the First Tetrarchy, A.D. 284-305," 85. The edict connects heavily to Diocletian's broader program of "Romanitas" the Roman traditional cultural hegemony.

⁴⁰ A.L. Frothingham, "Diocletian and Mithra in the Roman Forum," in *American Journal of Archaeology* 18 no.2, (1914), 146.

⁴¹ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, 93

⁴² Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LII.36.2-4; Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, 93.

⁴³ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, 93.

authority lies the heftiest evidence of anti-universalist perceptions of minority faith. Considering Dio and Diocletian's statements, the rejection is not exclusive to foreign religions. It extends to reject the practice of *any* religions or cults which held values contra to Roman imperial standards or referred to different gods. They are held in contempt for their recency and as suspects of rebellion and public disorder.

Christianized Rome and Theodosian Persecutions

As the Roman empire Christianized during the 4th century, Manichaeism became a target for a different yet familiar reason. During the 4th century, Christianity would rise in popularity until its adoption as the state religion by Theodosius in 380. Christianity, for many years, was ambivalent towards Manichaeism. However, with its increase in popularity among the upper elites of Roman society, it developed a new perspective that was both Roman and Christian. Christianity acquired the authority to act against other religions with Imperial power, and Roman identity became tied to Christianity. Manichaeism would, through the adoption of certain Christian ideas, be seen as a heresy by the Christianizing Roman state, which now sought to consolidate Christian doctrine.⁴⁴ The consolidation of Christian doctrine began with Constantine through his efforts beginning with the First Council of Nicaea. Upon Constantine's acceptance of Christianity, it is believed that he sought to bring about Imperial stability by resolving various church schisms, such as the Arian controversy, by calling the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea to debate and resolve incongruities. Many heresies were formerly excommunicated, and their followers were anathematized for their disagreements on the nature of Christ, among other conflicts.⁴⁵

The pursuit of a single, uniform doctrine of Christianity would lead Manichaeism to be the target of theological debates, attempting to dismantle and disprove the Manichaean faith.⁴⁶ When Theodosius made Christianity the official state religion, Manichaeism became a target for the Christianized State.⁴⁷ Although Manichaeism sought to be a universalizing force, that drive would make it a target. Where Donatism and Arianism were wholly Christian heresies, Manichaeism was a faith that drew on principles and gods from other religions and appealed to figures other than Christ. This made it especially heretical, and the Theodosian edicts would attack Manichaeism not for being of foreign nature but for diverging from the unified church doctrine.⁴⁸ In these edicts, the Manichaeans are prevented from having inheritance, making wills, and practicing faith.⁴⁹ Manichaeism is broadly associated with other heresies, such as the Arians, in some legislation. An edict from 383 CE states, "Absolutely all persons whomsoever the error of divine heresy excites... Arians, Macedonians... Manichaeans... should not assemble... should

⁴⁴ Averil Cameron, "The Reign of Constantine, A.d. 306-337," In *The Cambridge Ancient History*, ed. Alan Bowman, Averil Cameron, and Peter Garnsey, (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2005), 97-99; Peter Brown, "The Diffusion of Manichaeism in the Roman Empire," 98.

⁴⁵ Cameron, "The Reign of Constantine, A.d. 306-337," 97-99; Synodical Letter from the Nicene Council, ed. Joseph Cullen Ayer, in *A Source Book for Ancient Church History: From the Apostolic Age to the Close of the Conciliar Period*, 293-295

⁴⁶ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, 101-103.

⁴⁷ "Anti-Manichaean Legislation Issued by Theodosius," in *Manichaean Texts from the Roman Empire*, ed. Iain Gardner and Samuel Lieu, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 145-9.

⁴⁸ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, 103, 128-9.

⁴⁹ "Anti-Manichean Legislation Issued by Theodosius," 145-9

practice publicly or privately nothing which can be detrimental to Catholic Sanctity.”⁵⁰ In essence, Theodosius outlawed all dissenting religious minorities, including Manichaeism.

Manichaeism is also associated with Judaism in these edicts, and in this association, separated from Christianity more heavily than other heresies and given far greater punishment. In an edict published in 381, Theodosius states, “Also should be punished the shameful acts of those who... polluted themselves with Jewish contagions... our decrees should follow continually... those who have preferred at any time to attend the Manichaeans’ nefarious retreats.”⁵¹ Here Manichaeism and Judaism were perceived as a rejection of the Christian faith. Although Manichaeism was persecuted as a Christian heresy, it was also seen as a distinct faith because of its syncretism. However, the criticism for rejecting Christianity operates on Judaism and Manichaeism differently. Where Judaism is anathematized for not accepting the newer gospel of Christ and the Church, Manichaeism is seen as denying Christ through worship of Mani and the rest of the Manichaean pantheon.⁵² While Judaism is seen as not accepting the revelations of Christ, Manichaeism is seen as misinterpreting the New Testament with its inclusion of foreign faith and principles not accepted by the consolidated Christian doctrine. In this way, it was both heresy and apostate.⁵³

The treatment of Manichaeism as both heresy and apostasy makes clear the anti-universalist thought within the persecution. When Manichaeism is seen as heresy, it is banned from being practiced with the threat of expulsion from the church. When it is seen as apostasy, Manichaeans are denied the protection of Roman law, the ability to make a will, and to leave inheritance in addition to being banned from publicly practicing their faith and the threat of church expulsion.⁵⁴ This shows that Manichaeism is “detrimental to Catholic sanctity” but a wholly Christian subject when treated as heresy. While outlawed, it is punished with less aggression than when it is considered apostasy.⁵⁵ As apostasy, it is given outsider status and associated with the Jewish faith, as well as other pagan faiths. It is no longer a heresy, or even a Christian subject, entirely separated from Christianity.

The persecution of Manichaeism alongside other faiths which go beyond or do not wholly adhere to Christian doctrine shows a desire to exclude faiths of broad backgrounds which move beyond the traditionally accepted religious standards. Viewed similarly to the consolidation of religious authority in Sasanid Persia, the persecution is anti-universalist because it targets Manichaeism in part for its superseding of Christian doctrine to appeal to a wider theological and cosmogonic sphere. While Manichaeism was persecuted for its disagreements on subjects such as the nature of Christ, the persecution moved beyond that, and attacked

⁵⁰ Ibid, 148.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey*, 112-113. Recall the Manichaean pantheon which includes Zoroastrian figures, and Mani viewed as the final prophet, as opposed to Jesus in Christianity.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ “Anti-Manichaean Legislation Issued by Theodosius,” 146- 148.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 148.

Manichaeism for its broader pantheon and principles, which can be seen from its differential treatment.⁵⁶

The Theodosian and Christian Roman persecutions of Manichaeism can be seen to have some properties consistent with prior persecutions. In competition with other religions, including Paganism and Manichaeism, Christianity was able to secure control of the Roman empire's support during the 4th century and then sought to persecute faith inconsistent with the doctrine established by the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE.⁵⁷ Where Diocletian had resisted any religious change to consolidate authority, Christianity's growth led to a new, unified doctrine and strong anti-Manichaean sentiments of heresy and apostasy. The consolidation of Christianity in the Roman state led to the elimination of fringe faith. With the destruction of paganism and targeted legislation against Judaism, a desire to reject pluralist ideas is continually present. Manichaeism, while attempting to have a universalizing appeal by encompassing key aspects of Christianity within its doctrine, could not compete with the unified doctrine and hardline monotheistic perspectives developing in the west, leading to its persecution.⁵⁸

In the western regions, Manichaeism would start to falter aggressively during the 5th century, unable to stand up to the legislation established in the late 4th century by Theodosius I and his successors. While it would persist in the Eastern Roman Empire, I will omit this discussion as it follows similar themes to the persecutions in the Christian West.

Conclusion & Synthesis: Manichaeism, Anti-Universalist Rhetoric, Religious Conflict, the Ancient State, and Persecution

Resentment for Manichaeism's universal qualities manifested in different ways across its persecution. However, cross-culturally, anti-universalism remained a consistent factor in the rhetoric and persecution of Manichaeism during late antiquity. In the Sasanid empire, the persecution of Manichaeism came as the result of religious conflict with Zoroastrianism, the traditionally patronized faith of the Sasanid kings, and Shapur I's pagan court, which promoted Mani's universalist doctrines. Zoroastrianism, which acquired state support, called on Persian traditionalism as an opposition to Manichaeism's universalism, leading to Manichaeism's persecution in the Near East as part of a broader anti-universalist mission to make a wholly Zoroastrian state. In Rome, Diocletian's persecution primarily focused on the Persian origin of Manichaeism. However, Diocletian's edict in the context of his reformation program of the Roman state provides layers of rejection on the grounds of state and cultural unification that rejected Manichaeism and other minority faiths. This rejection comes with inherently anti-universalist thought, as religions such as Manichaeism and Christianity, which appealed to broader cultures than the Roman state, were seen as detractors, threats, and obstacles to Roman unity. With the Christianization of the Roman empire, Manichaeism became a heresy. It was

⁵⁶ Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, 128-29. Recall also my description of Manichaean perceptions of Christ on page 3, as the debate over the nature of Christ was an active component of its rejection by Christianity.

⁵⁷ Cameron, "The Reign of Constantine, A.d. 306-337," 97-99; Synodical Letter from the Nicene Council, ed. Joseph Cullen Ayer, in *A Source Book for Ancient Church History: From the Apostolic Age to the Close of the Conciliar Period*, 293-295

⁵⁸ For some of the aspects of Manichaeism's inclusion of Christian and Gnostic Christian practices, refer to the background section of this paper.

seen as a misinterpretation of the New Testament, which included cosmology and religious principles such as dualism which went beyond the Christian faith, aspects tied to Manichaeism's universalist principles. The persecution changed to a theological premise, but anti-universalism remained present in Christianity's persecution of Manichaeism.

Anti-universalist rhetoric and policy frequently come together with xenophobic policy. Where xenophobia would target something based on foreignness, anti-universalism seeks to push out ideas that differ from pre-existing faith and societal values, foreign or not. The anti-universalist rhetoric that underlies these persecutions shows how religious institutions grapple with faith that has a syncretic appeal, which contains certain concepts shared with one culture and those of a foreign culture. They are neither similar enough to be accepted nor wholly foreign. They become heresies in many cases or are more broadly seen as threats for their inclusion of ideas that go beyond the scope of a single culture, compromising a monolithic central identity. The denial of pluralism of faith is often, but not always, xenophobic. When a foreign religion is syncretic and can be viewed as heresy, monocultural religions and states must grapple with it not only as a foreign idea but as one with native roots which have expanded beyond prescribed doctrine. This treatment delegitimizes religion in a more complex fashion than cultural exclusion, as it cannot be recognized as wholly foreign or dissimilar.

There is also a consistent notion of anti-universalism employed to preserve a traditional cultural schema. When a syncretic doctrine develops, its use of familiar ideas or concepts in new ways, or in conjunction with new identities, comes into conflict with the desire to preserve an old order and a reverence for that which came before. The conflict of traditionalism is a particularly strong connection between all cultures and persecutions examined. In each case, a tradition was being created or preserved, which opposed the syncretic doctrines that sought to modify tradition and introduce new ideas built on principles of universalization and composite doctrine. Diocletian sought to reform and preserve the prestige of Roman religion with its ancient practice and value system. Christianity, which was establishing a tradition and doctrine of its own, sought to remove heresies that conflicted with the unifying values of the tradition among Christians. In Sasanian, Zoroastrianism was the religion with precedent, which gave it greater influence and favor among the courts, leading to its opposition with Manichaeism, which detracted from tradition by embracing a syncretic, universalizing doctrine.

Persecution within the ancient world is a multi-faceted, complex situation. By focusing on anti-universalism, better understandings may be produced considering how religions grappled with Manichaeism, an exceptionally syncretic doctrine that attempted to universalize many religious cultures. While Manichaeism certainly was viewed as a foreign faith, how it was criticized and dealt with becomes more nuanced when considering anti-universalist thought. Manichaeism was targeted not just because it was foreign but because it expanded and incorporated religions into a system antithetical or contradictory both to monocultural faith and traditional faith, which are typically protected in their relationship to the state.

