

ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines popular history and collective memory in the mid-20th century. Each chapter studies a different source of politicized history, exploring who created the history to be disseminated, what their goals and motivations were, why the historical trope particularly suited their needs and objectives, how they managed to convey ideologies through representations of the past, and how this popular history related to contemporary social and political issues. All of these “historians” – DuPont’s radio and television show, *Cavalcade of America*; the History Book Club; CBS’s historical news program, *You Are There*; the American Heritage Foundation’s “Freedom Train”; and the Smithsonian Institution – attempted to mold collective memory into an ideological foundation for their agendas. During a tumultuous period, at home and abroad, the past became a safer forum for political discourse, and reexamining these sources of historical information and interpretation sheds new light on postwar politics. Surprisingly, deep ideological divisions persisted well into the

age of apparent consensus. However, despite significant differences, the key people in all of these cases shared the same basic assumption about the relevance of history to contemporary society. The widespread acceptance of a strong relationship between past and present in postwar American society contrasts with later attitudes toward the past. The new technologies that enabled the communication of particular historical representations and interpretations changed too, and rapidly matured into forms less suited to the dissemination of historical lessons. As these attempts to control the public's views of the past began to fail, popular history was increasingly driven by marketplace considerations and was less confined to perspectives carefully chosen by a particular group of elites.

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By

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Dedication

To Shanna, who has endured this thing with me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Who Defines the Remembered Past?

When Oxford Press published an abridgement of Arnold Toynbee's *Study of History* in 1947, it quickly became a best seller, particularly in the United States.¹ To explain such success, the author suggested that, harboring feelings of "anxiety," many people turned, with him, to the "scriptures of the past to find out whether they contain a lesson that we can decipher."² How many of the book's purchasers actually read Toynbee's difficult and often confusing text is of course unknown, but the great number who bought it undoubtedly felt that this grand historical explanation of the rise and fall of civilizations was a book they *should* read. Yet not everyone agreed. Many historians found Toynbee's broad generalizations vexing, if not inappropriate. Criticisms usually centered on his very large units of history – civilizations – and the inevitability of his phases of a civilization's "life" cycle. The objection to stages of genesis, decline, and disintegration was academic, but also primal and self-defensive: Toynbee's rigid model suggested that contemporary civilization had not much longer to live.³

¹ William H. McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee: A Life* (New York: Oxford, 1989), 205.

² Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial and The World and the West* (1948; repr., New York: Meridian Books, 1958), 37.

³ Herbert Aptheker also criticized the book's spiritual (rather than materialist) interpretation, and denounced critics who praised it as a "Way of Salvation." Aptheker, "History and Reality," 21, in *History and Reality* (New York: Cameron Associates, 1955), 17-48; See also the essays by Pieter Geyl and Pitirim A. Sorokin, in Pieter Geyl, Arnold J. Toynbee and Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Pattern of the Past: Can We Determine It?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949); M.F. Ashley Montagu collected critical essays from 29 historians for publication in the edited volume *Toynbee and History: Critical Essays and Reviews* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1956).

Beyond the arguments (or above the fray) existed a more fundamental disagreement about the uses of the past. In particular, how should people access and assess the rich store of knowledge that presumably reposes in history? A surprisingly public discussion of this question took place in 1948, the year of both the abridged *Study*'s publication and Toynbee's more clearly contemporary work, *Civilization on Trial*. Toynbee debated the merits of his approach with Pieter Geyl on BBC radio. Geyl was a Dutch historian who would later author *Use and Abuse of History* (1955), a work that explored how the past is "ransacked for material that might support the case of one side."⁴ Some months before, Geyl had written an article published in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* that denounced Toynbee's approach. Not only did Toynbee offer generalizations based on insufficient examples, but he also selected only the "instances which will support his theses" and deliberately excised contradictory evidence. Geyl recognized the need to simplify, to generalize based on limited evidence, but he criticized Toynbee for too narrowly restricting his readers' views and forcing them into an acceptance of his interpretation.⁵

"The fate of the world – the destiny of mankind," Toynbee responded, "is involved in the issue between us about the nature of history." He claimed that preparing his readers for what lay ahead necessitated limiting their horizons to the key lessons of the past. Historians (and society) were confronted with the choice of trying to "chart" the past in order to navigate the present, or sailing ahead with the blank map offered by those who said that history is too complex to use effectively. For Toynbee, these options represented, respectively, "our fathers" view that "history

⁴ Pieter Geyl, *Use and Abuse of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1955), 10.

⁵ Geyl, Toynbee, and Sorokin, 15, 21.

is a revelation of God's providence," and the "nonsense view of history" espoused by his opponents.⁶ Either it all means something, he said, or none of it means anything.

The conversation between Geyl and Toynbee presented the two poles of a contemporary debate concerning the usefulness of the past. Herbert Muller's *The Uses of the Past* (1952) tried to find a middle ground. Like Toynbee's work it was "designed to give perspectives on the crisis of our own society." However, Muller argued that attempts to use history are almost always so over-simplified that they not only fail to capture the real meaning of historical events, they also fail to elucidate whatever contemporary problem it was that led to their invocation. In the beautifully written introduction, entitled "Hagia Sophia, or the 'Holy Wisdom'," Muller describes how the great Istanbul cathedral has often been used for the lessons that its history supposedly teaches. He is particularly concerned with Toynbee's uses of the Hagia Sophia in his *Study*. Completed in 537 AD, sacked by Roman Catholic crusaders in 1204, converted into a mosque after the Ottoman Turkish seizure of Constantinople in 1453, and finally secularized (as a museum) by Ataturk in 1935, the Hagia Sophia's long story seems to invite Toynbee's grand analytic approach. Referring to the Turkish conquest in 1453, Toynbee argued that the cathedral represented the moment in a civilization (every civilization) when its society loses its faith, and the civilization therefore dies. Muller refutes this by pointing out that most of Constantinople's population was inside the church praying for salvation when the Ottomans took control of their city – hardly a sign of lost faith.⁷ But Muller reveals his larger point through an extended metaphor that uses the building itself to counter

⁶ Ibid., 75-79.

⁷ Herbert J. Muller, *The Uses of the Past: Profiles of Former Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 8-9. "If anything, Toynbee seems to prove the universal failure of religion."

Toynbee's use of the past. The impressive edifice may *seem* to offer itself up for bold pronouncements of timeless meaning, but, "Upon close inspection, ...St. Sophia is an everlasting wonder in its anomalies.... Everything stands; but everything is wavering, bulging, or askew." On close inspection, the past is too messy to use – unless one ignores the contradictions and exceptions present in almost any historical event. And, Muller concludes, "we cannot afford to spare the past its troubles," since whitewashing history precludes any chance of learning from it. He acknowledges the need for any age to create its own usable past, "yet this admission of relativity does not permit us to... make over the past to suit ourselves."⁸

Muller joined many historians in praising the historical perspective introduced by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr's *The Irony of American History* influenced more than a few contemporary American historians (among others), encouraging a "cult of complexity" within postwar historiography. Historian Peter Novick argues that the Niebuhrian terms: complexity, irony, and ambiguity, "became the most highly valued qualities in postwar intellectual life." For many intellectuals, this stance distinguished them from contemporary leftists as well as intellectual movements of the recent past.⁹

It also distinguished them from important trends in history that have generally been ignored by historians focused on postwar American academics. If elite intellectuals embraced the irony of the past, the rest of the nation did not seem inclined to follow them. There was a revival of popular historical interest, but it usually resembled Toynbee's neat system of historical lessons more than Niebuhr's

⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁹ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 324.

paradoxes. If we look beyond the ivory tower, at some of the other, more popular sources of information about the past, we see that the lessons of history remained simple, comprehensible, and usable.

Ultimately, non-academic individuals, groups, and corporations, rather than scholars, determined the role that the past would play in postwar America. In the late 1940s and early 1950s in particular, diverse concerned groups and individuals delivered didactic histories to Americans in a variety of packages. This dissertation examines these attempts to create a popular history. I argue that during these years, the average American was virtually inundated with lessons from the past, which *always* sought to influence contemporary social thought. While some Americans may have wondered about or doubted the relevance of history, many others recognized both its utility and its malleability and sought to harness the “powers of the past.”¹⁰ In a period characterized by rapid and dramatic changes, rooting new theories and proposals in the collective memory of the American past functioned as an effective method of communicating ideology.¹¹

Using the past to argue for the appropriateness of a particular agenda depended upon a successful and persuasive effort to define the nation’s heritage and traditions. The individuals discussed in the following chapters found means (of varying effectiveness) of doing this. Their media of communication ranged from more traditional sites of historical interpretation such as books and museum exhibits, to the latest technologies, including radio and television. Their messages represented

¹⁰ Harvey Kaye, *The Powers of the Past: Reflections on the Crisis and the Promise of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

¹¹ Amongst others, Eric Hobsbawm discusses how innovation is legitimized by the past in, E. J. Hobsbawm, “The Social Function of the Past: Some Questions,” *Past and Present* 55 (May 1972): 4.

the startling diversity of political opinion that existed in the United States, even at the height of McCarthyism. Their methods involved an extensive interpretation, revision, and explanation of history for a public that they all thought lacked sufficient historical knowledge.

Sources of Anxiety, Sources of Reassurance, and Multiple Sources of History

This dissertation focuses on some of the more important creations and uses of popular history in the postwar United States. In American society, history gushes from many founts, and citizens absorb the lessons of the past through a number of currents – all of them man-made. As the architects of new historical constructions attempted to affect the collective memory they competed with other sources of history for an audience. New possibilities for mass communication encouraged efforts to mine the past for commercial and propaganda purposes. Population growth and increased secondary school and college attendance also presented new reasons to create history: more students obliged to study the discipline and absorb the lessons taught. Beside textbooks, postwar schools made use of audio and visual materials to teach history, much of which came from commercial sources.

In this period, many thousands of sources for information about the past existed. For the sake of being able to look in depth at particular cases that elucidate *how* history was used in postwar American society, this study is interested only in those that sought recognition as reliable histories, and reached a large number of people. This category includes: the first book club exclusively for works of history;

two ideologically opposed historical radio and television anthology programs, both critically acclaimed and both used in secondary school education; a train that transported a cargo of historical documents and sacred civil texts to every state; and a new Smithsonian Institution history museum. It does not include Hollywood movies or theme parks like Disneyland, even though representations of the past certainly existed there. The line between serious history and historically themed entertainment may be very fine in some cases, but the projects in this study all strove for credibility and respect in ways that Disney and Hollywood did not.

By comparing and contrasting these contemporary sources, this dissertation identifies from whence came the history that postwar Americans “knew,” through what process they learned that history, toward what ends the variant sources and promoters of historical knowledge worked, and how they imagined their reconstructions of history would support their goals. Focusing on just a few key groups and issues, from a time period that related to the past in special ways, reveals the hidden meaning and relevance of some of the prominent pasts constructed for postwar America, and also suggests a more general framework for understanding the role history plays in contemporary society.

George Orwell wrote, “He who controls the past controls the future.” The actors in this study certainly subscribed to that aphorism, believing history to be centrally important to their contemporary agendas. Orwell also suggested that control of the present allows for control of the past. Because the United States is an open society, the past has remained contested terrain. Public battles over history, in the past and present, suggest how control of that narrative has been, and continues to be,

important to major interests in American society. However, this dissertation demonstrates the ultimate failure – even the impossibility – of achieving that goal.