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Cultural Chaos at Comiskey: Major League Baseball and Disco's Intersection in 1979 By Christopher Roberts

Baseball is America's pastime. The crack of the bat, pop of the glove, and smell of the fresh-cut grass on a summer day have captivated fans for decades. Major League Baseball is a league and a sport that is deeply rooted in tradition. Between the foul lines can be considered a sacred space, where two teams play a game and leave it all on the field. But on July 12, 1979, chaos took over Chicago's Comiskey Park. Disco Demolition Night will forever be an infamous promotion in baseball history. The night's events showcase the modernization of professional sports, and the opposition to disco culture in the late 1970s.

As stars Reggie Jackson, Johnny Bench, and Tom Seaver were breaking records on the baseball diamond, disco music dominated the American music landscape in the 1970s. Disco music topped the charts, and the Bee Gees, ABBA, and Donna Summer played across the country. Disco was more than just a genre of music, and the culture that surrounded disco swept the nation, too. *Saturday Night Fever* starring John Travolta debuted in 1977, showcasing the dancing and style of the disco era.¹ Disco balls, blow-dried hair, flashy clothes, and up-tempo music helped define American culture in the late 1970s. Despite its widespread popularity, many opposed the culture and style of music. These people gathered in Chicago at a Chicago White Sox game for a promotion coined "Disco Demolition Night." They were at the game not to celebrate disco but to demonstrate their disgust with the genre. Disco Demolition Night will forever be an infamous promotion in baseball history. When examined further, the night's chaos demonstrates the modernization of professional sports, and the opposition to disco culture in the late 1970s.

In between games of a doubleheader, disco records were put in a box in center field. The records were blown up, exploding across the outfield.² Chaos ensued. Approximately seven thousand fans left their seats, storming the field, setting fires, climbing the foul poles, fist fighting, and wreaking havoc on the field of play.³ The umpires declared the field unplayable, and the White Sox had to forfeit the game.⁴ It was a one-of-a-kind night in MLB history, and arguably the most infamous promotion in sports history.

The night was memorable for a number of reasons. In the decades since the chaos at Comiskey Park, Disco Demolition Night has been remembered in many ways: as a night of violent rioting, a promotion gone horribly wrong, and a symbolic end to the disco era. In a 30th anniversary video for MLB Network, narrator Bob Costas asked with a chuckle, "What's the big deal? Records are meant to be broken." Costas also referred to the promotion as a "harmless

¹ Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*, 1st ed (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 202.

² Mike Huber, "July 12, 1979: Chicago's Disco Demolition Night Results in White Sox Loss and Forfeit," *Society for American Baseball Research* (blog), <https://sabr.org/gamesproj/game/july-12-1979-chicagos-disco-demolition-night-doubleheader-results-in-loss-and-forfeit/>.

³ Burton Alan Boxerman and Benita W. Boxerman, *Ebbets to Veeck to Busch: Eight Owners Who Shaped Baseball* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2003), 149.

⁴ Burton Alan Boxerman and Benita W. Boxerman, *Ebbets to Veeck to Busch: Eight Owners Who Shaped Baseball* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2003), 149.

prank.”⁵ MLB Network described the events as a promotional fiasco, but Costas’s language certainly lightened the mood. On the flip side, Disco Demolition Night and its organizers were accused of organizing a racist and homophobic event to combat the rise of disco music and culture. In recent years, scholars and journalists have written about the racism and homophobia involved with blowing up disco records, and the events that took place that July evening in Chicago. There is a clear disparity in how Disco Demolition Night is remembered. Some dismiss it as a harmless prank, while others view the night’s events as racist and homophobic. Disco Demolition Night therefore incites varying opinions in the memories of baseball fans and those interested in and studying American culture in the late 1970s.

On Thursday, July 12, 1979, the visiting Detroit Tigers were scheduled to take on the Chicago White Sox in a two-night doubleheader.⁶ Comiskey Park in Chicago was set to host eighteen innings of American League Baseball. The home team White Sox were struggling, coming into the doubleheader with a 40-46 record in a season that hosted below-average crowds.⁷ Mike Veeck, the son of White Sox owner Bill Veeck and the team’s director of promotions, was eager to fill seats. He reached out to Chicago rock disc jockey Steve Dahl, a young but very popular radio host in the Chicago market.⁸ In the 1970s, as disco was gaining popularity, radio stations were changing their format to play more disco music. Just a few months before Disco Demolition Night, Dahl had been fired from WDAI on Christmas Eve in 1978 as the station switched from a rock to a disco format.⁹ Dahl was then hired by WLUP to play rock music. He would constantly denounce disco music, artists, and fans on his new station.¹⁰ He built up a large following and started a group of disco critics called the Insane Coho Lips.¹¹ This devoted and sizeable audience led Mike Veeck to reach out to Dahl to see if he was interested in an anti-disco promotion. Dahl agreed and the promotion was scheduled for a Thursday evening in July.

Fans were admitted into both games for just ninety-eight cents if they brought a disco record to be demolished in center field between games. The price matched WLUP’s station frequency, 97.9.¹² During the 1979 season, White Sox averaged just over sixteen thousand fans per game.¹³ That night, they were hoping for and told their security team to prepare for thirty

⁵ Bob Costas, “MLB Network Remembers with Bob Costas: Disco Demolition Night.” MLB Network, 2009. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSVTJn_NMeU

⁶ The first game of the double-header was scheduled to make up for the game on May 2, 1979, which was postponed due to rain.

⁷ Sports Reference LLC. “1979 Chicago White Sox Schedule” Baseball-Reference.com - Major League Statistics and Information. <https://www.baseball-reference.com/teams/CHW/1979-schedule-scores.shtml>.

⁸ Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*, 1st ed (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 232.

⁹ Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture*, 1st ed (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 206.

¹⁰ Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*, 1st ed (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 232.

¹¹ Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*, 1st ed (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 233.

¹² Steve Dahl, Dave Hoekstra, and Paul Natkin, *Disco Demolition: The Night Disco Died*, First edition (Chicago, Illinois: Curbside Splendor Publishing, 2016), 19.

¹³ Sports Reference LLC. “1979 Chicago White Sox Schedule” Baseball-Reference.com - Major League Statistics and Information. <https://www.baseball-reference.com/teams/CHW/1979-schedule-scores.shtml>.

thousand fans.¹⁴ Some members of the security team laughed and thought it was funny that the organization was hoping for thirty thousand fans. The appeal to attend was to watch two baseball games and see an explosion of disco records. Drawing even more fans to the game was simultaneous marketing of the doubleheader as “teen night.” Chicago teenagers were still admitted at a discounted price, even if they didn’t bring a disco record, and were given a small gift upon entry.¹⁵

The morning of the promotion, White Sox owner Bill Veeck felt that something might be wrong and feared that the promotion could get out of hand.¹⁶ Veeck was right. As the first game of the doubleheader started, fans continued to fill the stands. Comiskey Park’s capacity was 44,492.¹⁷ But the promotion drew an overcapacity crowd, as a recorded 47,795 fans packed into the stadium for the first game.¹⁸ This was a season high, and on paper, the promotion appeared to be a great success, as the stadium was packed. But the crowd grew restless during the first game and began to throw disco records and golf balls onto the field, some in the direction of Tigers players.¹⁹ The game had to be stopped multiple times because of the crowd’s actions. Players and fans recalled that the smell of marijuana filled the air, and people moved around the stadium and paid little attention to the game.²⁰ Nonetheless, the first game continued and ended in a 4-1 Detroit Tigers victory.²¹

Despite the over-capacity crowd, fans continued arriving at Comiskey Park. Gates were closed, and some regular attendees were turned away. Persistent fans climbed the gates and made their way into the stadium. By the time the demolition promotion was to begin before the second game, the size of the crowd had grown to more than fifty thousand fans inside the stadium. Reports say that fifteen thousand fans loitered outside of the stadium once they learned they could not gain entry.²²

¹⁴ Steve Dahl, Dave Hoekstra, and Paul Natkin., *Disco Demolition: The Night Disco Died*, First edition (Chicago, Illinois: Curbside Splendor Publishing, 2016), 31.

¹⁵ Gillian Frank, “Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash against Disco,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 2 (May 2007): 277

¹⁶ In fact, Bill Veeck had been hospitalized the morning of the promotion to receive treatment on his leg. Veeck lost his leg in World War II and battled health issues for the rest of his life. He was in the hospital for a good portion of the 1979 season and was less involved with the team. Worried about what could happen at the park, he checked himself out. Paul Dickson, *Bill Veeck: Baseball’s Greatest Maverick*, 1st U.S. ed (New York: Walker & Comp., 2012), 314.

¹⁷ Bill Veeck and Edward Linn, *Veeck as in Wreck: The Autobiography of Bill Veeck*, University of Chicago Press ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 388.

¹⁸ Sports Reference LLC. “1979 Chicago White Sox Schedule” Baseball-Reference.com - Major League Statistics and Information. <https://www.baseball-reference.com/teams/CHW/1979-schedule-scores.shtml>.

¹⁹ Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*, 1st ed (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 233, 244.

²⁰ Dan Epstein, *Big Hair and Plastic Grass: A Funky Ride Through Baseball and America in the Swinging ’70s*, 1st ed (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin’s Press, 2010), 242.

²¹ Sports Reference LLC. “1979 Chicago White Sox Schedule” Baseball-Reference.com - Major League Statistics and Information. <https://www.baseball-reference.com/teams/CHW/1979-schedule-scores.shtml>.

²² Joseph G. Preston, *Major League Baseball in the 1970s: A Modern Game Emerges* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2004), 232.

It was then time for the main event. Steve Dahl took the field in a jeep, dressed in army combat gear. He had a microphone, leading the crowd in “disco sucks” chants that echoed outside of the stadium.²³ The crowd was amped up, and Dahl made his way to the outfield. With a crate of disco records in center field, Dahl pressed a button that shattered records and sent the shards across the outfield. The crowd roared and cheered. Steve Dahl began to leave the field, and the emotionally charged promotion appeared to be coming to an end. But the fans didn’t want the fun to end. Seven thousand fans then jumped over the fences and stormed the field, ultimately destroying it. They set fires in the bleachers and on the field, fought each other with fists, and climbed the foul poles.²⁴ The demolition promotion to attract fans to attend a doubleheader had gone horribly wrong.

There seemed to be no way to stop the mob that had invaded the playing field. Bill Veeck got on the microphone and pleaded with fans to return to their seats so the next game could begin. Fans didn’t listen, and the scene on the field continued. White Sox play-by-play announcer Harry Caray even got on the microphone and sang his famous rendition of “Take Me Out to The Ballgame” that he would routinely sing during the seventh-inning stretch of home games throughout his career.²⁵ Caray’s vocal cords were not enough to stop the thousands on the field, and it became apparent that the chaos was going to continue. A SWAT team, police officers on horseback, and the fire department had to intervene to stop the chaotic fans.²⁶ Thirty-nine fans were arrested, and six fans had to be taken to the hospital.²⁷ It became clear that the field’s conditions were not fit for a Major League Baseball game, and crew chief Dave Phillips decided the game wasn’t going to be played.²⁸ Bill Veeck pleaded to the umpires to play the game and promised that the field would be okay once the fans returned to their seats.²⁹ Phillips and the other umpires resisted his entreaties, telling Veeck there was no way that the game could be played. Phillips recalled Veeck kicking a locker shut out of disgust and frustration, sending a booming sound across the locker room.³⁰

²³ Gillian Frank, “Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash against Disco,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 2 (May 2007): 277.

²⁴ Joseph G. Preston, *Major League Baseball in the 1970s: A Modern Game Emerges* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2004), 232.

²⁵ Hall of Fame Broadcaster Harry Caray is famous for singing “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” during his career with the Chicago White Sox and Chicago Cubs. Bill Veeck was the one who encouraged Caray to sing to the crowd. Caray was initially hesitant because he said he couldn’t sing. Veeck said that was the point, and Caray began leading the stadium in the song in 1976. A tradition that is remembered fondly by Chicago sports fans was encouraged by Bill Veeck. Caray’s rendition of “Take Me Out To The Ballgame” during Disco Demolition Night was criticized by members of the media and said to have increased the violent actions on the field.

²⁶ Steve Dahl, Dave Hoekstra, and Paul Natkin., *Disco Demolition: The Night Disco Died*, First edition (Chicago, Illinois: Curbside Splendor Publishing, 2016), 31.

²⁷ Dan Epstein, *Big Hair and Plastic Grass: A Funky Ride Through Baseball and America in the Swinging '70s*, 1st ed (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin’s Press, 2010), 243.

²⁸ Dave Phillips and Rob Rains, *Center Field on Fire: An Umpire’s Life with Pine Tar Bats, Spitballs, and Corked Personalities* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2004), 54.

²⁹ Dave Phillips and Rob Rains, *Center Field on Fire: An Umpire’s Life with Pine Tar Bats, Spitballs, and Corked Personalities* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2004), 54.

³⁰ Dave Phillips and Rob Rains, *Center Field on Fire: An Umpire’s Life with Pine Tar Bats, Spitballs, and Corked Personalities* (Chicago: Triumph Books, 2004), 54.

The next day, Bill Veeck and the White Sox Organization were blasted by the press. Veeck was accused of disgracing the sport.³¹ American League President Lee MacPhail decided the second game would be forfeited because the White Sox had been unable to provide playable field conditions. Bill Veeck accepted full responsibility and was sincere in his apologies.³² Although his son Mike was the one that organized the promotion, Bill took the blame himself. He said that he didn't do the necessary research before the promotion. Veeck should have looked more into Steve Dahl and the Insane CoHo Lips. He said that he was truly sorry for what happened. There was an effort by the White Sox to separate the fans rioting on the field and the average baseball fan. Veeck said that the people that rioted on the field were not baseball fans.³³ Disco Demolition Night was a black eye for the White Sox, Bill Veeck, and Major League Baseball. Despite the absolute disaster of a night, the promotions at Comiskey Park didn't stop. Two nights after Disco Demolition Night, the White Sox hosted Irish Night. Twenty-four thousand fans enjoyed a 12-4 White Sox win, and according to the Chicago Tribune, fans gleefully danced in the aisles.³⁴

Disco Demolition Night should be viewed as a transitional moment in 1970s disco and baseball culture. Learning about how the night came to be illustrates key aspects of baseball and disco culture in the 1970s. Disco Demolition Night showcased the modernization of baseball in the 1970s, a time when the game was drawing more viewers on television, player salaries were exploding, and a new wave of owners were buying Major League Baseball teams in the new era of free agency. Disco Demolition Night also demonstrated the widespread and hostile anti-disco sentiment evident by the end of the decade as the genre became increasingly associated with gay and minority communities. Disco Demolition Night wouldn't have happened in any other city, with any other team, at any other time. There was a perfect storm of events that allowed the promotion to be scheduled, and for it to go horribly wrong. Throughout Bill Veeck's career in baseball, he was always open and interested in trying new things to get fans excited about his teams. Veeck often invited chaos into the stadium, and that night it took over.

Bill Veeck's name, for right or wrong, will always be attached with Disco Demolition Night. Making sense of Disco Demolition Night requires a deeper understanding of Veeck as an MLB owner and as a person. Baseball was in Veeck's blood, and he spent his entire life in the sport. His father was the President of the Chicago Cubs, and Veeck spent much of his youth around the game.³⁵ At different points of his career, Veeck owned the Cleveland Indians, St. Louis Browns, and Chicago White Sox.³⁶ He won a World Series with the Indians in 1948.³⁷ He had a larger-than-life personality and was beloved by those he interacted with. He was inducted

³¹ Paul Dickson, *Bill Veeck: Baseball's Greatest Maverick*, 1st U.S. ed (New York: Walker & Comp., 2012), 316. "Veeck Asked for It," *Chicago Tribune* (1963-1996), July 14, 1979.

³² Richard Dozer, "Veeck Protests Sox Forfeit, but Accepts Responsibility," *Chicago Tribune*. July 14, 1979.

³³ Richard Dozer, "Veeck Protests Sox Forfeit, but Accepts Responsibility," *Chicago Tribune*. July 14, 1979.

³⁴ Bob Logan, "Washington's 3 HRs Lead White Sox Explosion," *Chicago Tribune* (1963-1996), July 15, 1979.

³⁵ Christopher Atwater, "A Passion for People: The Unconventional and Innovative Business Success of Bill Veeck," *Sport in Society* 23, no. 9 (September 1, 2020)

³⁶ Paul Dickson, *Bill Veeck: Baseball's Greatest Maverick*, 1st U.S. ed (New York: Walker & Comp., 2012), 3.

³⁷ After winning the World Series in 1948, Veeck's Indians got out to a poor start in the 1949 season. To show fans that the team had moved on from the championship and would improve their poor play on the field, Veeck staged a promotion where the team marched around the field with the World Series Champions banner, and then buried it. Paul Dickson, *Bill Veeck: Baseball's Greatest Maverick*, 1st U.S. ed (New York: Walker & Comp., 2012), 3.

into the MLB Hall of Fame in 1991 for his many contributions to the modernization and growth of the sport.³⁸ Bill Veeck was a promotional genius, a common man, and a progressive and caring leader.

Disco Demolition Night was far from Veeck's first promotional stunt. He had been hosting outside-the-box promotions since the late 1940s, and throughout his career, he was always successful at drawing big crowds. He was great at selling baseball and attracting different types of people to come to the games. Veeck was infamous for sending a little person up to bat in 1951. As the owner of the St. Louis Browns, Veeck sent 3-foot-7-inch Eddie Gaedel up to bat.³⁹ Gaedel drew a four-pitch walk and jogged down to first base.⁴⁰ However, Veeck relied on more than publicity stunts to draw in crowds. Veeck put a nursery in the outfield so mothers who were responsible for watching children could come to the ballpark and enjoy a game.⁴¹ He hosted a game early in the morning so people who during normal game times could come to the park; for this event, he directed the ushers to distribute breakfast foods.⁴² Veeck once said that a team can't win every game, but you can make every game entertaining. Veeck wanted all different types of people to come to games and was open to trying unconventional ideas to attract fans.

Veeck was known for his outlandish promotions, but he also had ideas that made the games a lot more enticing for fans and players. He was the first person to have an "exploding scoreboard."⁴³ After the White Sox hit home runs, the scoreboard shot fireworks into the sky. This has become a norm at stadiums in many sports across the world. Veeck was the first to put players' last names on the back of their jerseys, making players more well-known to fans.⁴⁴ His outside-the-box mindset made him a successful owner. Veeck was a natural entertainer and truly cared about the fan experience while spending time at his ballparks. He worked to make baseball more accessible to everyone and invited all different kinds of people into his ballparks. Bill Veeck was known for outlandish stunts that were meant to draw bigger crowds to baseball games.

³⁸ "Bill Veeck," Baseball Hall of Fame, accessed April 10, 2022, <https://baseballhall.org/hall-of-famers/veeck-bill>

³⁹ Bill Veeck and Edward Linn, *Veeck as in Wreck: The Autobiography of Bill Veeck*, University of Chicago Press ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 15. Gaedel's plate appearance was not Veeck's only promotion with little people. He used them as beer vendors so they wouldn't block people's view of the game. This only lasted one game. Ray Sons, "Veeck a Leader for Civil Rights," *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 28, 1991. Gaedel also made another promotional appearance for Veeck. Gaedel and a few other little people dressed in regimental Martian clothing and jumped out of a helicopter onto the field. Bill Veeck and Edward Linn, *Veeck as in Wreck: The Autobiography of Bill Veeck*, University of Chicago Press ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 20.

⁴⁰ Bill Veeck and Edward Linn, *Veeck as in Wreck: The Autobiography of Bill Veeck*, University of Chicago Press ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 19.

⁴¹ Bill Veeck and Edward Linn, *Veeck as in Wreck: The Autobiography of Bill Veeck*, University of Chicago Press ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 126-127

⁴² John C. Hoffman, "Squirrel Night at the Brewers," September 1943. Accessed via Baseball Hall of Fames archives department.

⁴³ Bill Veeck and Edward Linn, *Veeck as in Wreck: The Autobiography of Bill Veeck*, University of Chicago Press ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 342.

⁴⁴ Burton Alan Boxerman and Benita W. Boxerman, *Ebbets to Veeck to Busch: Eight Owners Who Shaped Baseball* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2003), 149.

Despite his publicity stunts, Veeck presented himself as a down-to-earth guy. He spent time in bars discussing his teams with local residents and even talked to fans in the restroom.⁴⁵ Veeck responded to fan letters regarding the team and was receptive to criticism or others' ideas.⁴⁶ He believed fans were entitled to the smell of fresh-cut grass when watching a baseball game, showcasing his care for the fan experience and perspective.⁴⁷ In his later years, he was a regular in the bleacher seats at Chicago Cubs games. He watched games shirtless, drinking beer, and spending time as a fan.⁴⁸ It is difficult to imagine professional sports franchise owners selling a team today and spending the last few years of their life in bleacher seats with their shirts off. Veeck never lost sight of who he was as a person and maintained true to serving fans throughout his career as an owner.

While Veeck worked tirelessly to support the fans, he was also an incredibly caring owner for his players. Veeck was also essential in working to integrate baseball. When he owned the Indians in 1947, Veeck signed the first black player in American League history, Larry Doby.⁴⁹ Doby was the second black player signed in MLB history, after Jackie Robinson.⁵⁰ Doby and Veeck had a close friendship after Doby retired; they attended jazz shows together. Doby referred to Veeck as the "greatest humanitarian he had ever known."⁵¹ Veeck also signed legendary Negro League pitcher Satchell Paige to a Major League contract in 1948.⁵² Veeck was also a caring owner. In 1951, an 18-year-old player, J.W. Porter, lost both his father and girlfriend in a tragic car accident. Veeck took the vulnerable player under his wing, and even let him stay at his house. Veeck would play catch with Porter and throw him batting practice at night.⁵³ When Porter needed someone after the deaths of his father and girlfriend, Veeck was there for the young player.

After owning the Indians and Browns, Veeck became the head of an ownership group that bought the Chicago White Sox in 1959.⁵⁴ The White Sox had great success on the field and with attendance. The team made it to the World Series in 1959 and broke attendance records in both 1959 and 1960.⁵⁵ Veeck was a popular owner but decided to sell the team in 1961 due to health issues. Veeck had suffered a serious leg injury in World War II, leading to an amputation after the war. He used a prosthetic leg, and underwent many surgeries throughout his life to

⁴⁵ Bill Veeck and Edward Linn, *Veeck as in Wreck: The Autobiography of Bill Veeck*, University of Chicago Press ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 342.

⁴⁶ Hank Greenburg, *Unforgettable Bill Veeck*. Undated. Accessed via Baseball Hall of Fame Research Department.

⁴⁷ In the 1970s, AstroTurf playing surfaces became the norm in Major League Baseball. Veeck opposed this and insisted on keeping a traditional grass field. Dan Epstein, *Big Hair and Plastic Grass: A Funky Ride Through Baseball and America in the Swinging '70s*, 1st ed (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2010), 51.

⁴⁸ Richard Favarty, *The New York Times*, June 1982. Accessed via the Baseball Hall of Fame.

⁴⁹ Paul Dickson, *Bill Veeck: Baseball's Greatest Maverick*, 1st U.S. ed (New York: Walker & Comp., 2012), 127.

⁵⁰ Jackie Robinson was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers, a National League Team. Doby was the second black player in Major League Baseball, but first to play in the American League. Ira Berkow, "When Baseball's Circus Came to Town," *New York Times*, October 20, 2005.

⁵¹ Untitled. Undated. Accessed via the Baseball Hall of Fame Research Department.

⁵² Paul Dickson, *Bill Veeck: Baseball's Greatest Maverick*, 1st U.S. ed (New York: Walker & Comp., 2012), 45.