As the various groups described below created and distributed narratives that served their own agendas, they manipulated the past to gain control of the present and future. Each of the following chapters evaluates a different source of politicized popular history, demonstrating why the historical trope particularly suited their needs and objectives and how they managed to convey ideologies through representations of the past. They also reveal what messages were entwined with these representations of the past, how the messages were transmitted, and how these messages were received.

History, Memory, and Authority in Democratic Society

Historians Michael Kammen, David Glassberg, John Bodnar, Leila Zenderland, Roy Rosenzweig, David Lowenthal, W. Fitzhugh Brundage, George Lipstiz, Gaines M. Foster, and David Blight have recently drawn attention to the uses to which American history has been put, and an increasing number of scholars are thinking about how representations of the past affect people in the present. These authors show that divergent interests compete to influence collective memory and manipulate popular conceptions of history. The discipline may remain the province of professional historians, but we now understand that many other actors affect the public memory. The public, or collective, memory differs from history in its ultimate reliance on consensus instead of authority (or evidence), its overwhelming emphasis on only the most memorable (“historic”) events and people rather than broad attempts

to depict societies of the past, and also, I would say, in its greater relevance to the political culture of a democracy. Academic history may escape into the streets eventually, but any change in the collective memory *inherently* indicates accessibility by the greater public.

Similar to earlier epochal events, the Second World War altered American life in myriad ways. After the war, many Americans felt compelled to reestablish (or establish) central ideas and creeds – basic tenets that may have been thrown into confusion by the events of the 1930s and 40s. This had happened before; America often revisited its past to affirm or challenge ideas and choices made in the present. For example, late-nineteenth century Americans revisited the U.S Civil War and created a new “reconciliationist script,” which helped unite the nation and prepare it for its twentieth century world power role.¹² Likewise, early twentieth century progressives challenged prevailing historical consensus in the hope of affecting ideas about government’s role in society, while the social gospel movement, in Warren Susman’s words, also “depended upon its special version of history.”¹³ In the 1930s, New Dealers and allies in the Popular Front re-imagined American history to at least partly include key constituencies of labor, immigrants, and African Americans. For the most part, these attempts at affecting American’s collective memory achieved only modest success, but searches for usable pasts continued.

The atmosphere in which such attempted revisions took place after World War II was characterized not only by anxieties about the postwar situation and fears

¹² David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001).

¹³ Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2003), 21.

of nuclear annihilation, but also by hope and the promise of “better living” (which created another type of anxiety). This mixture of anticipation and angst created a sense of urgency regarding history: specifically, how history informed the present. The same fears, needs, and possibilities that contributed to the rise of social scientists and other experts – who answered fundamental questions about society and also offered ideas with which to fight communism and confront other challenges – also presented a moment of opportunity for elites to provide guidance through usable pasts.¹⁴ In the contemporary culture, history had *authority*. Significantly, all of the popular “historians” studied in this dissertation also possessed a certain authority in American society, whether derived from academic credentials, corporate dominance, the prestige of network news, the cultural capital possessed by museums, or apparent consensus. Thus, each chapter also addresses the questions of who has the authority to rewrite public history (and why), and what then acts to limit that authority. In the end the market, or a need to appeal to popular tastes, affected the approaches taken in each and every one of these cases.

Contemporaneous with the rise of public history in the 1970s, several historians began to examine nostalgia and other issues related to the interactions between societies and the past. There seems to be general consensus among historians that nostalgia has grown in the last half century. Since nostalgia is characterized by longing for a selectively imagined and sanitized version of history,

¹⁴ Terrence Ball, “The Politics of Social Science in Postwar America,” in Lary May, ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 76-92: 77-78.

they view this development as problematic.¹⁵ In the early seventies, David Lowenthal and Eric Hobsbawm explained nostalgia as a late- or postmodern need for some connection to the past, even (or especially) a fictitious one. They raised intriguing questions about individual and collective desires to be linked with the past. More recent works in psychology, anthropology, and sociology, as well as in history, have sought to answer some of those questions through a variety of approaches.¹⁶ While this dissertation does not specifically focus on the social-psychological impetus for nostalgia, myth, or history, it demonstrates that some level of conscious connectedness still existed between past and present in the mid-twentieth century, even if it was in some ways strained by the catastrophic events that characterized the world in that period. However, the mediators, those that stepped in to provide a link between history and the contemporary public, are the real focus of this dissertation.

In contrast to my more narrowly focused approach, the historians engaged in memory studies generally have approached the subject from a broad perspective, speculating about how social conceptions of history (or the collective memory of certain historical events) have changed over time.¹⁷ These authors have begun to study how history in the public sphere has been created or influenced by non-

¹⁵ Nostalgia may no longer be considered a disease per se (which it was when the term was first used in the 18th century to classify soldiers stricken with severe cases of homesickness), but historians and other social commentators basically treat it as a threat to more informed ways of remembering history.

¹⁶ Paul Antze and Michael Lambek, eds., *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Hobsbawm, "Social Function of the Past"; Barbara Mizstal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Philadelphia: Open University, 2003).

¹⁷ The grandest attempt at a narrative of American memory so far, Michael Kammen's *Mystic Chords of Memory*, is encyclopedic in both its comprehensiveness and its lack of analysis. Kammen separates all of American history into four periods of American memory: pre-1870, 1870-1915, 1915-1945, and 1945-1990. This project questions this last segment, which Kammen says is characterized by a "sense of discontinuity" with the past. I think he is correct in challenging the idea of a postwar liberal consensus that was disrupted only in the 1960s (differing ideas about history competed throughout that period), but I think the sudden break with the past he finds in 1945 occurred later and was a gradual process. The various projects considered in this study may be part of a longer period in which Americans increasingly connected to history only through the mediation of popular culture.

historians, people with goals seemingly at odds with the objectivity espoused by academics. Some also have attempted to measure the popular reception of public history increasingly created through corporate collaboration.¹⁸ The most recent developments seem to be, as David Glassberg writes, an increased attention to how “various versions of the past are communicated in a society through a multiplicity of institutions and media,” and a recognition of the existence of multiple understandings of the same historical events.¹⁹ Jeremy Black begins his recent examination of direct uses of the past with the statement that “history is important for the uses to which it is put outside the academy as well as in it.”²⁰ My project is especially interested in examining those uses and their sources, some of which are recognized and some of which have received little to no attention as generators of collective memory. While most recent studies of multiple sources and versions of the past have been contemporary rather than historical, I examine several key sources within a critical historical period.²¹

Several important and reoccurring terms or concepts that I use require clarification. By “usable past” I mean a particular version of history (or some part of it) that is seen as utilitarian because it provides a basis for current work or possesses characteristics that are, or seem, relevant to cultural or political matters at hand. The difference between “heritage” and “history” also should be elucidated since the usable past contains elements of both. Heritage refers to traditions, commonly

¹⁸ David Grimsted offers an overview of the focus on corporate or elite hegemony in much of the recent work by historians focused on public history in "Dueling Ideas of History: Public, People's, Popular, and Academic - and Henry Adams's Surprising Failures," *The Maryland Historian* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 20-21.

¹⁹ Glassberg, 7-8.

²⁰ Jeremy Black, *Using History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), xi.

²¹ In contrast to, for example, Roy S. Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

understood to have been passed down, in a direct line, from earlier generations.²² Naturally, only usable traditions continue on, while irrelevant or unpopular traditions disappear or are confined to small groups (or are obliterated by power). Heritage is thus very similar to the idea of a usable past; both have high utilitarian value. But heritage is less encompassing and generally refers to an identifiable (though possibly imaginary) line of inheritance. In contradistinction, the usable past may offer a broader vision of history – what the world used to be like – in order to compare or contrast with the present. Thus the usable past must provide some connection to an earlier era (through heritage or performance of memory) and also perform history’s task of positioning events and people in a more complex narrative that gives meaning to the events it describes. But whatever the differences, most consumers of the historical productions discussed below would have been unlikely to consider whether they viewed “history,” “tradition,” “myth,” “heritage,” a “usable past,” or simply reproductions of the past “as it essentially was.”²³ Instead, their conceptions of the past derived from a mostly subconscious mix of idealistic and pragmatic appreciations (often flawed) of how our forebears solved the problems of their day.

Following the mass destruction that finally ended World War II, Americans found to their surprise and discomfort that peace had ushered in an age of *less* certainty. The situation in 1945, both foreign and domestic, appeared to many to be no less dangerous than wartime. Edward R. Murrow noted that probably never before

²² David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), x.

²³ Leopold von Ranke’s famous dictum to present the past “*wie es eigentlich gewesen.*”

had a “war ended leaving the victors with such a sense of uncertainty and fear...”²⁴ Not long after, Reinhold Niebuhr and Eric Goldman wrote of the feeling of apprehension that gripped the nation even before the victory celebrations had ended.²⁵ Niebuhr’s own worry followed from his observation of the “political and moral hazards” faced by the United States as it advanced “directly and precipitately into the baffling currents of world politics.”²⁶ Historian Roland Marchand argues that corporate America also feared for the postwar future, believing either that capitalism would “face the greatest challenge in its history,” or worse, that “free enterprise is doomed.”²⁷ Even after some wartime public relations successes, most businessmen did not believe in an inevitable end to the New Deal or popular acceptance of a free market economy. Consequently they launched massive propaganda efforts to convince politicians and the public that their interests lay with business.

Similarly, internationalists and supporters of a large, active military worried that Americans would again choose to demilitarize and withdraw into isolation following victory in World War II. While the world-historical events that developed into the Cold War undoubtedly helped the public to acquiesce in huge postwar defense budgets, a renewed emphasis on the military as a vital part of American heritage also helped to provide a climate favorable to the rapid growth of the

²⁴ Paul S. Boyer, *By the Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1994), 6-7.

²⁵ In addition to the observations of Niebuhr and Goldman, see William Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990); Paul Boyer, in *By the Bomb’s Early Light*, examines how the awesomeness of the bomb’s power affected existential thought.

²⁶ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Scribner, 1952), 76; Eric Goldman, *The Crucial Decade – And After* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 3-6.

²⁷ Quotes are from General Electric President Charles E. Wilson and from a Psychological Corporation Survey of American businessmen, in Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 317-318; other historians have said much the same thing about corporate America’s fears in the 1940s, including, Howell John Harris, *Right to Manage: Industrial Relations Policies of American Business in the 1940s* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 6.

“military-industrial complex.” The Cold War also demanded a well-defined America to contrast with the USSR (defined as godless, totalitarian, and un-free). This image of the United States required roots in history since America was presumed to be inherently at odds with communism, not merely opposed to the Soviet Union in a contemporary geopolitical setting. Thus the urgent demand for a usable past with which to wage a cold war.

Of course the Cold War was fought at home as well as abroad, and a usable past was just as critical to domestic politics. Anticommunists sought to write the Left out of American history, while the Left simultaneously searched for a past that championed its ideals. The hunt for un-American activities implied a history of American activities from which suspected communists and their liberal allies were excluded (and defined a heritage that they allegedly were trying to subvert). Beyond this narrow dispute, Americans positioned at all points on the political spectrum attempted to find their ideological ancestry in tradition and thereby challenge their opponents’ definitions of Americanism. At the same time, the oft-tumultuous cultural-political battles of the two decades that bracketed World War II made political expression through historical allegory especially appealing. Beneath a veneer of Cold War era intellectual unity, covert argument through historical allegory sometimes offered a more effective, or at least more acceptable, method of engaging in politics.²⁸ Thus, because of the particular postwar/Cold War context, American society was both drawn to and pushed toward new interpretations of history.