⁵³ Paul Dickson, *Bill Veeck: Baseball's Greatest Maverick*, 1st U.S. ed (New York: Walker & Comp., 2012), 204.

⁵⁴ Joseph G. Preston, *Major League Baseball in the 1970s: A Modern Game Emerges* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2004), 232.

⁵⁵ Paul Dickson, *Bill Veeck: Baseball's Greatest Maverick*, 1st U.S. ed (New York: Walker & Comp., 2012), 235-236.

maintain his ability to walk and to avoid infection.⁵⁶ Veeck didn't let losing his leg hurt his spirits, as he would often remove his wooden leg and dance on his good leg.⁵⁷ He even had an ashtray carved into his wooden leg, so he made the most out of his situation.⁵⁸

Veeck spent the next fifteen years out of baseball, but his health improved throughout the 1960s and early 70s. He regained ownership of the White Sox in 1975, and his second stint with the organization was full of promotions. A friend of Veeck's joked that he had fifteen years of promotional ideas stored up and ready to go. On opening day in 1976, Veeck, manager Paul Richards, and business manager Rudie Schaffer marched around the field in Revolutionary War gear to honor the bicentennial.⁵⁹ In Veeck's first season back with the White Sox, attendance was up 21.8 percent despite winning eleven fewer games than the season before. Veeck hosted many nightly promotions that were a big hit with fans. A standout included band night, when fans were admitted for free if they brought a musical instrument; that evening, the fans in the ballpark played "Take Me Out to The Ballgame" together.⁶⁰ Veeck even invented a new sport for fans to play during games: beer case stacking. Three-man teams competed against each other on the field to see who could stack cases of beer the highest and the quickest. Beer would often fall and spray all over the contestants, which Veeck encouraged.⁶¹ Veeck also celebrated Chicago's diversity with many different ethnic nights.⁶² Every day there was something new for fans to enjoy and make them want to come back to Comiskey Park.

These promotions were important to draw fans to the games because the White Sox were a losing team. In Veeck's five seasons from 1976 to 1980, the White Sox finished with a winning percentage above .500 just once and never finished above third in the American League.⁶³ In the late 1970s, Major League Baseball was changing too. Throughout the 1970s, more games were being shown on television, which changed two major aspects of the game. First, fans could now consistently watch the games from home. If a team was struggling, fans could save their money and watch their team from their living rooms. The White Sox were not winning a lot of games, and fans usually don't support losing teams as well as they do winning teams. Veeck leaned on his promotional skills to attract fans and bring them back to the ballpark. Second, owners were making a lot more money from these growing television deals.⁶⁴ This made baseball a much better investment, and a new wave of wealthier people were more interested in purchasing

⁵⁶ Burton Alan Boxerman and Benita W. Boxerman, *Ebbets to Veeck to Busch: Eight Owners Who Shaped Baseball* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2003), 144

⁵⁷ Paul Dickson, "Bill Veeck: The Maverick Who Changed Baseball," *American Heritage* 62, no. 1 (Summer 2017).

⁵⁸ Paul Dickson, "Bill Veeck: The Maverick Who Changed Baseball," *American Heritage* 62, no. 1 (Summer 2017).

⁵⁹ Dan Epstein, *Big Hair and Plastic Grass: A Funky Ride Through Baseball and America in the Swinging '70s*, 1st ed (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2010), 186.

⁶⁰ Bill Veeck and Edward Linn, *Veeck as in Wreck: The Autobiography of Bill Veeck*, University of Chicago Press ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 394.

⁶¹ Joseph G. Preston, *Major League Baseball in the 1970s: A Modern Game Emerges* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2004), 232.

⁶² Dan Epstein, *Big Hair and Plastic Grass: A Funky Ride Through Baseball and America in the Swinging '70s*, 1st ed (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2010), 240.

⁶³ Sports Reference LLC. "1979 Chicago White Sox Schedule" Baseball-Reference.com - Major League Statistics and Information. <https://www.baseball-reference.com/teams/CHW/1979-schedule-scores.shtml>. Finishing above .500 means the team has more wins than losses. In this era, only two teams from each league advanced to the playoffs.

⁶⁴ Paul Dickson, *Bill Veeck: Baseball's Greatest Maverick*, 1st U.S. ed (New York: Walker & Comp., 2012), 313.

teams.⁶⁵ In the 1970s, wealthy businessmen George Steinbrenner and Ted Turner purchased Major League Baseball teams.⁶⁶ These wealthier owners had more money to spend on free agents to improve their teams.⁶⁷ Baseball was changing, and its players were starting to make a lot more money than in previous years.⁶⁸ Veeck didn't have the capital to spend on free agents in comparison to Steinbrenner or Turner. In fact, Veeck hardly had any money to run his team. Veeck told the team's general manager Roland Hedmond, "Don't bother drawing up a budget. We don't have any money. We'll think of something."⁶⁹ Clearly, Veeck was out of place amongst the new age of wealthy owners in baseball's new era of free agency. He sold the team after the 1980 season to Jerry Reinsdorf and Eddie Einhorn.⁷⁰

Bill Veeck needed these promotions to attract fans, maintain his career commitment to entertainment, and keep his head above water financially. In addition to his lack of funds, Veeck's health began declining again. He was in and out of the hospital during the 1979 season, as his amputated leg caused him a lot of trouble.⁷¹ In part due to his unstable health, Veeck named his son Mike the White Sox's director of promotions. This meant that Bill Veeck was less involved in the day-to-day operation when Mike reached out to Steve Dahl to host Disco Demolition Night.

Historians have failed to appreciate how Disco Demolition Night fit into a longer history of promotions invented by Bill Veeck. Most scholars mention only in passing that Bill Veeck was the owner of the team and Mike Veeck's father. They do not consider his background in promotions, and his positive overall influence on baseball, making the game more accessible for everyone. Disco Demolition Night's origins begin to make more sense after understanding Veeck's history of promotional stunts, and financial situation in the current landscape of Major League Baseball. Combined with his poor health, and his less experienced son, Veeck's lack of research before the promotion is more understandable. Disco Demolition Night was very much a night that showcased baseball promotions, Bill Veeck's career, and the modernization of baseball due to free agency and lucrative television contracts. Nevertheless, Disco Demolition Night would not have descended into chaos without Steve Dahl and his followers' hate for disco music and culture in the late 1970s.

⁶⁵ Joseph G. Preston, *Major League Baseball in the 1970s: A Modern Game Emerges* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2004), 209.

⁶⁶ Steinbrenner bought the New York Yankees in 1973, and Ted Turner bought the Atlanta Braves in 1976.

⁶⁷ Major League Baseball free agency began in 1976. The free agency era began after Curt Flood challenged his contract's reserve clauses after he was traded to the Philadelphia Phillies in 1969. Flood lost his court case, but it was a major step in the right direction towards players gaining the right to free agency. Bill Veeck testified on Flood's behalf. This was between Veeck's stints owning the White Sox, so he was not currently an MLB owner. This was much to the dismay of other owners and showcases Veeck's care for the players. He put people above money. Joseph G. Preston, *Major League Baseball in the 1970s: A Modern Game Emerges* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2004), 13-21.

⁶⁸ John Schullian, "Generation Gap: End of Veeck Era," *Chicago Sun-Times*, August 24, 1980.

⁶⁹ Warren Corbett, "Bill Veeck," Society of American Baseball Research, <https://sabr.org/bioproj/person/bill-veeck/>.

⁷⁰ Joseph G. Preston, *Major League Baseball in the 1970s: A Modern Game Emerges* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2004), 235.

⁷¹ Paul Dickson, *Bill Veeck: Baseball's Greatest Maverick*, 1st U.S. ed (New York: Walker & Comp., 2012), 314.

While Veeck struggled to field a competitive baseball team, disco music and style increasingly defined American culture. The era was flashy and the music was fast paced. Disco music was everywhere in the mid to late 1970s. The hit 1977 movie *Saturday Night Fever* featured the music and style of the disco era; the film's accompanying soundtrack, featuring songs by the Bee Gees, sold millions of copies and spawned several hit songs.⁷² The movie helped propel John Travolta's acting career and popularized disco style and music even further. While many idolized Travolta's character, others disliked his style and willingness to dance to the popular disco hits.

Many Americans hated disco music, culture, and how popular the genre and style had become. Disco was disliked for a few reasons. Some people simply disliked the style of music and preferred rock. But, as disco music became more popular, and radio stations were switching their format from rock to disco, fans of other genres felt left behind. Even bands and singers that had risen to the top playing rock music now released disco-style hits due to the genre's widespread popularity. Kiss and the Rolling Stones released disco songs, and the style of music was heard by even more people.⁷³ Even Frank Sinatra released disco songs in the late 70s, further contributing to the disco craze.⁷⁴ Rock bands pumping out disco songs speaks to the overall commercialization of the genre and culture in the late 1970s. Disco was everywhere and unavoidable. Even children's television show *Sesame Street* released two disco records that played during episodes.⁷⁵ Historians studying disco culture have argued that this commercialization drove the quality of disco music down, making the genre significantly less popular by the 1980s.⁷⁶

A discussion of disco culture in the 1970s is incomplete without considering its roots and growth in minority and gay communities. Before Travolta danced to Bee Gees songs in 1977, disco music was written by predominantly black groups and became popular in the early 1970s. Groups like KC and the Sunshine Band, Chic, and Kool & The Gang defined early disco music. The genre was especially popular in black and Latino communities, where hit songs were played in nightclubs to large crowds. Disco music was also a staple in gay bars and nightclubs, making

⁷² The Bee Gees wrote six songs of the seventeen disco songs used in the movie. The soundtrack climbed the charts and made the Bee Gees one of the most popular music groups of the late 1970s. Hit Bee Gees' songs *Stayin' Alive*, *How Deep is Your Love*, and *Night Fever* were written for the movie, and the *Saturday Night Fever* still contains one of the most successful soundtracks of all time. John Travolta played Tony Manero, a young Brooklyn man who spends his weekends dancing with girls in New York City's discotheques. Travolta dances wearing colorful clothes with big collars and a white three-piece suit during the movie. *How Deep is Your Love* reached gold status in December 1977. *Stayin' Alive* reached platinum in March 1978. *Night Fever* went platinum in May 1978.

Anthony Hogg, *The Development of Popular Music Function in Film: From the Birth of Rock 'n Roll to the Death of Disco*, Palgrave Studies in Audio-Visual Culture (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 124. Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture*, 1st ed (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 167, 206.

⁷³ Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*, 1st ed (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 229.

⁷⁴ Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*, 1st ed (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 229.

⁷⁵ Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*, 1st ed (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 228-229.

⁷⁶ Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*, 1st ed (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 228-229.

the genre popular in the gay community in the early 1970s.⁷⁷ Before disco became the number one music genre at the end of the decade, it was black, Latino, and gay communities who popularized it. Some white Americans simply looked at disco as “black music,” and disliked it only because of its popularity in black communities.⁷⁸ Its popularity in gay communities also made the genre and culture susceptible to homophobic attacks. Disco would not have swept the country in the late 70s if it wasn’t for the growth and support from black and gay communities earlier in the decade.⁷⁹

People disliked disco for several reasons at its peak in the mid to late 1970s. With a lot of people opposing the music and the groups with which it was associated, Steve Dahl became both an organizer and face of the anti-disco sentiment. Before Dahl was in center field blowing up records at Comiskey Park, he was a 23-year-old disc jockey for Chicago rock station WDAI in 1978. Dahl’s shows produced great ratings, and he was one of the highest-paid morning radio FM personalities in the country.⁸⁰ But as disco became more popular throughout that year, the station decided to switch to a disco format at the end of 1978. As a rock disc jockey, Dahl was terminated from the station on Christmas Eve.⁸¹ Dahl soon landed another radio job in Chicago with WLUP playing rock music. Now working for a competitor of his former station, he had a newfound hatred for disco music that he brought to the air on WLUP every morning. It is easy to understand why he would want to seek revenge against disco as a young disc jockey fired on, out of all days, Christmas Eve.

Each day, Dahl spent time trashing disco songs, singers, and its surrounding culture. He played snippets of disco songs and then would play an explosion sound effect over the music.⁸² Dahl said he didn’t like disco music, but especially hated disco’s surrounding culture.⁸³ Dahl parodied Rod Stewart’s hit disco track, “Do Ya Think I’m Sexy?” with a song of his own titled, “Do You Think I’m Disco?”⁸⁴ Dahl changed the lyrics and sang the song as a character named Tony, who shared a name with Travolta’s *Saturday Night Fever* character, Tony Manero. Dahl sang about spending hours blow-drying hair, wearing tight clothes, and dancing with girls wearing “sleazy” dresses.⁸⁵ Dahl said the song and its lyrics were based in humor, and just blew

⁷⁷ Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*, 1st ed (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 191.

⁷⁸ Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*, 1st ed (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 150.

⁷⁹ Anthony Hogg, *The Development of Popular Music Function in Film: From the Birth of Rock 'n Roll to the Death of Disco*, Palgrave Studies in Audio-Visual Culture (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 124.

⁸⁰ Rogers Worthington, “Deejay Steve Dahl Hits FM Airwaves with the Rock of Humor: Dahl’s Humor Is No Joke in FM Ratings War,” *Chicago Tribune (1963-1996)*, May 3, 1978.

⁸¹ Steve Dahl, Dave Hoekstra and Paul Natkin, *Disco Demolition: The Night Disco Died*, First edition (Chicago, Illinois: Curbside Splendor Publishing, 2016), 84.

⁸² Gary Deeb, “Deejay Goes on Record: Disco Is a Disease: Deejay Dahl Unites Rockers in a Record-Breaking Antidisco Campaign,” *Chicago Tribune (1963-1996)*, July 5, 1979.

⁸³ Gillian Frank, “Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash against Disco,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 2 (May 2007), 280.

⁸⁴ Stewart is another example of non-disco artists releasing popular disco style songs in the late 1970s. Steve Dahl, Dave Hoekstra and Paul Natkin., *Disco Demolition: The Night Disco Died*, First edition (Chicago, Illinois: Curbside Splendor Publishing, 2016), 16.

⁸⁵ Gillian Frank, “Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash against Disco,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 2 (May 2007), 294.

off steam about disco's popularity.⁸⁶ Not everyone found Dahl's song humorous. Sex and gender scholar Gillian Frank viewed Dahl's lyrics as a homophobic attack. Frank also wrote about Dahl's tendency to lisp the word disco on air.⁸⁷ Studies have shown the stereotype attached to lisping words and gay speech.⁸⁸ Dahl's language and antics have been accused of racism and homophobia, linking Disco Demolition Night to criticism too.

Dahl has refuted these claims over the years, saying he is worn out from defending himself for leading Disco Demolition Night. He said that his anti-disco campaign had nothing to do with race or sexual preferences, and it was just a group of people who didn't like a musical genre.⁸⁹ He has said that he wants people to view Disco Demolition Night through the lens of 1979, saying people attacking the night are engaging in "revisionist history."⁹⁰ Dahl believes people have misremembered the event, and taken what happened out of context. In 2016, Steve Dahl released a book with author Dave Hoekstra and photographer Paul Natkin. The book, *Disco Demolition Night: The Night Disco Died* is a collection of oral histories, containing unique perspectives and stories of the night. Dahl and Hoekstra said the book was written to set the record straight and tell what they consider the true story. Everyone interviewed in the book looks back at Disco Demolition Night with overall positive memories, except for Comiskey Park groundskeeper Roger Bossard.⁹¹ The book paints Dahl as a misunderstood figure, who became popular with an anti-disco schtick and ran with it. Hoekstra's interviews portray Dahl as a young kid who was passionate about restoring rock music and keeping it mainstream. While we will never know Steve Dahl's true intentions, and whether his hate for disco was real or a promotional shtick, his increasing popularity amongst Chicago rock fans in 1979 on WLUP was evident.

Despite Dahl's positivity looking back at Disco Demolition Night, his role in the anti-disco movement was clear. Right from the start of his tenure with WLUP in March 1979, Dahl organized an anti-disco army that he named the Insane Coho Lips.⁹² In just a few months, the Insane Coho Lips had seven thousand members. The group was comprised of people "dedicated to eliminating disco dystrophy in [their] lifetime."⁹³ Disco Demolition Night was not Dahl and the Insane Coho Lips' first anti-disco event. An article was published in the *Chicago Tribune* on July 5, 1979, exactly one week before Disco Demolition Night, outlining the group's origins and

⁸⁶ Steve Dahl, Dave Hoekstra and Paul Natkin., *Disco Demolition: The Night Disco Died*, First edition (Chicago, Illinois: Curbside Splendor Publishing, 2016), 16.

⁸⁷ Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture*, 1st ed (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 206.

⁸⁸ John Van Borsel and Anneleen Van de Putte, "Lisping and Male Homosexuality," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 43, no. 6 (August 2014): 1159–63,

⁸⁹ Steve Dahl, Dave Hoekstra and Paul Natkin., *Disco Demolition: The Night Disco Died*, First edition (Chicago, Illinois: Curbside Splendor Publishing, 2016), 16.

⁹⁰ Steve Dahl, Dave Hoekstra, and Paul Natkin., *Disco Demolition: The Night Disco Died*, First edition (Chicago, Illinois: Curbside Splendor Publishing, 2016), 16.

⁹¹ Steve Dahl, Dave Hoekstra, and Paul Natkin., *Disco Demolition: The Night Disco Died*, First edition (Chicago, Illinois: Curbside Splendor Publishing, 2016), 174.

⁹² Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*, 1st ed (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), 233. Dahl created the name after the coho salmon, a fish placed in the Great Lakes to eliminate the lamprey eel, which was killing most of the Great Lakes' fish population.

⁹³ Rogers Worthington, "Deejay Steve Dahl Hits FM Airwaves with the Rock of Humor: Dahl's Humor Is No Joke in FM Ratings War," *Chicago Tribune (1963-1996)*, May 3, 1978.

their activities. In early June, Dahl hosted an anti-disco event at a nightclub in Hanover Park, Illinois. The capacity of the club was one thousand, but four thousand people came. Dahl broke disco records over his head, and performed his parody song “Do You Think I’m Disco?” The remaining three thousand people loitered outside and threw bottles that broke a few windows. Police responded to what they described as a “riot situation.”⁹⁴ Dahl also gave away tickets to a Village People concert, encouraging his followers to throw marshmallows at the “disco freaks.”⁹⁵ Dahl described his army’s hatred for disco as heavy and a bit scary⁹⁶. The article told readers about Disco Demolition Night and said that the Insane Coho Lips planned to invade Comiskey Park the following Thursday.⁹⁷

Steve Dahl is an interesting and important character in Disco Demolition Night. Without him, there would have been no Disco Demolition Night or a riot on the field which resulted in the game’s cancellation. . Dahl’s firing from WDAI demonstrates the widespread popularity of disco at the perceived expense of the rock genre. Dahl’s subsequent popularity and growth on WLUP showcased Chicago’s rising anti-disco sentiment during the disco era. Finally, Dahl’s on-air rhetoric at the very least raises questions about the homophobia and racism involved in the disco era. Therefore, Dahl is a figure who showcased and embodied all aspects of anti-disco culture.

The riot on the field during Disco Demolition Night may have been an accident, but it certainly wasn’t a fluke. There is no simple answer to questions about why the promotion happened. In effect, it was the perfect storm of events and people at the exact right time. The White Sox were a mediocre baseball team who were struggling to attract fans in an era when it was harder to convince people to come to games. The mediocre team was owned by Bill Veeck, who had spent his entire career hosting outlandish promotions to attract fans to the games. The riot also occurred in a decade when a new genre of music rooted in minority and gay communities took over the music landscape. Bill Veeck owned a team in Chicago, the same city where Steve Dahl, a radio disc jockey, built an anti-disco army opposing this new genre and its surrounding culture. With Bill Veeck in poor health, his son Mike Veeck was named head of promotions. Mike reached out to Steve Dahl for an anti-disco promotion, and the rest is history. Disco Demolition Night wouldn’t have happened in any other city, for any other team, in any other stadium, at any other time, under any other owner, or led by any other disc jockey.

How is Disco Demolition Night remembered? How should it be remembered? The answers to these questions depend on who you ask. More than four decades later, Disco Demolition Night is most often remembered for its chaos and uniqueness. In some ways, Disco Demolition Night is celebrated with nostalgia for a different era in American history. Steve Dahl’s helmet from that night is on display at the National Baseball Hall of Fame in

⁹⁴ Rogers Worthington, “Deejay Steve Dahl Hits FM Airwaves with the Rock of Humor: Dahl’s Humor Is No Joke in FM Ratings War,” *Chicago Tribune (1963-1996)*, May 3, 1978.

⁹⁵ Village People released disco hit song *Y.M.C.A.* in 1978

⁹⁶ Rogers Worthington, “Deejay Steve Dahl Hits FM Airwaves with the Rock of Humor: Dahl’s Humor Is No Joke in FM Ratings War,” *Chicago Tribune (1963-1996)*, May 3, 1978.

⁹⁷ Rogers Worthington, “Deejay Steve Dahl Hits FM Airwaves with the Rock of Humor: Dahl’s Humor Is No Joke in FM Ratings War,” *Chicago Tribune (1963-1996)*, May 3, 1978.

Cooperstown, New York.⁹⁸ The Hall of Fame’s mission is to “preserve the sport’s history, honor excellence within the game and make a connection between the generations of people who enjoy baseball.”⁹⁹ It is certainly an interesting piece of baseball history, but its place in the Baseball Hall of Fame is questionable. Costas and MLB Network portrayed the event as a promotion that went wrong but didn’t consider the chaos an issue. The White Sox organization itself has capitalized on the event in marketing schemes. On June 13, 2019, the White Sox gave out t-shirts to the first ten thousand fans in the stadium for the 40th anniversary of the promotion to mark its historical nature.¹⁰⁰ The White Sox organization continues to profit from the infamy of Disco Demolition Night decades later.

Many were furious that the White Sox decided to give out t-shirts and honor the anniversary because of the anti-disco campaign’s homophobic and racist roots. Journalists all over the country covered the 2019 giveaway and blasted the White Sox organization.¹⁰¹ Disco Demolition Night’s alleged problematic intentions have been discussed in recent scholarship and popular work. Gillian Frank’s 2007 journal article, “Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash against Disco” portrays Disco Demolition Night as a homophobic event where straight white people attacked disco’s popularity in both popular and gay culture. Disco Demolition Night was back in the news in 2020, after the release of the HBO Documentary, *The Bee Gees: How Can You Mend a Broken Heart*, that told the story of the Bee Gees, and their rise and fall during the disco era. In the film, Disco Demolition Night was depicted as a night that led to the demise of disco, and the disappearance of disco as fans knew it.¹⁰² The story is incredibly critical of Disco Demolition Night for its racist and homophobic roots.

Bob Costas’ and Gillian Frank’s contrasting views show how differently Disco Demolition Night is remembered. It is likely that the event held multiple meanings for different participants. Some fifty thousand people were in Comiskey Park that night. It is impossible to place them all in the same category as to why they attended the two-night doubleheader. A family of four could watch eighteen innings of baseball for just four dollars if they brought old disco records. People who preferred rock music could enjoy a baseball game and have fun chanting disco sucks. Racists and homophobes had the opportunity to wreak havoc on a culture that threatened them. Some people likely wanted to poke fun at the Bee Gees’ high voices and John Travolta’s dance moves and tight clothes. Others simply disliked the style of music because it was popular among black and gay people. Labeling them all as innocent or guilty is an oversimplification of a complicated event. Disco Demolition Night, and anti-disco culture absolutely had racist and homophobic roots and overtones, and these attitudes were an essential

⁹⁸ Cassidy Lent, email message to author, March 1, 2022.

⁹⁹ “Mission,” Baseball Hall of Fame, accessed April 11, 2022, <https://baseballhall.org/support-the-hall/mission>.

¹⁰⁰ Phil Rosenthal, “White Sox and Steve Dahl Defend Disco Demolition T-Shirt Giveaway amid Criticism: ‘What Happened?’” *chicagotribune.com*, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/white-sox/ct-spt-white-sox-disco-demolition-t-shirt-controversy-20190612-story.html>.