²⁸ On the illusion of consensus, see Alan Brinkley, "The Illusion of Unity in Cold War Culture," in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, ed. Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 61-73.

Chapter Outline

History, in some respects, gained in popularity during this period. Initially, demand for both popular and academic history grew in tandem in the early postwar era, but the popularity of academic history quickly declined, while the public's interest in popular history continued to rise.²⁹ The reasons for this divergence had to do with contrary expectations of history on the part of academics and non-academics, including the shift in academia away from narrative and toward histories that confronted accepted interpretations by critically examining issues of race, class, and gender. As academic historians increasingly interrogated the foundations of the state and society, the casually interested public chose more conventional history.³⁰

Chapter two uses the rapidly developing story of the early History Book Club to illustrate: first, how these professional historians attempted to bridge the gap between academe and the public in order to increase the diffusion of historical knowledge; and second, why they failed. This chapter also establishes a paradigm which the trajectories of each of the other popular history enterprises followed (never completely, but always to a significant degree). The charter group of historians at the Club conceived of their task as educative. They selected (and taught, in the form of lengthy explanatory reviews) history books that offered particular lessons to Club members. Their business model performed poorly however, and the Club soon changed its mission and operation, attempting to respond to the market (a market that they struggled to define) instead of pedagogically directing the public to required

²⁹ Harvey J. Kaye, *The Powers of the Past: Reflections on the Crisis and the Promise of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 18; Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 71.

³⁰ Richard White, "A Commemoration and a Historical Mediation," *The Journal of American History* 94, no.4 (March 2008): 1077.

readings in history. For the History Book Club, the imperative to educate conflicted with the underlying motive for profit. The insolubility of this conflict led the Club's first editorial board to resign en masse. In the other cases examined in this dissertation this tension between ideology and commercial or popular success resolved itself differently, since those "historians" possessed the ability to write or revise history (ironically, a power that, in this case, the professional historians lacked). But each ultimately confronted its own restrictive conditions.

The choice of media always resulted in particular restrictions. The medium most associated with the 1950s, television, offered a premier venue for battles between competing narratives.³¹ Two distinctive historical dramas achieved unparalleled success in distributing highly politicized notions of the past to the American public. One, *You Are There*, served as a forum for the Left during the years of the film and television blacklist. The other, *Cavalcade of America*, was history by and for big business. But both series dealt with a wide range of subjects. Issues of politics and economics were joined by new questions about race and gender that had arisen (partly) out of the wartime experience. In fact, their relevance to contemporary debates contributed to making these historical series commercially successful. Additionally, both series were so highly acclaimed by critics that educators across the nation utilized their productions as educational materials for teaching history to their students.

The television medium has always been pulled in several different directions at once and the balance between serving the public good and increasing corporate

³¹ Thomas Doherty examines how television and McCarthyism interacted to influence each other, in *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

profits – or between public affairs programming and pure entertainment – has never been fixed (or realized). The two chapters on *Cavalcade of America* and *You Are There* recall a period in television history when corporations and advertising agencies held much of the power, as evidenced by the level of control exercised by Du Pont and other sponsors over programming and content. But the networks never liked that situation and they asserted increasing control over their domains. This was not a linear progression; the networks controlled some early shows, including *You Are There*, while some sponsor-controlled programs, such as *Disneyland* and the *Du Pont Show of the Month* (*Cavalcade's* successor), persisted into the 1960s.

The restoration of the reputation of business in the 1940s, which followed widespread anti-corporate animosity during the depression years, required either an acknowledgement of a significant change in popular economic thinking from the 1930s or, more simply (because it required no such acknowledgement), demanded Americans remember their past as one in which business played a predominant and overwhelmingly beneficial role. In the postwar period, revisions in both academic and popular histories of American business helped legitimate the massive corporations that have since dominated economic life.³² Consensus historians, who, unlike their progressive school forebears found little class or other conflicts in American history, also reacted against earlier “feminine idealism,” as Allan Nevins put it, in histories that wrote too critically of the captains of industry who made the United States into a world power.³³ Epitomizing this group, in *People of Plenty*

³² For example, business historians such as Alfred Chandler, Jr. and Thomas Cochran reconceptualized the growth of corporations in the 19th and 20th century United States and made that story much more appealing.

³³ Novick, 342.

(1954) David M. Potter echoed contemporary business leaders who heralded “abundance” and material wealth as the most significant American characteristics.³⁴

Chapter three reconstructs the specific efforts of the Du Pont Company to mold the past into usable propaganda that legitimized modern corporations, but this also is a dominant theme found throughout this dissertation. Beginning as a radio series during Franklin Roosevelt’s first term, and remaining on television well into Eisenhower’s second, Du Pont’s *Cavalcade of America* brought the past to life in order to identify the fundamental values that both made America great and heralded free market capitalism. It also proclaimed heroes who possessed (or, more accurately, were given) the character traits that Du Pont either wished upon the public or claimed for itself. Du Pont broadcast American history as the stories of great Americans who made their nearly perfect country a little more perfect. In the process of dramatization, history became mythologized, a result perfectly in keeping with Du Pont’s conservative objectives. Mining the past for potential myths, Du Pont managed to promulgate its ideology while educators and the public embraced the series as a wonderfully effective educational device. Eventually however, changes in the television industry, including the proliferation of stations and viewing options, the diffusion of set ownership into all social classes and geographic regions, and the move from prestigious single-sponsored anthology programs to formulaic series

³⁴ David M. Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954). However, Potter was somewhat less enthusiastic than business leaders about the effects of abundance on individuals and society.

produced by the networks, forced Du Pont into an attempt to appeal more directly to popular tastes.³⁵

Chapter four closely studies the foremost alternative to *Cavalcade of America*, *You Are There*. CBS News produced *You Are There*, which started on radio in 1948 and moved to television in 1952. Where Du Pont controlled the content and message of *Cavalcade*, CBS generally left *You Are There* to producer Charles Russell and director Sidney Lumet (or second director John Frankenheimer). The two major sponsors, the Prudential Life Insurance Company and America's Electric Light and Power Companies, a conglomeration of private utilities, had nothing to do with the series' production, and evidently expressed little interest in content. Consequently, the writers hired by Lumet experienced a considerable degree of freedom.³⁶ The involvement of leftist writers, actors, and directors, including prominent figures from the Hollywood blacklist, as well as the series' presence on the airwaves during anticommunism's most intensive period, practically guaranteed that the history reported by Walter Cronkite and his team radiated ideology and politics. Yet, much of the story is surprising. At the height of anticommunist hysteria, a network news division reported from the past, interviewing people long deceased according to scripts prepared by communists and fellow travelers. In a way very similar to *Cavalcade*, *You Are There*'s writers placed their ideology just below the surface of their historical dramatizations, which allowed them to continue to participate in a political culture from which they might otherwise be excluded. *You Are There* also

³⁵ On the diffusion of set ownership during the 1950s, see James L. Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture: Journalism, Filmmaking, and Broadcasting in America since 1941* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 42.

³⁶ Generally speaking, sponsors bore responsibility for the blacklist since their threats of withdrawing from series or individual broadcasts led networks to fire (or never hire) certain blacklisted artists.

influenced the style of network television news during its crucial formative years; introduced new themes, approaches, and people into popular historical memory; and brought a radical alternative perspective into American homes and classrooms at a time when such viewpoints were seldom heard in mainstream society. The series' historical interpretations contrasted not only with *Cavalcade*, but also with school textbooks that presented American history as the continuing saga of conflict-free (besides the necessary wars to extend democracy) manifest destiny.³⁷ However, like *Cavalcade*, *You Are There* disappeared as television abandoned the diversity of programming that characterized its early years. At CBS, this meant both an increased emphasis on shows with more clearly popular appeal, and the distancing of its News Division from infotainment programs like *You Are There*.

Clearly (at least in retrospect), both *You Are There* and *Cavalcade of America* molded the past into propaganda. From the right or from the left, the United States' two most prominent history education programs transmitted to millions of people each week the audio and visual representations of history that articulated distinct political agendas. The subject of chapter five, the "Freedom Train" of 1947-1949, also used the past for propaganda, and in doing so, helped transform history into civil religious iconography as well. This chapter examines how business gathered together for exhibition on a transcontinental, diesel-powered train, ten-dozen carefully selected historical documents to help make its case to the American people. Historical consultant Frank Monaghan described the train as "a dramatic device" that would

³⁷ Frances Fitzgerald, *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1979).

“focus the attention of the American people on their heritage.”³⁸ To define that tradition, the American Heritage Foundation, the specially created organization behind the Freedom Train, drew authority from an unparalleled collaboration between leaders in business, government, and, to a lesser extent, religious organizations, the military, labor unions, and the educational system. Dominated by corporate America’s message of the inviolability of laissez faire capitalism, the Freedom Train exhibits also limited history and ideology to a narrow focus on great leaders. Moreover, and as the foreseeable result of how the train’s organizers selected, displayed, and promoted the documents, this opportunity for Americans to engage with history became instead an almost obligatory ritual of a revived and reconfigured civil religion. However, because of the extraordinary range of participants, the meaning of “freedom” was challenged by segments of the population unwilling to accept the imposed definition. Despite these rebellions, the train managed to drive through a unified propaganda campaign that experienced a rate and breadth of participation that would be unimaginable only several years later. It thus encapsulates the broader story, evident throughout these chapters, of a brief postwar moment in which elites instructed a relatively willing public in history.

The final chapter examines another case where history, processed by interconnected groups of elites for public consumption, became iconography. Focusing on the postwar Smithsonian Institution’s American history exhibits, I pay particular attention to the role of corporations in the construction of the nation’s semiofficial collective memory. At the Smithsonian, new exhibits (and eventually a

³⁸ Frank Monaghan, *Heritage of Freedom: The History and Significance of the Basic Documents of American Liberty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 145.

new museum) didactically presented the nation's past as a series of business and military triumphs, often in the form of persistent technological and material progress. This history also melded together the state, the armed forces, and the largest corporations, while fostering patriotic reverence for a past, and a present, in which these institutions dominated American society. However, the same impulse that first drove the Smithsonian to make its exhibits more informative, accessible, and entertaining, eventually led the Institution to largely abandon its effort to put forth a grand narrative, rife with meaning, in favor of an increasingly segmented and popular approach to American history. As in the other cases, the necessity of popular appeal trumped pedagogic considerations. The Smithsonian's story ends on a happier note however, since the Museum of American History eventually managed to combine aspects of both popular memory and history, and, in its current form, has even incorporated recent historiographic developments into the exhibits.

Each of these efforts to remake the past encountered certain restrictions beyond accommodating popular taste and memory. Aspirations of education or propaganda conflicted with the profit motive (broadly defined). For example, Du Pont's historical dramas balanced, uncomfortably sometimes, between the company's propaganda requirements, historical accuracy, and the need to generate popular appeal. Similarly, the Smithsonian's refurbished exhibits, including the innovation of educative panels that explained the meaning of displayed objects, were by definition attempts to instruct *and* engage a public that principally desired entertainment.