¹⁰¹ Phil Rosenthal, “White Sox and Steve Dahl Defend Disco Demolition T-Shirt Giveaway amid Criticism: ‘What Happened?’” *chicagotribune.com*, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/white-sox/ct-spt-white-sox-disco-demolition-t-shirt-controversy-20190612-story.html>.

¹⁰² Disco music had a steep decline after the summer of 1979. Going into 1980, disco music was much less popular.

part of the story of the chaos on the field.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, defining the event as strictly a homophobic and racist demonstration isn't fair either.

Any analysis of Disco Demolition Night is incomplete without a fuller discussion of the role of Bill Veeck.¹⁰⁴ Considering the event through a wider lens than gender and sexuality reveals that Veeck's career of promotional stunts allowed and encouraged this night to happen. A fuller examination of the night's roots and events must include Bill Veeck. He wasn't just any owner, and the White Sox weren't just any team in the late 1970s. Scholarship that attaches Bill Veeck's name to racism but doesn't mention his background in promotions and the integration of baseball is missing an integral part of the story.¹⁰⁵ This comprehensive examination of Bill Veeck's role that night truly complicates how we should perceive it.

How should we remember Disco Demolition Night? In my view, the public spends too much time focusing on arguing against or defending it. When the story is told, parts are often left out depending on who is talking. There are so many layers to this story, and all are important in understanding how and why the promotion happened. It's complicated, and historians should embrace that fact when studying it. Lessons can be learned from the promotion, and it tells us a lot about culture in July of 1979. Disco Demolition Night has been remembered incompletely. Rather than focusing on whether the promotion should be celebrated or shamed, its importance lies in what it tells us about that moment in time.

The story of Disco Demolition Night contains fascinating characters who shed light on the 1970s disco era. The crowd who shattered disco records, started fires and fistfights, and engaged in general mayhem between the foul lines at Comiskey Park that July evening illustrated the intersection of many facets of 1970s American culture. Disco Demolition Night is, in part, a story about an owner who did all he could to entertain fans. Veeck is an admirable figure with a storied career, who accomplished a great deal for baseball. He was a pioneer who brought African American stars like Larry Doby and Satchell Paige into Major League Baseball. He knew professional sports were more than just a game, but a show. He put entertainment first and greatly valued the fan experience. His struggles late in his career suggest that he was out of place in a game that was becoming increasingly modern, as the free agency era no longer allowed Veeck to compete financially. His promotional stunts were thus an effort to entertain and more importantly, remain part of the game. Veeck walked the line between fun and bedlam throughout his career, and that night the line was crossed. He invited a fun type of chaos into his ballparks each night, but that night the Insane Coho Lips took over.

¹⁰³ For more information on racism and homophobia in the disco era see: Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco*, 1st ed (New York: Faber and Faber, 2005), Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture*, 1st ed (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), Gillian Frank, "Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash against Disco," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 2 (May 2007).

¹⁰⁴ Gillian Frank's thesis and writing about homophobia in the disco era is an essential part of understanding the chaos of Disco Demolition Night. Frank views the promotion through a gender lens. My biggest critique of Frank and many others who harshly critique or attack Disco Demolition Night would be their omission of Bill Veeck. Frank Gillian Frank, "Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash against Disco," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 2 (May 2007), 298.

¹⁰⁵ Don't forget, Veeck is the same guy that Larry Doby called "the greatest humanitarian he'd ever met." Just because Veeck wasn't racist doesn't mean Disco Demolition Night can't be racist, but he isn't just Mike Veeck's dad either. Untitled. Undated. Accessed via the Baseball Hall of Fame Research Department.

Disco Demolition Night can be understood through the rise of disco. To understand its opposition, you must understand its growth and popularity. Black artists popularized a new style of music that defined a decade and shaped music forever. This genre became an outlet in the gay communities and provided them spaces to be themselves. On the flip side, Disco Demolition Night illustrated the sad realities of how cultural forms could be attacked when they were popular in minority and gay communities. The intersection of sport and music makes it a complicated event to study and draw conclusions about. Instead of deeming the promotion right or wrong, it is important to consider both the positive and negative aspects, as well as their surrounding substories.

On the surface, Disco Demolition Night is a story that appears to be about seven thousand people storming a field and canceling a baseball game. But when further examined, it is about the modernization of professional sports, and the popularity and opposition of disco culture in the 1970s. Disco Demolition Night can help us learn about so many things taking place in American culture. This paper discusses John Travolta, Jackie Robinson, television deals in professional sports, the Bee Gees, exploding scoreboards, Chicago radio stations, promotional stunts, music in gay nightclubs, prosthetic legs with ashtrays, *Sesame Street*, a 3-foot-7-inch professional baseball player, and Kool & The Gang. This list appears to be just a random assortment of people, places, and things. But when examined together they provide a more complete context and impetus for Disco Demolition Night's occurrence. one of the most infamous and misunderstood promotions in the history of sports.

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**Who Are The Plastics?:
The Roles of Power and Exploitation in Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory*
By Taylor Mason**

In an effort to save herself from a lifetime of embarrassment and expulsion from school, Regina George glues a picture of herself onto a page in the infamous Burn Book and writes, “she is the nastiest skank bitch I have ever met. Do not trust her, she is a fugly slut,” to frame her now ex-best friend Cady Heron (Lindsay Lohan) and maintain her unforgiving social reign over North Shore High School. From the beginning of *Mean Girls*,¹ George commands an elite circle of popular and fashionable girls, including her minions Karen Smith and Gretchen Wieners, who seek absolute control over their classmates. When Heron, a previously homeschooled girl from Africa who believes anything she hears, enters North Shore’s cafeteria, George scouts out her prey like a lion on the hunt. She absorbs Heron into her clique and crafts her into a perfectly-dressed pink protector of power. George furthers her tyranny by pretending to tell Aaron Samuels, the hottest boy at North Shore, Heron is available. In reality, George bad-mouths Heron and ends up kissing Samuels in full view of her. All of her efforts, from small snarky comments to changing Heron’s personality, work as part of George’s seamless plan to maintain a hierarchy which secures her dominance and lets her rule the school. At its core, *Mean Girls* examines power structures through the eyes of teenagers, desperate to keep their social might, even if it means sacrificing their peers’ authenticity and true selves.

Although *Paths of Glory*² does not follow the activities of high school girls, it parallels *Mean Girls* in its theme of tyrannical exploitation. *Paths of Glory* takes place in the trenches of World War I, following a regiment of the French army and their efforts to conquer the opposing enemy territory, referred to as “the Anthill”. However, when the order to attack this German stronghold trickles down the chain of command, from General Broulard (Adolphe Menjou) to General Mireau (George Macready) to Colonel Dax (Kirk Douglas), Dax calls on his men to retreat after realizing continuing the attack is inevitable suicide. To protect his own integrity and set a fearful example for the rest of the troops, Mireau orders the court-martial of three random soldiers for cowardice, resulting in the soldiers’ execution despite Dax’s best efforts to prevent it. The film closes with the somber song of a German woman and Dax’s men enjoy a few moments of peace before being whisked away to become meaningless bodies on the battlefield. On the surface, *Paths of Glory* condemns the brutality of war and explores the role of authority in military decision-making. However, when taking a closer look at the film’s characters and dialogue, *Paths of Glory* demonstrates that people desperately chase influence, those with power will misconstrue, manipulate, or murder anyone to maintain it.

Philosophy and communications scholar Jason Holt explains *Paths of Glory* focused on existentialism, or the idea of using free will to make decisions, by examining the manipulation of the disadvantaged majority by the privileged minority. Holt writes, “the members of the 701st are pawns in a general’s chess game, and the outcome seems to have nothing to do with free choice and more to do with myriad internal and implacable external forces that they can neither

¹ *Mean Girls*, directed by Mark Waters (2004; Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Pictures, 2009), DVD.

² *Paths of Glory*, directed by Stanley Kubrick (1957; Los Angeles, CA: United Artists, 1999), DVD.

negotiate successfully nor ultimately resist,”³ to prove pawns are the sacrificial lambs of chess and French soldiers serve their general kings to continue the game. In a similar fashion, epistemology scholar Donald R. Riccomini argues *Paths of Glory* forces the success of the greater good over a single person’s morals or intentions. Any instances of individual good flash by, no more than mere seconds of an entire century. According to Riccomini, those ready to knock others down in the name of power will succeed: those who cannot keep up will perish.⁴ While existing scholarship argues existentialism, indoctrination in the military, and group dynamics persist as themes of the film, *Paths of Glory* reveals a great deal about how human beings—driven by greed—place their own personal reputations over the lives of others.

In relation to other World War I films, such as *All Quiet on the Western Front*⁵ and *King and Country*,⁶ *Paths of Glory* falls in line by opposing war and unnecessary bloodshed. However, *Paths of Glory* distinguishes itself from other World War I films by going beyond the blood, criticizing the hypocrisy of the military elite. The film covers a war where every soldier needed to whole-heartedly back their country with their lives as collateral. To maintain their legacies, the fictionalized military commanders executed soldiers in a similar way to how the leaders of the House Un-American Activities Committee investigated communism in Hollywood, denouncing anyone who had leftist ties. The HUAC’s investigation was in no small part an attempt by those in power to save their political reputations at the expense of some of Hollywood’s best actors, producers, directors, and writers, just like the French commanders of World War I did with their men. In this paper, I will argue that although instances exist where people given a position of power maintain it as a force for good, such as Colonel Dax being the lawyer for the court-martialed soldiers, the majority cling to their power as a source of destruction and exploit their fellow human beings, turning themselves into nothing more than a self-centered Regina George desperate to hold onto her sphere of influence over her subjects.

For the inspiration behind the film, Humphrey Cobb’s 1935 novel, *Paths of Glory*, served as the source material and drew influence from his own deteriorating mental state after drawing on his service under the Royal Montreal Regiment.⁷ His inspiration came from the death and destruction that humanity had never seen prior to World War I. An article in the *New York Times* mentioning the story of five French soldiers chosen at random to be executed by firing squad for not advancing into German territory also inspired Cobb to write.⁸ Though he modified some elements of the original *Times* story, Cobb’s vision, as author Gabriel Miller observes, “is one of total despair; the greatest enemy of man is man, and there is nothing redeeming in nature.”⁹ As an author, Cobb juxtaposed life versus death throughout the graphic battle, trench, and execution

³ Jason Holt, “Existential Ethics: Where the Paths of Glory Lead” in *The Philosophy of Stanley Kubrick*, ed. Jerold J. Abrams (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2007), 55.

⁴ Donald Riccomini, “*Paths of Glory* and the Tyranny of the Greater Good,” *Film-Philosophy* 20, no. 2 (2016): 328.

⁵ *All Quiet on the Western Front*, directed by Lewis Milestone (1930; Los Angeles, CA: Universal Studios, 1999), DVD.

⁶ *King and Country*, directed by Joseph Losey (1964; London, UK: BHE Studios, 1998), DVD.

⁷ Gabriel Miller, *Screening the Novel: Rediscovering American Fiction in Film* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., Inc, 1980), 122.

⁸ “French Acquit 5 Shot for Mutiny in 1915; Widows of 2 Win Awards of 7 Cents Each,” *New York Times*, July 2, 1934, 5, ProQuest Newspapers.

⁹ Gabriel Miller, *Screening the Novel: Rediscovering American Fiction in Film* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., Inc, 1980), 127.

scenes to emphasize the lack of hope for humanity to escape the chains shackled on by people of power from those at the top of the military or pink and sparkly hierarchy .