Above all, these singular views of the past were themselves restricted by their chosen media – a paradox, since each project's communicative capabilities depended

on new technologies. On *You Are There*, to fit within the confines of the format, the “authentic” recreations usually had to compress several days’ events into one day (and one twenty-eight minute broadcast).³⁹ The news report format of the show allowed for concise explanations at least; on *Cavalcade* the format included little to no contextual narration, which meant that the brief histories had even less time to develop their subjects. Despite the intentions of the historians, the books offered by the History Book Club were not accessible to great numbers of people. The Smithsonian’s reliance on objects and the Freedom Train’s deployment of documents also ran into trouble, particularly with their lack of contextualization. The medium of a three-car train, that seldom stayed at rest for even 24 hours before its diesel locomotive hauled it to another town or another state, may have been the most restrictive space of all. Walking down the train’s narrow aisle (literally and figuratively prevented from veering too much to the right or left), and hurried along by Marine Corps guards, visitors stole only the most fleeting glimpses of the pre-selected documents said to represent American history.

As the United States moved forward after the shocks of the Great Depression, World War II, and atomic weapons, many eyes looked back, searching for precedent or example. The interested bystanders examined in this dissertation offered to direct the public’s gaze. Elites who designed a usable past for public consumption certainly hoped to increase popular historical knowledge. But these various parties had more immediate concerns foremost in mind. By referencing the past, these

³⁹ Robert F. Horowitz, “History Comes to Life and You Are There” in *American History/ American Television: Interpreting the Video Past*, ed. by John E. O’Connor, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1983), 80.

groups addressed major issues of the day, including the nature of the American economic system and the relative power of labor and business, the United States' role in international affairs, the Cold War at home and abroad, and issues of race and gender (in-)equality.

The disruptions of recent events strained Americans' connections to the past but also encouraged the study of history. A 1948 survey revealed that the average book reader was "unconcerned about international affairs, the atom bomb, or the recent war." Books on these topics, whether fictional or non, proved extraordinarily unpopular. But while readers shied away from these important subjects, "the classics," historical fiction, and even non-fiction history surged in popularity.⁴⁰ As the following chapters demonstrate, the interest in history did not necessarily mean a retreat from contemporary issues; rather, postwar Americans dealt with these new challenges by referencing the lessons and legacies of the past.

History and memory interacted with contemporary politics, religion, and popular culture to define postwar American society's relationship with the past. The confluence of major historical developments and influential new technologies made the postwar years an ideal moment for elite efforts to reconfigure popular historical memory. Increasingly, Americans interacted with the past through electronic media that claimed to accurately represent the world, both past and present.⁴¹ An irony of modern literate societies (as opposed to oral) is that historical knowledge is "fragmented into segments" by and for specialists, while the majority generally relate

⁴⁰ "Books on War and Atom Bomb Avoided By U.S. Readers, Library Survey Shows," *New York Times*, February 2, 1948.

⁴¹ Mizstal, 48.

to the past through mass media filters.⁴² The cases examined in this dissertation show that American society possessed characteristics of both literate and oral societies. But the way that these popular histories blurred past and present also suggests that the majority of Americans approached the past in ways more similar to those of oral cultures.⁴³ David Lowenthal suggests that in oral societies, people retain only the “memories which have present relevance and which articulate consistent cultural inheritance.” Barbara Mizstal argues that oral societies remember the past “only as long as it serves present needs.” Moreover, they orient collective memory toward origins and mythical heroes: “In an oral culture, the past refers essentially to a mythical creation or Golden Age, with personal genealogies claiming to run to the beginning of time.”⁴⁴ At mid-century, the individuals and organizations that presented history to the American public (particularly Du Pont and other conservative groups) tended to frame the past in precisely these terms, blending mythology, genealogy, and history into a smoother narrative for a public that, for a time at least, seemed to be interested in how the past related to “present needs.”

Jan Vansina writes that “performances [of oral tradition] are not produced at random times”; they appear only when appropriate and necessary.⁴⁵ The same can be said of these popular histories, which materialized when their creators believed society required their particular lessons. Because of particular historical circumstances, including the legacy of World War II and the postwar international

⁴² David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 238.

⁴³ Mizstal, 28.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 29; Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition As History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), xii, 21-25.

⁴⁵ Vansina, 40.

situation, the domestic exigencies of the Cold War, the early stage in which broadcast television then existed, and, more generally, a widely shared belief that the past had relevance to the present, the American public for a time proved at least modestly receptive to these directed historical perspectives. Then, as the Cold War made the definition of the United States as anything other than capitalistic increasingly difficult, fewer of the ideological battles that had played out in historical guises took place. There was simply less of a need for appeals to founding principles or the “real” American heritage once major economic questions had been settled by the widespread acceptance of a relaxed New Deal state by the late 1950s. The situation also changed as available sources of information and entertainment increased during the 1950s. Moreover, a population growing accustomed to (or pushing for) wider participation and expanding opportunity could not use these pasts, which, despite important differences, all represented the same, limited tradition. As these attempts to control the public’s views of the past thus began to break down, popular history was increasingly driven by marketplace considerations and was less confined to perspectives carefully chosen by a particular group of elites.

Chapter 2: The Past as an “Image of Ourselves”: The Origins of the History Book Club

“In the short span of one lifetime, the personal contribution of the individual scholar to the great and growing stream of knowledge can’t be more than a tiny pailful. But if he could inspire – or provoke – other scholars to pour in their pailfuls too, well, then he could feel that he had really done his job. And this job of making sense of history is one of the crying needs of our day – I beg of you, believe me.”

Arnold Toynbee, 1948⁴⁶

“We must not delude ourselves with an idea that the past is recoverable. We are chained and pinioned in our moment... What we recover from the past is an image of ourselves, and very likely our search sets out to find nothing other than just that.”

Bernard DeVoto, circa 1946⁴⁷

The moment seemed propitious. In 1947 historian Bernard DeVoto sensed that there was an awakening of a “growing national consciousness about the American past. Not only readers but writers are turning to it in increasing numbers,” which meant, a “vast production of books about our past.”⁴⁸ Together with this new abundance arose the question of how interested Americans could figure out which histories should be read, and which could be ignored. Once they decided that history might have something important to say (to them and to their age), where should they begin? If it were possible for concerned historians to guide the general public, DeVoto thought, perhaps history might realize its potential as a source of knowledge that would help to create an informed citizenry, something many Americans believed

⁴⁶ Peter Geyl, Arnold J. Toynbee, and Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Pattern of the Past: Can We Determine It?* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1949), 82.

⁴⁷ Louis P. Mazur, “Review: Bernard DeVoto and the Making of the Year of Decision: 1846,” *Reviews in American History* 18, no. 3 (September 1990): 440-441.

⁴⁸ Stanford University Library, Bernard DeVoto Collection (BDV), Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 38, DeVoto to Ray Dovell, February 4, 1947.

was vital as the nation took on greater global responsibilities. Perhaps Americans in every part of the country, of various backgrounds and education levels, could learn from the same, educative texts, in turn leading toward a broadly shared consciousness of the past. The promise of the History Book Club (HBC) was that it would allow a select group of historians, actively engaged in contemporary affairs, to show thousands of other Americans how the past, as they knew it, informed the present. The HBC advertised answers to the questions: “How did we get this way? What are we? And can our way of living survive?”⁴⁹

For a while, the Club operated along these lines: like a purpose-driven course in directed readings rather than a discount bookseller. But a tension existed between education and profit, and the charter group of historian-editors quickly concluded that, at the HBC, the profit motive superseded their goals for history education. The first year of the Club’s existence thus stands separate from its later years when a new cohort took over the duties, but not the attitude or objectives (at least not fully), of editor Bernard DeVoto and his like-minded colleagues. For several years the club continued to function as DeVoto hoped it would, but by the end of the 1950s it lost its coherent philosophy. The selective history, meant to convey some specific relevance to the contemporary situation, fell by the wayside and was replaced by history selected for its promise of high sales.⁵⁰ Where the early club editors hoped to establish new connections across time (to foster new ideas in the present), the later

⁴⁹BDV M0001, Incoming Correspondence, Box 13, Folder 259, Dovell to DeVoto, September 11, 1947, with enclosed copy of advertisement for *New York Herald Tribune*.

⁵⁰ Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 69. Tyrrell’s general characterization of the Club as commercial and ideologically restricted misses this key difference between the founding mission and its later operative philosophy.

HBC built a booklist that, by design, would be dependent on established historical memories.

The clearly liberal ideology professed through the first year selections also disappeared during that transition. The changes in the editorial board took place in 1948, the same year as the Wallace Progressives' last stand. Very quickly after that, the kind of left-wing politics associated with the New Deal, which were also manifest in the HBC history book selections, declined rapidly – at the Club, in the historical profession, and in society. Thus the beginning of the HBC corresponded to the end of a political age and the transition at the Club reflected the broader shifts in contemporary American culture.

The History Book Club's story in some ways encapsulates the history of all of the educative efforts elucidated in the following chapters. Each of the groups discussed attempted, in some sense, to write real "history" for the public. As happened with the HBC, these attempts inevitably faced the realities of the market, which forced them to modify their approaches, and replaced "history" with "memory." In place of history's critical distance, and its pursuit of an objective evaluation of the past, memory tends toward mythologization, which denies the past its complicated realities in favor of reassuring, popular remembrances, and obliterates its "pastness" as well.⁵¹ Based on their internal discussions, of history in general and the selection of books in particular, the HBC's original group of historians apparently reconciled themselves to a presentist approach; but in choosing books and topics that they knew would be unfamiliar to subscribers, they demonstrated an unwavering faith in the benefits of historical inquiry. The successor board led by Dumas Malone

⁵¹ Myszal, 99.

professed no such faith, instead preferring greater commercial success based on catering to what people already knew. The groups profiled in the following chapters dealt with the pedagogic – profit conflict in varied and critically different ways, ranging from the resignations proffered by the original HBC editors to the full embrace of history’s mythologization by Du Pont. However, at some point, all of the attempts at creating new popular history were forced to acknowledge the increasing commercialization of American culture and the rapid expansion of individual choices in leisure and mass culture. Ultimately, the public would strongly influence, if not determine, how the past was remembered. The history of the HBC succinctly chronicles this pervasive pattern.

The Founding of the Club

“Subway riders and Rotarians have their rights as readers, [and] they are the people whom we would like to have reading U.S. history.”

Randolph Adams, 1947⁵²

In 1947 Bernard DeVoto nominated his friend and protégé, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., for two positions, both rather surprising for someone just twenty-eight years old. One nomination was for Schlesinger’s admittance into the Century Association, an elite social club in New York, generally reserved for much older men of professional distinction. The other was for the young historian to be included on the first board of editors of the HBC. Both nominations succeeded, a testament to

⁵² BDV M0001, Incoming Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 109, Circular No. 9 [sic] from Randolph Adams (RGA), March 17, 1947.