Kubrick's interpretation of the novel deviated from Cobb's original vision. In the novel, Colonel Dax put no effort into fighting the war whereas the film placed Dax front and center as the courageous leader, the court-martialed soldiers' attorney, and the leading man to challenge the hypocritical power structures of those above him. Kubrick evolved his purpose in the film to compare the roles of the powerful and the subordinate with Dax as a middleman seeing both perspectives. In addition to the expansion of Dax's character, Kubrick extends the film to include two more scenes. Cobb's novel concluded with the execution of the three men serving as a final farewell to any ounce of empathy one human could have for another. However, Kubrick continued the story by having General Broulard tell General Mireau that he will be investigated for his order in the bunker to shoot his own army. Mireau storms out of the room, knowing the blood of executed men, men he ordered to die, stains his legacy. Immediately after Mireau exits, the scene cuts to a bar with rowdy French soldiers screaming at an unnamed German girl, Christiane Kubrick. As the girl begins to sing, the men soften their voices and listen to the song, a solemn ending to a film criticizing the exploitative nature of their superiors, who will drive them to death moments later.

Adapting the original *Paths of Glory* into a film challenged its writers, Calder Willingham and Jim Thompson. Kubrick originally chose the novel because he read it in high school and enjoyed its anti-war themes.¹⁰ Willingham and Thompson's prior work suited *Paths of Glory's* goal because both explored a lack of empathy within society, comparable to how the generals in the film forget the humanity of the soldiers they command. Willingham, Thompson, and Kubrick shared the credit for writing *Paths of Glory*, but which of the three men truly deserved it is up for speculation. In an open letter, Willingham claimed he wrote the majority of the script, noting, "the screenplay of *Paths of Glory*, as the film was shot in Munich line by line, was 99% my own work, a lot of it done right there on a typewriter at the studio."¹¹ An anonymous appeal to the Writers Guild ruled in favor of listing the credit as "Screenplay by Stanley Kubrick, Calder Willingham, and Jim Thompson."¹² Given the purpose of *Paths of Glory*, the irony behind an argument over who gets their name up on a quick flash of the screen becomes obvious. Three men quarreling over who deserves the recognition for the success of the script, ready to drag down the other two at a moment's notice correlated to the French generals wanting to save themselves from embarrassingly losing their power. Kubrick, Willingham, and Thompson needed to jumpstart or save their respective careers by earning acknowledgment for their work on the script just as the Plastics needed to maintain social power over their peers.

Although he obtained several awards for his writing and directing, Kubrick did not receive much recognition during his childhood. Over his four years at William Howard Taft High School in New York City, Kubrick earned a sixty-seven average and no praise from his teachers.¹³ Though Kubrick possessed little academic talent, he demonstrated his critical thinking

¹⁰ Jeremy Bernstein, "Profile: Stanley Kubrick" in *Stanley Kubrick Interviews*, ed. Gene D. Phillips (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 27.

¹¹ Robert Politio, *Savage Art: A Biography of Jim Thompson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1995), 405-406.

¹² *Ibid*, 409.

¹³ Jeremi Szaniawski, *After Kubrick: A Filmmaker's Legacy* (Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2020), 34.

and problem-solving skills by learning how to play chess. Kubrick's natural talent for the game allowed him to turn the black and white pieces into dollar signs, which he applied toward living expenses and some of his early photography and film expeditions.¹⁴ However, the game's meaning ran deeper than a means of financial support for Kubrick's career. He explained, "if chess has any relationship to filmmaking, it would be in the way it helps you develop patience and discipline in choosing between alternatives at a time when impulse decisions seem very attractive. Otherwise, it is necessary to have a perfect intuition— and this is something very dangerous for an artist to rely on."¹⁵ Applying the game to *Paths of Glory*, multiple scenes forced characters into a metaphorical chess match with each other. One such scene occurred at the beginning of the film, where General Broulard informs General Mireau that the 701st Infantry Division must take the Anthill for French advancement.

Mireau and Broulard discuss capturing the Anthill in a lavish chateau, one of many slaps in the face to soldiers in the dirty trenches. Broulard moves his knight forward by telling Mireau his men need to take the Anthill to keep the French moving, but Mireau plays defense by refusing. In an effort to sway his fellow general, Broulard tempts Mireau with his rook, dangling a possible promotion in his face. Mireau stands strong, professing, "the life of one of those soldiers means more to me than all the stars and decorations and honors in France." However, by the end of the conversation, Mireau agrees to give the order to take the Anthill. The staging of this scene exemplified Kubrick utilizes the gameplay and teachings of chess in his directorial choices. At first, Mireau and Broulard are seated across from each other: whenever one speaks, the camera goes to their face, allowing them to explain their opinions honestly. The discussion appears to be like a conversation between old friends as they begin a chess match. As the men disagree, they begin to walk away from each other, visually representing their separate stances. Once Mireau changes his mind, he holds Broulard by the arm and walks him around the room, shifting the mental chess match in Mireau's favor. This choice also represented Kubrick's desire to show those in power seized opportunities, no matter how immoral or manipulative, to keep themselves on top of the game. Chess taught Kubrick the necessary soft skills for making *Paths of Glory* while also being a framework for his visual metaphors in the film.

In addition to chess, Kubrick's time at *Look* magazine molded his love for working behind the camera. As a budding photographer, Kubrick worked to achieve *Look's* goal of "offering photojournalistic documentation of aspects of society and culture--particularly American society and culture--in the middle decades of the twentieth century."¹⁶ While taking pictures for the magazine, he began to explore the lucrative and expensive world of documentary film. After saving up his salary, Kubrick created *Day of the Fight*, which turned a small profit. Motivated by this slight success, Kubrick left *Look* to make a second documentary barely better than the first, resulting in him going back to nickel-and-dime games of chess in the park.¹⁷ Kubrick realized documentaries lacked popularity with the people, so he decided to direct a feature film entitled *Fear and Desire* (1953). Kubrick went on to direct twelve more feature

¹⁴Jeremy Bernstein, "Profile: Stanley Kubrick" in *Stanley Kubrick Interviews*, ed. Gene D. Phillips (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 21.

¹⁵ Alexander Walker, *Stanley Kubrick, Director* (New York: W. W. Norton Company and Press, 1999), 69.

¹⁶ "About This Collection," *Look Magazine Collection*, Library of Congress

¹⁷ Philippe Mather, *Stanley Kubrick at Look Magazine: Authorship and Genre in Photojournalism and Film* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2013), 54, EBSCO.

films, continuing till his death on March 7, 1999. His final movie, *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), served as the dramatic conclusion of one of Hollywood's most existentialist directors. Starting off as a photographer trained Kubrick to think seriously about visual composition in filmmaking.

While any amateur moviegoer will notice excellent cinematography, it takes a true expert to notice the director's thoughts behind the lens. By 1957, Kubrick had become increasingly frustrated with American politics. The Hollywood studios demanded influence over his films, and he wanted no one to have control.¹⁸ Kubrick needed total control over *Paths of Glory* to properly convey his anti-war, anti-Red Scare, and anti-power stances. During the battle scene, Kubrick operated a camera himself to follow Dax and his dying men, unsupported by their fellow soldiers in the neighboring regiment or by the supervising generals, to ensure the scene was just right.¹⁹ In regard to post-production, Joseph Glemis asked Kubrick in a 1970 interview how much editing he does for films. Kubrick responded, "Nothing is cut without me. I'm in there every second, and for all practical purposes I cut my own film; I mark every frame, select each segment, and have everything done exactly the way I want it. Writing, shooting, *and* editing are what you have to do to make a film."²⁰ As those in power in the United States exerted control over filmmakers' lives and careers in their efforts to seek out suspected communists in the 1950s, *Paths of Glory* represented Kubrick's resistance to outside control of his work and to structures of power in a film ostensibly about World War I.

The Second Red Scare gained traction during the production of *Paths of Glory*, with anti-communist politicians investigating suspicious Hollywood stars. Although Kubrick never found himself on the blacklist, various scenes in *Paths of Glory* criticized the unjust nature of many politicians' actions and the abuse of their power in order to maintain their status. For example, Corporal Paris, Lieutenant Roget, and Private Lejeune enter enemy territory as part of a reconnaissance mission. When Lejeune goes further into the German base and takes too long to return, Roget throws a grenade into the camp out of fear, which ends up killing Lejeune. Paris confronts Roget back at the trenches and they accuse each other of various crimes. As they argue, Roget utters, "Phillip, have you ever tried to bring charges against an officer? It's my word against yours, you know. And whose word do you think they're gonna believe? Or let me put it another way: whose word do you think they are going to accept?"

At first glance, the dialogue between Paris and Roget represented an unfair power structure within the military. Even if Paris' facts line up, he stands below Roget in the hierarchy, forced to listen to his superior. However, it does not matter who is correct because both Paris and Roget serve an institution that will not serve them back. Kubrick criticized war because it promotes systems of oppression. This scene also showcased more of Kubrick's tendency to make broad generalizations about humanity in his films rather than chastise people's politics. At the end of Kubrick's day, those in power will keep their power even if it means exploiting fellow humans. Parallels exist between the 1916 French generals abusing their soldiers to avoid failure

¹⁸ Paul Loukides and Linda Fuller, *Beyond The Stars: Studies in American Popular Film* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Press, 1996)

¹⁹Alexander Walker, *Stanley Kubrick, Director* (New York: W. W. Norton Company and Press, 1999), 81.

²⁰Joseph Glemis, "The Film Director as Superstar: Stanley Kubrick" in *Stanley Kubrick Interviews*, ed. Gene D. Phillips (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 80.

and embarrassment and 1957 Hollywood studio executives blacklisting those who did not align with their anti-communist agenda.

While Kubrick's problem with the executives lay in their lack of humanity, disturbed at their abuse of power in the name of saving face, other cast and crew members took up issues with their actions, specifically the Hollywood Blacklist. A more obvious critique of the anti-communist politicians' investigations comes in one of Kubrick's later films, *Spartacus* (1960). Spartacus (Kirk Douglas) leads a group of slaves to revolt and go back to their homes in a classic Roman epic.²¹ *Paths of Glory* and *Spartacus* alike shared a common theme of powerful groups, such as the French military jury or the Roman Senate, and the people in those groups abusing their power. The two films also have a common leading actor, Kirk Douglas, one of Hollywood's most influential men. Not only did Douglas secure the funding for *Paths of Glory*, but he brought his maverick attitude to work each day, which helped end the blacklist.

When he entered the world, the Gods gave Kirk Douglas nothing except a really hard name to pronounce. Born Issur Danielovitch to impoverished Jewish-Russian immigrant parents, he and his siblings lived on the streets of Amsterdam, New York. Throughout his childhood, he faced antisemitism, the conclusion of World War I, the Stock Market Crash of 1929, and the Great Depression. After graduating from St. Lawrence University, Danielovitch went back to his former job at the Tamarack Playhouse to kick off his acting career. The Tamarack Playhouse also gifted Danielovitch his now well-known alias, Kirk Douglas. Sadly, Douglas' acting skills had to be abandoned at the onset of World War II where he served as a Navy officer for several years, then eventually discharged for recurring amoebic dysentery. He returned to the acting world with his first film, *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946, dir. Lewis Milestone). Douglas starred in, produced, and directed countless films, which earned him high praise from both colleagues and the general public. Douglas passed away in February 2020 at the age of 103, but he left a legacy for the real and fictional lives he impacted, including being an exceptional advocate against the atrocities of wartime exploitation by superiors.²²

Douglas' experience in the Navy familiarized him with the gruesomeness of war, making him the perfect candidate to play Colonel Dax in *Paths of Glory*. An excerpt from Douglas' first autobiography, *The Ragman's Son*, emphasizes his anti-war stance:

But it's all vague because I've pushed away everything connected with World War II. Even people who know me well would be surprised to learn that I was a Communications Officer in anti submarine warfare during World War II. I never talk about it. I don't know what happened to my uniform or whatever medals I got for being in the Atlantic or the Pacific or wherever. They're all packed away somewhere. There's only one picture of me from that time, in shorts, sitting on the railing of a ship, with a rifle in my hand. War is such a stupid waste of time, young people on a ship looking for other young people and trying to blow them up.²³

²¹ Larry Ceplair, "Kirk Douglas, Spartacus, and the Blacklist", review of *I Am Spartacus!*, by Kirk Douglas, *Cineaste*, 2012.

²² Kirk Douglas, *A Ragman's Son* (New York: Pocket Books, 1989).

²³ *Ibid*, 88.

Douglas understood war from the soldier's perspective given that he spent the majority of his service on the Navy's ships, just as Colonel Dax lived with his men in the French army's trenches. In a similar sense, Douglas experienced firsthand the hierarchies within a military regime that *Paths of Glory* denounced. Douglas and Dax fought on the frontlines while their superiors watched from the comfort of their chateaus, trying to keep their power alive at the expense of human beings.

After *Paths of Glory*, Douglas starred in a few other films before receiving the title role in *Spartacus*. References to McCarthyism, the HUAC, and the Second Red Scare ran rampant throughout the film, particularly because of the screenwriter, Dalton Trumbo. Trumbo wrote brilliant, award-winning scripts, but because of his previous association with the Communist Party, he ended up blacklisted and became part of the Hollywood "Unfriendly" Ten.²⁴ Trumbo earned the writing credit for *Spartacus*, which Douglas attributed to breaking the blacklist. However, uncertainty persisted as to whether Douglas really deserved this credit. In an excerpt from Trumbo's biography,

As for Kirk Douglas's repeated claims that he "broke" the blacklist, the evidence is incontrovertible that, at some point in 1959, Douglas decided that he would try to give Trumbo screen credit for the *Spartacus* script. However, Douglas did not have the final say in the matter. Universal's head of production, Ed Muhl, did. After the meeting, Douglas telephoned Trumbo and invited him to come to lunch at the studio commissary, under his own name. It was that invitation, Douglas maintains, that "broke" the blacklist. According to Lewis, however, no such meeting took place. He never heard Kubrick say that he would take the writer's credit, and he never heard Douglas ask for anybody's opinion on the subject.²⁵

Once again, powerful people bolstered their status in Hollywood by taking recognition for any good deed. Regardless of who agreed to give Trumbo the credit for *Spartacus*, the move revived his career and invalidated McCarthy's blacklist as nothing more than a witch hunt. As a staunch Democrat, Douglas continued to fight against the HUAC whereas his *Paths of Glory* co-star, Adolphe Menjou cooperated with the investigation.

Menjou testified alongside Ronald Reagan and other Republicans to the politics of various celebrities to help the HUAC fight communism. In 1947, Menjou commented to the *New York Times*, "Hollywood is one of the main centers of Communist activity in America... motion pictures are 'our greatest medium of propaganda and it is the desire and wish of the masters of Moscow to use this medium for their purpose- which is the overthrow of the American Government.'" ²⁶Although Douglas and Menjou belonged to opposing political parties and presented different responses to the Hollywood Blacklist, they both served the United States. Menjou fought during World War I, allowing him to give a realistic performance in *Paths of Glory* based on his time of service. Menjou utilized his right-wing beliefs and support for the

²⁴ Larry Ceplair and Christopher Trumbo, *Dalton Trumbo: Blacklisted Hollywood Radical* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2015), EBSCO

²⁵ *Ibid*, 403.

²⁶ Gladwin Hill, "Hollywood Is a Main Red Center, Adolphe Menjou Tells House Body," *New York Times*, May 16, 1947, 1, ProQuest Newspapers.

HUAC investigation to his advantage while playing General Broulard. Menjou and Broulard alike profited at the tragic expense of those around them, be it their colleagues or soldiers who protested their injustices.²⁷

Media coverage of the HUAC investigation portrayed its supporters as heroes worthy of the limelight. Opponents were forced to use aliases or give up their Hollywood careers entirely. Whether the truly good guys sparkle in the limelight or hide away from society as a result of the Hollywood Blacklist crawled its way into *Paths of Glory* as a central theme. Located under the trenches, Colonel Dax's office appears dirty and dark, lit by a single overhead lamp. In contrast, Generals Mireau and Broulard's chateau stays well-lit with no despairing shadows in sight. Typically, light symbolizes purity and goodness, whereas darkness is evil and immoral. Kubrick flipped this narrative on its head, having Dax, the ideal example of a man, be sent into darkness, just as blacklisted stars like Trumbo had been all throughout the 1950s. Along with manipulating light and shadows, Kubrick utilized different camera angles to achieve the disconnect between those in power and those that serve. Whenever Dax gazes at the Anthill, it looks like a mere speck on the horizon, too far for any regiment to take. However, Mireau always uses binoculars to gaze at the Anthill, making it appear extremely close and practical to achieve taking it over. Powerful people naturally view the world through their own set of binoculars, where everything seems a step away. Those who do not hold power have to see things as they really are; treacherous journeys plagued by death. The difference in vantage points affects how those with power and those without perceive the world and how far the powerful go to protect their respective images.

Despite the conflicting viewpoints, the powerful do not always trample the small, the insignificant, in *Paths of Glory*. When Mireau gives the order over the phone to fire on his own troops because the regime refused to advance, the soldier on the other line sticks to protocol and insists he must write the order. For once, military procedure benefits those lower in the hierarchy and authoritative Mireau does not succeed. While Dax does not have the influence a general has, he holds a meaningful amount of power within the French military. When he serves as the lawyer of the three court-martialed men, Dax references the lack of bureaucratic order in the trial, attests to the men's characters, and appeals to the jury's sense of humanity by declaring, "to find these men guilty would be a crime...compassion for another completely dead". Though his power may be limited, Dax still tries to be a respectable example for his men as well as all of humanity. Lastly, the final scene of *Paths of Glory* both supported and contradicted the rest of the film's aggressive arguments, explosions, and gunfire.

When the entire film scrutinized power structures chiseling away at every ounce of humanity one has, the conclusion of *Paths of Glory* defied said structures. As the unknown German girl, played by Christianne Kubrick, sings her song, some men join in while others tear up, a final sign of remorse and empathy.²⁸ The men left in the 701st division come together in peace before moving on to their upcoming mission where the person seated next to them in the bar will likely be six feet under. Yet at second glance, this scene still represented the exploitation of humans by their superiors. When reflecting on her performance in the scene, Kubrick explains

²⁷ Adolphe Menjou, *It Took Nine Tailors* (Whittlesey House Publishing, 1948).

²⁸ Gabriel Miller, *Screening the Novel: Rediscovering American Fiction in Film* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., Inc, 1980), 133.

Stanley “wanted to just show the disinterested suffering female. It doesn’t matter whether she is French or German. She doesn’t get treated well.”²⁹ The French soldiers acted no better than the generals they served; maintaining their patriarchal supremacy over the girl by hollering and whistling. Low-ranking soldiers marginalized an individual to taste a sliver of the power pie that their superiors have been dangling over their mouths.

Although powerful people like Colonel Dax, who strive for good, live in the world, the more common narrative prevails: those who hold the power abuse it to the extreme. When someone maintains their reputation at all costs, leaving dignity, respect, and reverence for human life behind, irony comes along with such manipulation. At the beginning of *Paths of Glory*, General Mireau walks through the trenches in an attempt to boost soldier morale. Instead, he inflates his own ego and flaunts his dominance. Mireau greets two of the three soldiers that later face court-martial and execution, Private Ferol and Corporal Paris, with the question “ready to kill more Germans?” Kubrick foreshadowed the men’s death by having bombs explode near the trenches after Mireau concludes his conversation with Ferol and Paris. Not only is it ironic that Mireau comes face to face with the men whose blood will be on his hands, but his question itself insults mankind. The German and French soldiers acted as expendable lives, used as collateral by their generals to save their reputations behind closed doors. In turn, Kubrick claimed the French do not deserve more praise than the Germans or vice versa: there can be no good guy when everyone kills each other.

Paths of Glory’s execution scene provided a last nail in the coffin for the three men executed and for Kubrick’s final attempt at highlighting powerful people who will neglect any sense of integrity in order to keep being powerful. Prior to the execution, General Broulard hosts a lavish party, blissfully ignoring the events to come as he tells Colonel Dax, “one way to maintain discipline is to shoot a man now and then”. Killing fellow men in the name of discipline only happens because of conniving leaders and Broulard exemplified this philosophy. Furthermore, as the drums play suspensefully in the background, a series of quick close-up and three-quarter shots of each soldier and officer builds the anticipation of when guns will go off. When the camera followed Dax, the close-up and eye-level shots signified the audience agrees with his actions thus far and understands he tried every possible solution to save his men. In contrast, when the camera panned to Broulard and Mireau, it was a low-angle shot, making the viewer feel small in comparison, looking up to their villainous superiors. Finally, as the bullets exit their chambers and the men drop from their stakes, the scene resembles the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, another reminder that any element of morality is dead and disregarded as guidance for decision-making of the elites.

Several critics gave *Paths of Glory* mixed reviews after its release in the U.S. on Christmas Day. Esteemed film critic Bosley Crowther praised the acting performances, especially during the execution scene, as well as Kubrick’s stylistic choices. However, he despised the casting because the film focused on the French military and actors with English accents made the film unrealistic. Douglas’ voice reminded viewers of Western films rather than the anti-war genre. Crowther also refuted the symbolism behind the film, claiming viewers do not leave the theater understanding that war means nothing because humanity’s drive for power kills itself: they just see that war is bloody and hurtful. Overall, the film generated moderate buzz

²⁹ Christiane Kubrick, interview; Criterion Extras, YouTube.

at the American box office, but the French especially did not enjoy Kubrick's depiction of their military as equally evil as the Germans.³⁰

As a result of European military leaders being dissatisfied with the film, multiple countries banned *Paths of Glory* till the end of the 1950s. Eventually, the film made its way to French theaters, but not without a disclaimer reading “this episode of the 1914-1918 war tells of the madness of certain men caught in its whirlwind. It constitutes an isolated case in total contrast with the historical gallantry of the vast majority of French soldiers, the champions of the ideals of liberty, which, since always, has been that of the French people.”³¹ French leaders being so afraid to show a film about power structures and maintaining them through any means necessary knocked Kubrick’s message out of the ballpark. Whether its execution in 1916 or censorship in 1957, people with power will go to extreme lengths to keep the rest of humanity subordinate to their authority in fear of what would result out of disobedience.

At its core, *Paths of Glory* criticized war’s idolization of violence. Through an alarmingly realistic battle scene, Kubrick condemned the brutality of war. The film condemned the Hollywood Blacklist and Second Red Scare, especially through Generals Mireau and Broulard. Mireau and Broulard behaved no morally superior than anti-communist politicians as they looked for low-ranking soldiers or left-wing actors to be their scapegoats for their unjust actions, mirroring George’s lack of morality when commanding her North Shore High subjects. However, with any of his films, Kubrick did not make comments on current circumstances, but instead he developed broad claims about all of society. Extending the film beyond 1957 and the military hierarchy, *Paths of Glory* argued anyone with power, be it generals, bosses, politicians, etc., will force someone else to make the ultimate sacrifice to avoid rolling the dice and losing their authority throughout every element of the film, most notably the hypocritical dialogue and the execution scene.

Both *Paths of Glory* and *Mean Girls* leave the audience with the same thought: authoritative regimes use their inferiors as stepping stones to keep their influence intact. *Mean Girls* correlated with *Paths of Glory* because both films examine the raw desire individuals have for power as well as how anyone destroys those around them in the name of keeping said power. Generals Broulard and Mireau functioned just like the Plastics, hollow shells of human beings who do not care about anyone or anything but their own success. While Broulard and Mireau’s lack of accountability became responsible for the murder of three innocent men, the Plastics murder Cady Heron’s identity. However, it does not matter the type of killing; physical, emotional, social. Powerful people, whether dressed in military uniforms or mini skirts, will corrupt themselves and circumvent the blame onto innocent individuals in any way possible if it means staying at the top of the hierarchy to generate a sense of accomplishment at the cost of others physical or social lives.

³⁰ Bosley Crowther, “Screen: Shameful Incident of War: 'Paths of Glory' Has Premiere at Victoria Kirk Douglas Stars in Film of Cobb Book,” *New York Times*, December 26, 1957, 23, ProQuest Newspapers.

³¹ “Disputed Film On Again: Brussels Will See 'Paths of Glory' With a Foreword,” *New York Times*, March 12, 1958, 35, ProQuest Newspapers.

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