DeVoto's perseverance and influence as well as Schlesinger's already substantial reputation following the publication of *The Age of Jackson* in 1945.⁵³

DeVoto himself had recently published *1846: The Year of Decision*, which at the time received at least as much praise as Schlesinger's work.⁵⁴ While with the HBC, DeVoto's next work, *Across the Wide Missouri*, won the Pulitzer and Bancroft prizes in 1948. By then, DeVoto had already had a long career writing history, historical fiction, essays, and articles. He authored a regular column in *Harper's* called *The Easy Chair*, a perch from which he wrote about the many contemporary issues that concerned him, particularly conservation, civil liberties, and political corruption. Very much interwoven with his work and the book choices he made for the HBC, DeVoto wrote critically about growing corporate power and the resurgence of conservatism. His writing career had brought him into contact with a number of people in the world of publishing, many of whom became friends. One of these was Charles P. Everitt, publisher and almost legendary book dealer, and a few years later the author of *The Adventures of a Treasure Hunter: A Rare Bookman in Search of American History*.⁵⁵

In January 1946, a friend of Everitt's named Ray Dovell approached him with the idea of starting a new book club. At the time, Dovell worked as the director of public relations at a "large chain-store organization" and had worked previously in

⁵³ BDV M0001, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 36, DeVoto to Ray Dovell, February 28, 1946; Folder 37, DeVoto to Paul Kieffer, March 15, 1946.

⁵⁴ Mazur, 436.

⁵⁵ Charles P. Everitt, *The Adventures of a Treasure Hunter: A Rare Bookman in Search of American History* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951). History Book Club alumnus Frank Dobie reviewed the book favorably in the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review*, December 16, 1951.

the newspaper business.⁵⁶ The new club would be modeled on the successful Book-of-the-Month Club, but would restrict itself to non-fiction works of history. A panel of experts – historians – would select from the numerous new titles in the field a monthly offering for club members. This selection would be sold at a twenty percent discount, and club members would also receive “dividend” books as rewards for purchasing three of the monthly selections. Upon signing up for the club, new members also received a “premium” – a free book specially selected by the historians. Members had to purchase four books within a twelve-month period to fulfill their obligation.⁵⁷ Everitt would publish the dividend books, which were to be out-of-print older works that the board believed would be valuable to readers (and cheap to reprint). In exchange, Everitt’s recognized name might benefit the as yet unknown HBC in negotiations with publishers.

It would be difficult to imagine a more suitable historian than Bernard DeVoto for the job of chief editor/judge. DeVoto had been laboring for years to bridge the gap between academe and non-academic Americans. In general, however, he elicited little sympathy from academics and remained at odds with his own Harvard history department. When he put together the board of editors for the HBC, he wrote to Dovell, “the best thing I know about the board as it stands is that it contains no academic historians.” Though “young Schlesinger” would soon move to Harvard, DeVoto confidently proclaimed that, “they will never make him an academic.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ BDV M0001, Incoming Correspondence, Box 13, Folder 257, Dovell to Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. (AMS), February 21, 1946.

⁵⁷ The Book-of-the-Month Club initially required a monthly purchase, but this quickly changed to a minimum annual purchase of four books. The early history of that club is well documented in the third chapter of Joan Shelley Rubin’s *The Making of Middle Brow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

⁵⁸ BDV, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 36, DeVoto to Dovell, February 28, 1946.

Schlesinger had been closely mentored by DeVoto and subscribed to his belief that history served little purpose if confined to the all but enclosed community of professional historians. Both men held in low regard those historians who seemed, to them, to be inclined to write for an exclusive audience. “Damn if the academic aren’t horrible asses,” wrote DeVoto. “I’ve watched the contagion spread from the literary profs to the historians in my own lifetime... and it has certainly made them gangrenous.”⁵⁹

The other historians on the new HBC board – Randolph Adams, Stewart Holbrook, and Frank Dobie – held similar views. Adams headed the Clement Library at the University of Michigan, but interacted often with people in that school’s history department, and would sometimes solicit their advice for selections. But, as he wrote DeVoto,

“I get mighty little help from the History Faculty at Ann Arbor. They are, after reading a book, more anxious to prove how bright they are than to criticize what they have just read. Besides which, they are jealous as hell at the fact that the History Book Club did not pick one of them in the first instance. But among some of the instructors, and the members of my own staff, the books submitted get a lot of reading, roasting and reflective appreciation. That is why I’m glad Li’l Arthur [Schlesinger, Jr.] was retained. I have three or four [like him].”⁶⁰

In Portland, Oregon, Stewart Holbrook worried that the “real history boys” would scrutinize their selections and think them “flighty” when they offered something too “popular.” In fact, the HBC editorial board expressed excitement when they could offer the club’s subscribers something “abstract” or something with “intellectual distinction,” rather than a mere “easy read.” Often it may have been

⁵⁹ BDV, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 38, DeVoto to Kitty [Bowen], January 13, 1947.

⁶⁰ BDV M0001, Incoming Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 112, Adams to DeVoto, November 27, 1947.

subconscious, but these men clearly had the reactions of academic historians on their minds, and they worried that their books would not appear intellectual enough to maintain their own professional reputations.⁶¹ In addition, as DeVoto frequently said to Dovell, the historians' purpose – the reason they joined with the HBC – was to guide the public to the better contemporary works of history. It would not be long before conflicts over this central objective arose.

At the University of Texas at Austin, Charles Everitt's good friend and fellow self-identified "storyteller," J. Frank Dobie, rounded out the board so that East, West, Midwest and South were all represented. This deliberate geographical dispersal would be matched by an effort to alternately select histories from each section of the country. The club's first selection focused on the Confederacy, the second on Concord, Massachusetts, the first premium studied the West, et cetera. The historians recognized an especial need to represent the South however, since they anticipated more subscribers from that region – partly due to traditional interest there in the Civil War period, but mostly because of the dearth of booksellers in that underdeveloped region.⁶²

As they read through piles of historical books and galley proofs, trying to find the right works with which to launch their enterprise, the board wrote each other frequently to share their thoughts about history, historical writing, and historians. They also, piecemeal, began to articulate a vision for the Club. They agreed that, somehow, they would attempt to "distribute important books about America without

⁶¹ BDV M0001, Incoming Correspondence, Box 13, Folder "Holbrook," Letter from Holbrook to DeVoto, November 7, 1946; Box 19, Folder "Schlesinger," Letter from AMS to DeVoto, March 18, 1947.

⁶² BDV M0001, Incoming Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 109, Circular No. 5 to History Book Club Judges from RGA, December 3, 1946.

trying to ‘educate’ Americans.” From the very beginning, Dovell, Everitt, DeVoto and the rest consciously avoided any talk of uplift or even guidance.⁶³ Fighting against the notion of hierarchy in matters academic, they believed themselves true democrats. They would provide a service by winnowing down the great number of new historical titles, but they would not seek “the best that has been thought and said.” That was not the point. They hoped to be a better sort of educator than those who insisted they knew who and what should be canonized, who and what should be revered by the masses (of subscribers).

However, since the point of the club was to choose for Americans the right things to read, an element of uplift certainly existed. Their mission diverged though from that of the Book-of-the-Month Club, which, according to Joan Shelley Rubin, was summarized by their slogan “Why is it you disappoint yourself?” That is, instead of the larger club’s emphasis on self-improvement and the avoidance of personal failure, the HBC’s goals were closely connected to ideas of nation, service, and an internationalist, progressive politics. The postwar situation demanded something more from citizens than self-absorbed attention to their own deficiencies during cocktail party conversations about the latest novels. It was time for Americans to understand themselves as Americans, proclaimed Randolph Adams, and the HBC seemed to him to offer the best chance of doing that. Through careful selection and direction, the editorial board could help to ensure that Americans interested in such an

⁶³ BDV M0001, Incoming Correspondence, Dovell to DeVoto, February 21, 1947; Dovell to DeVoto, n.d.

endeavor of *national* self-discovery would not be misled (or simply bored) by poor history.⁶⁴

The board's approach also reflected a desire they shared with other contemporary historians to "mobilize" history for the struggle against totalitarianism. As Peter Novick has shown, wartime service in the Office of Strategic Services, the State Department, or the Armed Forces, led many historians in the early postwar period (Schlesinger, Jr., for example) to link their historical work with service to the nation. Samuel Eliot Morrison wrote that, "the historian who knows, or thinks he knows, an unmistakable lesson of the past, has the right and duty to point it out." However, where calls for the past to serve the present were made too explicitly, historians tended to back away from such an obvious danger to objectivity.⁶⁵ The Geyl-Toynbee debate (described in the introductory chapter) replayed itself many times throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

During the postwar period, historians often critiqued their colleagues' work in terms of cold war concerns. For example, when Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. reviewed Allan Nevins's civil war history *Ordeal of the Union* in 1947, he wrote, "The issue here posed – what policy would have averted war – goes down to the question we formulate today in terms of appeasement or resistance." "In essence, [Nevins's position] is Mr. Wallace's current thesis about the Russians."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ BDV M0001, Incoming Correspondence from Adams, Box 6, Folder 109, "Circular No. 4 to History Book Club from RGA," November 26, 1946; Rubin, 99-101.

⁶⁵ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 304, 315.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 356-357. Poor Nevins was attacked from the other side – the revisionists – as well. Craven thought Nevins's work lacked "objectivity and balance" and also injected northern moralism into the history of the Civil War. Schlesinger did see a difference between Nevins and Craven, but he thought both led ultimately to the same conclusion.

DeVoto wrote often against Civil War historical “revisionism” and shared Schlesinger’s belief that “the vogue of revisionism is connected with the modern tendency to seek in optimistic sentimentalism an escape from the severe demands of moral decision; ...it is the offspring of our modern sentimentality which at once evades the essential moral problems in the name of a superficial objectivity and asserts their unimportance in the name of an invincible progress...” DeVoto’s critiques of Avery O. Craven and James G. Randall followed this line, though DeVoto argued even more broadly for moral judgments in history (if slavery was excused from moral condemnation, he asked, where would society ever be able to draw a line?). He would not permit revisionists to argue that the issue of slavery in the territories was tangential and might have been resolved politically. His response was, so what? What was it then that prevented Americans from facing the problem “squarely, ...with the soberest realism”? “That is the question that historians must answer – the more necessarily, I submit, because in an answer to it there may be light or forecast, some judgment whether we are capable of squarely meeting the fundamentals of inescapable questions hereafter, perhaps even some wisdom that would help us prepare to do so.”⁶⁷

DeVoto’s demand for judgments in history ultimately was a demand that history speak to the present. These arguments did not go unchallenged; John Higham responded to Schlesinger’s writing on the Civil War with a comment that it represented “an obvious exercise in historical rearmament for World War III.” With each side charging the other with fostering another war through either appeasement or

⁶⁷ Bernard DeVoto, “The War of the Rebellion,” *Harpers* (February 1946), reprinted in Bernard DeVoto, *The Easy Chair* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1955), 152, 156.

militarism, the “consensus” age historians seem to have had tremendous difficulty divorcing their academic work from contemporary politics.⁶⁸

Ray Dovell and DeVoto discussed their approaches to history on many occasions during the club’s first year. They appeared to have agreed for a time at least, though in retrospect their later split was presaged in their respective formulations of their merely superficially similar philosophies. DeVoto’s group of historians may have scoffed at any creed of uplift through great books, but they were not ready to abandon the idea that history had educational value. On the other hand, Dovell occasionally summarized for DeVoto the results of their consultations on the HBC’s mission as an understanding between them to “[sell] the thrill and romance of history, not its educational value.”⁶⁹ The advertisements for the club that Dovell crafted with Carl Jones, Chairman of the HBC Board of Directors, reflected this view: “Men and women in every community are fascinated by the vitality, the romance, and the spectacle of what to them is ‘incomparably the greatest story on earth’ – the story of the United States of America.”⁷⁰

DeVoto, though, objected strongly and frequently to such overblown language, and complained to Dovell and Jones that they misrepresented or misunderstood the historians’ participation. Randolph Adams called the advertisements “some of the God damndest tripe I ever read”; DeVoto thought Jones “quite incapable of writing copy that does not make us all vomit.” And he worried that the business office failed to “understand that there is a difference between a man who wants to buy a life of Jefferson and one who wants to buy some black lace step-

⁶⁸ Novick, 357.

⁶⁹ BDV, Incoming Correspondence, Box 13, Folder 257, Dovell to DeVoto, n.d.

⁷⁰ BDV, Incoming Correspondence, Box 13, Folder 257, Dovell to DeVoto, September 11, 1947.

ins for his secretary.” More important, DeVoto thought playing up the “romance,” “grandeur,” and “heart” of history was risking too much. “The point about our history is not its grandeur, for only fragments of it have any.” Rather, DeVoto believed they offered subscribers the “substance out of which contemporary American life has been formed.” He felt even stronger about the term “heart,” writing Dovell, “I don’t know what the heart of the U.S. is, either historically or today. I don’t like this kind of pepping up. We aren’t going to make a movie serial out of history and we aren’t going to sentimentalize it, either.”⁷¹

This represented the key conflict between DeVoto and Dovell, and between history and memory. The original HBC editors set out to provide their conception of the essence of history – new research and new interpretations written in comprehensible narrative form – to the public. To succeed commercially, the club eventually aborted this mission in favor of a business plan that tried to provide the public with books on popular subjects. In other words, the later club sought to profit from subscribers’ existing historical memories. DeVoto believed in strong writing in a narrative style that made for enjoyable reading, but he also believed in the integrity of historical work. Dovell never showed much interest in the history and seemed to be concerned exclusively with selling more books. Where the historians, particularly DeVoto, agreed with Dovell was on style. DeVoto despised “academic historians” for their failure to understand that “history is not only knowledge, not only knowledge and wisdom even, but is also an art.” He tried to write his own books using the “methods and techniques of literature” so that their “form is used to reveal

⁷¹ BDV, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 38, DeVoto to Dovell, February 4, 1947; Folder 50, DeVoto to Mr. Ulman, April 1947; BDV M0001, Incoming Correspondence, Adams to DeVoto, February 6, 1947.

meaning.” Auguring Hayden White’s later analysis in *Tropics of Discourse*, DeVoto suggested that “[history] books are like novels – they are constructed and written like novels, to exactly the same end as novels.”

The problem was that they often were not. DeVoto believed that too many historians wrote without consideration for their readers or for the writing itself. Not only that, far too many refrained from making meaningful judgments, a failure that vexed DeVoto. After reading an early draft of Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land* in 1948, he strongly urged Smith to rewrite the book and submit some real value judgments to his readers. “What we want from a man who has done all this work is not a report on the work he has done but, always and foremost, judgments on what the content meant in our culture and means to it now.” For DeVoto, the historian had an “obligation” to make judgments. As he said to Smith, “society is supporting you in order that you shall do just that.”⁷²

People wanted history “appraised, judged, interpreted, and converted to an explanation of the present,” wrote DeVoto. The past could not be fully recovered; rather, “what we recover from the past is an image of ourselves.”⁷³ Therefore, if a historical work failed to connect past and present, if it contained nothing useful for readers who, like DeVoto, thought of themselves not as scholars, “but as workers with ideas to the end of affecting society or culture in the United States,” it failed to do much of anything.⁷⁴

DeVoto’s books, particularly those written during the 1940s (*The Year of Decision, 1846; Across the Wide Missouri; and The Course of Empire*), illustrated

⁷² BDV, Mi 242, Box 7, Folder 46, DeVoto to Henry Nash Smith, June 28, 1946.

⁷³ Mazur, 440-441.

⁷⁴ BDV, Mi 242, Box 7, Folder 46, DeVoto to Henry Nash Smith, June 28, 1946.

both his vision for historical writing and his objectives for history's uses. Intended as a "form of art for all Americans," and for the "common reader" more than his fellow academics, DeVoto's histories, like his many essays and articles, grew directly out of his deep involvement in contemporary affairs. In turn, he hoped they might influence the public's understanding of the major issues of the day, from intervention in World War II (a specific goal of *Year of Decision*) to protection of the environment (perhaps the unifying theme of most of his historical work). In 1942 the *Atlantic Monthly* serialized *Year of Decision* and the Book-of-the-Month Club offered it to its subscribers, an experience that DeVoto must have appreciated – at least enough to seize the opportunity when asked to help build a new book club devoted to the promulgation of new works of history.⁷⁵

DeVoto wrote that he desired to "have some effect on the writing of history," to the end of making it more novelistic and thus ultimately more meaningful. The success of his own works might do that, he thought, if academic historians really paid attention and followed his example, but the position with the HBC offered, potentially, far greater influence. In that role he could reward historians who wrote as he liked, and punish, through non-selection, those who ignored his prescriptions – perhaps changing the writing of history in the process.⁷⁶ As Toynbee said in the year after the club's founding, no one historian, alone, could accomplish much in the way of affecting society, but if he could inspire other historians to "pour in their pailfuls

⁷⁵ John L. Thomas, *A Country in the Mind: Wallace Stegner, Bernard DeVoto, History, and the American Land* (New York: Rutledge, 2000), 60-63, 72-75.

⁷⁶ BDV, Box 3, Folder 38, BDV to Madeleine [?], January 5, 1947.

too” and help to find some answers in history, then he would really be doing something.⁷⁷

But from his stance on narrative history, Ray Dovell seems to have understood that DeVoto would suggest for the club some sort of historical romances, and this became a source of tension between the historian and the publisher. “Certainly some of the stuff is going to be heroic, picturesque, fantastic,” wrote DeVoto, but “some of it is also going to be brutal as all hell, and a lot of Americans are going to look awfully sad stuff in some of it.” Furthermore, “whether or not [lay readers want romantic history], I don’t think we can afford that particular kind of inflated writing. I favor sticking to the concrete and letting the oratorical, or radio-commercial, slide.” One can easily imagine – even sympathize with – Dovell’s apparent difficulty in understanding what it was exactly that DeVoto did want. For DeVoto, the misunderstandings would quickly become intolerable.

The Books

DeVoto’s group selected the books for the club ostensibly for their historiographical value, but often due to other considerations as well. Altogether they comprise a particular perspective, one which we can identify as, largely, DeVoto’s. The books met his explicit criteria for good narrative history, but they also seem to represent a consistently progressive interpretation and a recognizably liberal political agenda. And in general they are presentist in their approach to the past, sometimes

⁷⁷ Pieter Geyl, Arnold J. Toynbee, and Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Pattern of the Past: Can We Determine It?* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1949), 82.

including long discourses on the relationship of the history to the present. All were historical, but they also spoke directly to contemporary issues.

By design they were new works, preferably published no more than a month or two before their distribution to subscribers. Particularly in the club's first year, the publishers and historians thought that the club would best serve the public by sorting through new titles to discover which texts should be read and which could be ignored. Moreover, the only way the editors might hope to influence historical writing would be through the selection or rejection of new works. "Every generation ought to, and will, re-write history," wrote Adams to the other editors. The board believed they now had a wonderful opportunity to judge their contemporaries' rewrites.⁷⁸

Both the texts themselves and the historians' discourse about each new book allow a glimpse of the issues and concerns of 1947 as well as the logic behind the assumption that history offered solutions (or at least guidance). The first three monthly selections, and the first "premium," warrant especially close examination because the editors selected them with the greatest care and consideration of both their own objectives and the potential for influencing social thought. After that, the system began to fail, and even though they continued in their task, the book choices often followed practical considerations first, and scholarly judgments second.

The group made its first choice for a monthly selection in December 1946. It would not ship to subscribers for four more months, though at the time they thought February would see the start of club operations.⁷⁹ All agreed that Clifford Dowdey's

⁷⁸ BDV, M0001 Incoming Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 109, "Circular No. 4 to History Book Club from RGA," November 26, 1946.

⁷⁹ BDV, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 38, Circular to Board, February 18, 1947. A delay in financing meant the first release came out in April, rather than February. Thus the first and second

Experiment in Rebellion was not only “good stuff,” but also a brilliant book for launching the new venture. In concurring, DeVoto reminded the group of a conclusion he had earlier shared with them: that it might be “exceedingly cagey to discover the virtues of a book about the South in our earliest months,” ideally as their first monthly selection.⁸⁰ Not only would a book from the “Southern perspective” appeal to potential club members in the South, but it would demonstrate to those who cared that the historians (especially DeVoto and Schlesinger, who had written “pretty acidulous things about slavery and the Confederacy”), acted objectively.⁸¹

Dowdey writes critically of the Confederacy, but with the affection of a native son raised on stories of the Lost Cause. In addition to the usual archival sources, he relies on a personal and hereditary knowledge of the land and its people. In this, his work closely resembled DeVoto’s scholarship and it is not surprising to learn that the two men respected each other’s historical writing *and* their respective works of fiction.⁸² As someone who disparaged historians who wrote about a region they had never traversed, DeVoto must have been delighted to read Dowdey’s descriptions of Southern topography. The many pages devoted to social history read almost like

books at least would be “less than current.” When he learned of this, DeVoto wrote to the others, “I feel as strongly as possible then, after beginning with two tolerably late books, we must be absolutely current for several months.”

⁸⁰ BDV, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 44, December 6, 1946 Circular to Board; DeVoto to Paul Brooks of Houghton Mifflin Co., December 1946.

⁸¹ DeVoto explained to his colleagues that he would take it upon himself to think of commercial considerations. “I will always be fore the best book at hand, regardless. [...] But, all other things being equal, I think we would do well to spread our selections geographically and chronologically. If after some time it develops that none of our selections have impinged on, say, New England, or on, say, the seventeenth century, then, other things being equal, I think we ought to go about looking for something about New England or the seventeenth century. Other things being equal, if we’ve given the customers a couple of very stiff doses in succession, we ought to look for something that brings in prostitution, horse-racing, or a good laugh. After a few selections that are heavy with economics or the like, let’s find a biography. That sort of thing.” BDV M0001, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3 Folder 44, DeVoto to the Board, December 16, 1946.

⁸² BDV (M0001), Incoming Correspondence, Box 13, Folder 257, Dovell to DeVoto, March 10, 1947 (quoting letter from Clifford Dowdey).

folklore – like Carl Carmer perhaps, or Carl Sandburg, who Dowdey credits along with Charles Beard and Henry Adams with the formation of his general outlook on American history. Before *Experiment*, Dowdey had written five novels over ten years and this work reflects his background in fiction. Even the political history deals mainly in personalities, psychological explanations, tragic faults and heavy consciences.

Despite the historians' statements, it is not really pro-South. Dowdey never suggests the antebellum South possessed any real merit, nor that it seceded constitutionally. And while he spends comparatively little time discussing southern blacks, when he does it is to tell of their mistreatment. At 432 pages of readable but dense text, it was an ambitious choice with which to launch the club.

The group selected as its first “premium” Jeannette Mirsky's *The Westward Crossings*, first published by Knopf in late 1946. The decision reveals several important considerations. First, Mirsky did not hold an academic position. She wrote history from outside academe, so the audience she had in mind while writing was already the audience the HBC hoped to reach. But, like all of the “popular” histories the historian-judges accepted, Mirsky also met their standards for quality.

Contemporary reviewers in the leading professional journals of history agreed with this assessment, praising Mirsky's style and mastery of the subject, and her ability to create a work of literary as well as scholarly merit.⁸³ In other words, Mirsky had produced precisely the sort of work the group sought to promote. They loved her

⁸³ See for example the reviews in *American Historical Review* and *William and Mary Quarterly*. Bruce T. McCully, “Review of *The Westward Crossings: Balboa, Mackenzie, Lewis and Clark* by Jeannette Mirsky,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 4, No. 2. (Apr., 1947), 247-250. Grace Lee Nute, “Review of *The Westward Crossings: Balboa, Mackenzie, Lewis and Clark* by Jeanette Mirsky,” *The American Historical Review* 52, No. 4. (Jul., 1947), 745-746.

vividly descriptive writing; Adams told the others, “I can feel the heat of that Central American jungle, get the horrible taste of pemmican and wonder how Sacajawea changed her baby’s diapers.”⁸⁴

The selection of a female author did not seem to be of the slightest concern to anyone in the group. None of them raised the issue in their correspondence (though Adams wondered if the name Mirsky might cause “sub-conscious unfavorable reaction among potential clientele in hinterland”). And yet, in an era of very few female academic historians, highlighting a female historian’s work at the moment of the club’s genesis seems at the very least to have been another bold declaration of difference: a further rebuke to the history departments of which none of these historians was really a part. And in fact, the group had considered both the work of Mirsky and another female author, Marion Starkey (*The Cherokee Nation*), for the first month’s selection before deciding in favor of Dowdey’s southern history.⁸⁵

The content of Mirsky’s text surprises again, especially in its emphasis on hemispheric rather than national (much less eastern seaboard) colonial history. A very recent and much celebrated trend in contemporary American historiography of the conquest/ colonial period has expanded the field to include New France and New Spain.⁸⁶ In 1946’s *Westward Crossings*, Mirsky writes, “Considering North America as a whole gives unity to elements that are commonly separated into preludes to Latin American history, or Canadian history, or the history of the United States.” And,

⁸⁴ BDV, Incoming Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 109, “Circular No. 4 to History Book Club from RGA,” November 26, 1946.

⁸⁵ BDV (M0001), Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 43, DeVoto to Board, November 4, 1946; BDV (M0001), Incoming Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 109, “Circular No. 2 (of RGA),” November 9, 1946.

⁸⁶ See James A. Hijiya, “Why the West is Lost,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, LI (April 1994), 276-92. Hijiya also mentions DeVoto’s call fifty years earlier for more Indians in American history.

“For us here in the United States it would be well if we learned to think of Spanish America as one of our own antecedents.” She further argues against any idea of American exceptionalism by emphasizing that the “ennobling idea of freedom – the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – was, like so much else, brought to North America from many parts of Europe; here it was but adapted to our demands, our dreams.” Mirsky’s tale of three westward explorations – Balboa, Mackenzie, and Lewis and Clark – unified the histories of Canada, Mexico, and the United States. She further relates how the New World’s first democratic assembly actually took shape in New Spain, following from a tradition of local assemblies in Castile and Aragon. Mirsky suggested an even grander unification based on her argument that “thought is international” and national history cannot be written accurately except within the broader history of the world. This “one world” (or at least “Atlantic Community”) philosophy is not exactly surprising, given the historical context, yet it complicates the standard narrative of postwar historiography, which assumes that the emphasis placed on the national history of the United States by some prominent historians was followed by everyone in the field. Instead, many early postwar historians, including DeVoto, called for and wrote both broader and more inclusive colonial histories – though not necessarily for the same multicultural purposes as in the 1990s.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Mirsky, xiv, 28; Novick shows that there was an emphasis on the Atlantic Community – at the expense of an American exceptionalism paradigm – in the work of many American historians in the early postwar period. This served an internationalist political philosophy. Additionally, for DeVoto at least, incorporating western history into U.S. history was as elemental to his explanation of America as it was to Frederick Jackson Turner’s. Novick, 311; See the discussion of Hijjiya’s article: “Forum: Comments on James A. Hijjiya’s ‘Why the West is Lost,’” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, LI (Oct. 1994), 717-54.

DeVoto often complained that narrative histories faced unfair and increasing criticism from academics. He believed narrative history (i.e., history written with literary quality in mind) to be superior to overly analytical texts that failed to create a storyline out of past people and events. Mirsky offers a perfect example of why DeVoto subscribed to this belief. Her sources are, not surprisingly, few. But she uses the narrative form to discuss this problem openly with her reader rather than blanket it with academic prose, extensive footnotes, and an analysis based on too little evidence. When she has two or more sources that contradict each other, Mirsky submits each story to the reader's judgment.⁸⁸ This is more than the author's prerogative: it is a result of writing in the open, conversive, narrative style that DeVoto and his colleagues promoted. The author's authority derived from the skill with which she related the story rather than a credentialed claim to be the final word on the subject. As in fiction, the reader grants authority to the author only if persuaded to do so by effective writing.

In that sense, the reader accepts the authority of the author in much the same way that a television viewer acknowledges the authority of a particular program only after the narrative has been successfully put across. Du Pont's *Cavalcade of America* fits this description; it never introduced its episodes with any claims to authority on the subjects at hand (other than whatever authoritative qualities Du Pont possessed). Rather, it persuaded the viewer over the course of the narrative. *You Are There*, on the other hand, offered its credentials up front, and Walter Cronkite more or less guaranteed the accuracy of the history in his opening remarks. The HBC offered the authority of its historian-editors, but the selected texts stood on their own once

⁸⁸ See, for example, the story of Ojeda's demise in Mirsky, 22.

subscribers began to read. Thus, even during the club's first year, when the educative program remained intact, the public held considerable (but at that point only potential) power in determining the direction of popular history (or history that wished to become popular).

The second month's book, Thomas Scudder's *Concord: An American Town*, pleased the historians for several reasons. First, because it had just been published, it satisfied their need to find a brand new book for subscribers. Second, it brought New England history to the Club, which countered both the southern history of *Experiment in Rebellion* and the mostly western history of *Westward Crossings*. DeVoto, Adams and Holbrook also thought Scudder had written a solid work of history – unusual in form but highly effective. The book offers the whole of American history through the experiences of the town of Concord, a “more human approach to America's story” than would be possible without that geographic limitation. Scudder emphasizes how the forces of history touched the lives of Concord's citizens, from its most famous sons to the lowliest town drunks. In so doing, he thought that “history” would move “closer to the reader's own experience” of life in America. By making the people of one town's past seem like the people of any town's present, history would become more comprehensible to the reader.

Schlesinger objected to the book, thinking, it “hasn't got a whole lot of history in it.” But Adams and DeVoto both insisted that it did – “history of the kind which I think important,” wrote DeVoto. Adams thought that Schlesinger suffered from the “delusion that history is made by the Big Names, such as Jackson and Roosevelt, and now Robert Taft.” The others seem to have convinced Schlesinger to at least abstain

from voting, by arguing that Concord had not only contributed more to the United States than had the White House, but also was “a goddam [sic] sight more interesting to read about.”⁸⁹

Another concern was that subscribers might not have the intellectual background to appreciate a book that focused a significant amount of its attention on Ralph Waldo Emerson (as much as it focused on any one figure). In the end, Holbrook, Adams, and DeVoto decided that whether or not they had, readers should enjoy becoming acquainted with the man and his transcendentalist circle. At any rate, the whole point of their involvement with the HBC was to expand subscribers’ knowledge by directing their attentions to meaningful people and events in the past, particularly those that were less familiar to a non-academic audience.⁹⁰

Like most of the books selected during the HBC’s inaugural year, Scudder discusses the present as well as the past. The book concludes with young World War II veterans, some of whom had joined organizations like the American Veterans’ Committee and the Student Federalists, returning to Concord and organizing a conference promoting world government. Most of the delegates had served in the Armed Forces or in Washington, and several delegates had been in San Francisco for the United Nations Charter Conference. They had concluded from these experiences that people over thirty, more interested in holding onto oil fields or strategic bases than in doing good, should not be welcomed at the peace table. Only the young seemed to them to have a real interest in peace. The “Concord Charter” advanced the

⁸⁹ BDV M0001, Incoming Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 109, Adams to DeVoto, February 6, 1947; Holbrook to DeVoto and Adams, February 14, 1947.

⁹⁰ BDV M0001, Incoming Correspondence, Box 13, Holbrook to DeVoto, cc Adams, January 28, 1947.

idea of world citizenship, pushed for an end to power politics, and advocated a strong, federal world government. To the delegates and to Scudder, it was the logical conclusion to World War II and to two centuries of Concord history.⁹¹ Scudder's work reflected the contemporary liberal understanding of internationalism as a movement for weakening both nationalism and the potential for future military conflict. With tension growing between the United States and the Soviet Union, this liberal internationalist ideology rapidly faded. It is hard to imagine a book like *Concord* being written (not to mention selected by a book club) even a year later.

However, the politics inherent in Scudder's conclusion paled in comparison to the radical arguments presented in the Club's third monthly selection. William Harlan Hale's *The March of Freedom: A Layman's History of the American People* opens with two quotes. The first, from Samuel Adams, announces, "It is the common people who must, under God, finally save us." The second, from Henry A. Wallace, reads, "The march of freedom of the past 150 years has been a long-drawn-out people's revolution."⁹² Together, Adams and Wallace announce the tenor of Hale's work, which is, in his words, a very "personal history" that looks to the past for a "manageable body of facts and feelings about our heritage to take along with me into this new age." "You may gather that this book is not 'objective,'" he writes (but certainly does not apologize for). Objectivity is a false hope in Hale's "new age."⁹³

⁹¹ Townsend Scudder, *Concord: American Town* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1947), "To the Reader" and 389-390.

⁹² Hale uses two or three quotations at the beginning of each chapter to comment on each other. So, for example, the chapter on the Revolutionary Era, "The Fight for a Future," opens with "We, the People..." and "...those creatures called Democrats..." The latter is from Justice Samuel Chase, 1798. William Harlan Hale, *The March of Freedom: A Layman's History of the American People* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1947).

⁹³ In a rather moving passage on pages ix-x, Hale explains his immediate motivation for this "people's history" that, I think, explicates not only how Hale approached history but how DeVoto and the other

Similar to Reinhold Niebuhr's *Irony of American History*, Hale explores the past to see just what it is that Americans hope the rest of the world will emulate in the years after World War II. His contemporaries needed, he wrote, to "set promise against reality" in American history before asking every other nation to follow "our ways."⁹⁴ From the first page Hale seems to be appealing directly to DeVoto, disingenuously apologizing for the book lacking the "impedimenta of good scholarship."

The focus is on the "people" rather than the usual "stuffed heads" – from whom Hale sarcastically begs forgiveness for excluding them. Instead the book tells of the clashes between, on the one hand, the people and their allies who would expand their opportunities, and on the other, those who feared them and wanted to "restrict privilege." Hale sees "no law of inevitable progress" and no evidence that the people necessarily retained the gains they had won in any given struggle. Nor does he posit a Schelsinger-like cyclic view (in which moods of reform and conservatism alternate throughout American history); rather, Hale finds no pattern save the people's constant fight for greater democracy.

This history begins not in colonial Massachusetts or Virginia but in Main Street, USA, in 1947 ("in the beginning, which is here and now"). "You start your day as a few big companies show you how to do it," and just like everyone else, you end it listening to the "same jokes that are bringing the same laughs from people

historians on the board approached it (i.e., personally, emotionally, and with a strong connection to their contemporary world): "The time was May 1, 1945. The place was Dachau, Germany..." The ex-prisoners of the camp had gathered rags to create their own national flags to fly. When the American soldiers brought out the U.S. flag, they marched it toward the tall flagpole from which the German flag had flown, then sharply turned and placed it in line with the other, ragged banners. "And at this there arose a shout – a general shout of brotherhood and joy..." Hale continues, "I thought as I came away: This is what we mean, this is what we are. Should we seem to be less than this – should we stand apart from the lowly, from the people oppressed for faith, from those who will not be bound – then, in spite of all our riches and our power, we are not what we set out to be."

⁹⁴ Hale, 1, 20.

slouched in the same way by their sets in every town and hamlet of America.” His extended opening salvo continues from there to offer as sharp a critique of contemporary America as any historian has ever written. Hale takes the edge off a little by exploring regional differences (though he thinks this mostly means having to watch what you say as you venture into a new area, particularly the South – where, if you happen to be Black, you have no rights) but this contemporary beginning is generally harsh. It also contains a clear condemnation of not just the doctrine of states’ rights but also the idea of political representation based on states (e.g. the U.S. Senate). He writes, “The great tree of America has many roots of inequality, but the oldest of them, and the ones that have clung most tightly to our constitutional bedrock, are these strands of equal and inviolate statehood.” Of the two parties, he simply notes that, “we all admit... that neither of our two great parties really makes political sense.”

Corporate power appears everywhere in Hale’s work, though it is never welcomed. Defining the Northeast, he notes it is “bounded on the west by the Mellon Family’s Pittsburgh and on the south by the Du Pont family’s Delaware.” “Class war” occurs throughout American history, though it is often, Hale says, disguised as sectional conflict. The frontier “had the effect of a gigantic WPA,” postponing the “rigors of the system,” but that had closed long ago. Now “you are likely to be a landless, tool-less tenant or laborer or white-collar worker” who serves and depends on a giant corporation (which, despite their advertising to the contrary, is not owned by “countless widows and orphans,” each of whom holds a few shares). Freedom had developed into enslavement by the “private bosses” and the road to true emancipation

ran through a large federal government that could counterbalance the power of the corporation.⁹⁵

When he finally begins the history of the early colonial period, Hale writes humorously (but also critically) of how “it got off on the wrong foot” with greedy explorers and financiers heading the efforts at exploitation. For Hale, the Salem witch trials showcased a battle between Christianity and capitalism, in which admirable resistance to the latter led to unfortunate accusations of witchcraft. In his chapter on the American Revolution Hale draws attention to the impressive political organizing of the “radicals,” particularly Sam Adams. He offers a narrative of two revolutions, one against England and another, more radical social revolution at home.⁹⁶ After the revolution came constitution, and Hale here traces the development of anti-big government sentiment from the Jeffersonian radicals (who simply made a mistake in thinking small government would best preserve liberty) to states’ rights Southerners (who desired small government to preserve slavery) to later capitalists (who make cruel use of Jefferson’s argument in order to exploit the people). Then, Civil War, where “big business takes over” and the Negro gets “kicked back practically to the place where he came from” once the northern capitalists have no more use for him. By the 1870s the effect of the “uncontrolled business corporation had been to “disembody evil and make it anonymous.” Finally, continuing the work of the populists and progressives, Franklin Roosevelt demonstrated that Americans need not fear their government.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Ibid., 10, 13, 23.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 49-50, 84

⁹⁷ Ibid., 99, 152-165.

Hale ends his book where he began, in 1947. Contemporary Americans feared the “threadbare Soviets” not because of their strength but because of the “uncertainty” of the new American position and the fact that so many in Europe seemed disinclined to follow “our capitalist cause.”⁹⁸ He closes with the promise of men like Henry Wallace, who, for a new generation, revive the vital belief in the American people to “do for themselves” through the “instrument of self-government.”

The historians were not unanimous in this selection; it is not hard to understand why. Hale’s book presented a left-wing, anti-capitalist interpretation of the American past. More than that it makes no pretense of objectivity and enters much more directly into contemporary political debates than any of the other selections. For just the third month of the club’s existence it made for a bold choice. Seeing nothing there but criticisms of America, Stewart Holbrook declared himself against it, but the rest of the group outvoted him (though later, DeVoto would also express some ambivalence about the work). To Adams, Hale’s writing represented the best of the “by the fire side with a couple of highballs” style – just fine since, “dammit, that’s where decisions are made in this America of ours.” For Adams and Schlesinger, Hale’s book seemed perfectly suited to their purpose of reaching a lay audience. In particular, they thought this all-encompassing text met the demand for an American history accessible to the waves of veterans washing over university campuses.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁹⁹ DeVoto expressed fury at his colleagues’ non-committal voting. Sometimes one man voted for both books under consideration or voted with an explanation that seemed to negate their vote. BDV, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 48, Circular to the Board, April 11, 1947.

It rendered history relevant to contemporary readers, a case Adams made as he argued with increasing passion for Hale over several weeks. Responding to criticism from Holbrook of Hale's bias, he retorted that the book was "as objective as I can conceive a humanly written book on such a subject to be." Moreover, he appealed to the other four as men who believed that history had something to teach. They all wanted history that spoke to the present, so why object when an author gives them exactly what they want? "History gives lots of warnings," even though we tend to ignore them. For Adams, the question raised by Hale was, "Can we afford it? Is there much, if any time left? We have all listened to serious and well-meaning people who utter neo-philosophic comments and then say to ourselves, 'I wish he knew more history.' If history should 'tell something' – this books certainly tells it."¹⁰⁰ DeVoto, more attentive to the business of publishing, gave his blessing once the Book-of-the-Month Club had passed on Hale.¹⁰¹ But given DeVoto's concurrent attacks on corporate (and American Medical Association) obstructions to universal healthcare as well as what he saw as business's effort to rob Americans of their public lands, the

¹⁰⁰ BDV, Incoming Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 109, Adams to DeVoto, March 14, 1947; March 17, 1947; and April 2, 1947.

¹⁰¹ BDV, Incoming Correspondence, Box 13, Folder 256, Holbrook to DeVoto, February 26, 1947; BDV, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 48, DeVoto to Randolph, March 18, 1947. Adams also seemed to delight in the possibility of being labeled a Communist. He received a letter warning him to disassociate himself from the club and passed it along to the others:

"The new History Book Club of which you are named a judge will not have much standing with historians since two of its 4 [sic] members have unfavorable Red affiliations. One of them a contributor to an outright Red magazine..." Adams continued, "Boys! We are made! We are being attacked! [...] Of course, I am curious as to just which of you are contributors to The Red Book if it is The Red Book my correspondent means. That always struck me as a particularly sticky magazine with a lovely blonde on the cover.

"Of course, it may be that Frank carries a bomb under that big Stetson he wears – and yes, Schlesinger is writing a book on that Dreadful Man. Of course Bennie writes books about psychiatrists (they must be communists) and once I saw him wear a red necktie. As for Stewart, everyone knows the Northwest is full of communists and that even the sunset is red way out there." BDV M0001, Incoming Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 109, Circular No. 8 from RGA, February 18, 1947.

Holbrook responded, "I'm happy to learn from Adams that the Judges have been smeared with red. Or at least two of them. The other three better get a hump on and do something too."

selection of a book with such a strong anti-corporate message seems perfectly in line with his ongoing political objectives.¹⁰²

The book that precipitated the conflict that led to the board's resignation in spring 1948, John C. Miller's *Triumph of Freedom: 1775-1783*, also began with an explanation of how and why this history of the American Revolution would "profit" contemporary American society. Writing for a wider audience than in much of his other work, Miller substitutes a bibliography for the footnotes that he feared would distract the lay reader. Nevertheless, as he himself suggests, Miller's work follows the "canons of historical scholarship," reviewing the historiography and openly discussing problems with sources and previous interpretations.

Not surprisingly, Miller writes extremely well, weaving the battles and campaigns together with politics and economics on both sides of the Atlantic. Through almost 700 pages, the pace remains quick and the story exciting. For those "many citizens" who sometimes wonder just where the country is going, or why its progress seems so "rough and jolting," Miller offers the revolutionary period as an example and a reminder of the ideals for which Americans have and must always strive. In one of the most interesting chapters, "Inflation and its Consequences," Miller writes of the weakening of American resolve, the failure of all Americans to sacrifice for the cause, and the resultant collapse of morale among those who were sacrificing. The lesson is for the reader's generation: all Americans need to contribute to the defense of freedom, and all need to be protected by a government

¹⁰² Bernard DeVoto, "Doctors Along the Boardwalk," *Harpers* (September 1947), in DeVoto (1955) 85-102.

that cares as much about the well-being of the poor soldier or farmer as it does about the financial state of the union.¹⁰³

Although the editors took the selection of books very seriously, they made some of their choices for near-purely practical reasons. When the Club suddenly needed the October selection ahead of schedule, DeVoto picked *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising*, written by a former student of Adams's, Howard H. Peckham. The book had "real 'news value'," according to Adams's review (first written before he had seen the book), as it attempted to uncover just what sort of man had been able to inspire twelve tribes to revolt against the English. But *Pontiac* contains almost nothing besides a military history of the Indian-European conflicts of the 18th century – hardly any social, economic, or even political history. In other circumstances it seems unlikely that DeVoto would have agreed to the choice.

DeVoto's group offered Dovell a "damn good book," Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker's *The Puritan Oligarchy*, for December.¹⁰⁴ In contrast to the many HBC authors without strong academic ties, Wertenbaker was for 56 years professor of colonial history at Princeton University. At Princeton he taught the history of material culture, which likewise differentiated him from many of his colleagues. His emphasis on barn architecture, tools, agricultural methods, and other aspects of everyday life shared the focus of Dixon Ryan Fox, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr. and the other new social historians of the 1930s (and in fact Wertenbaker had contributed volume two of the Fox and Schlesinger-edited series *A History of American Life* in

¹⁰³ John C. Miller, *Triumph of Freedom: 1775-1783* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1948), 476-477, 687-688.

¹⁰⁴ BDV, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 57, DeVoto to Dovell, September 10, 1947.

1927). *The Puritan Oligarchy* completed his trilogy, *The Founding of American Civilization*, following *The Old South* (1942) and *The Middle Colonies* (1938).¹⁰⁵

Wertenbaker paints a bleak picture of 17th century Massachusetts, which he refers to as the “Bible State.” The book fits squarely in the 1930s-40s pattern of critical histories of the Puritans (soon to be countered by Perry Miller).¹⁰⁶ In this historiography, and in this book, the Puritans are undemocratic, authoritarian, superstitious, and morose. Only their persecuted dissenters offer positive examples for the present; to Wertenbaker, these outcasts are the wellspring of democratic thought. But Wertenbaker spends little time on these figures, though he clearly admires Anne Hutchinson, Roger Williams, and several others who resisted Massachusetts’ special tyranny. Instead he concentrates on the State, explains the rationale behind the actions of the Puritan leaders, and finds them to be a power-obsessed group intent on enhancing their own status.

Wertenbaker’s book is a transnational history that begins in East Anglia, England. There we find early Puritan leaders fighting each other for authority within their sect. He not only argues that the Puritans absolutely did not come to America to establish religious freedom (a position he feels hardly needs to be expressed by 1947), but that they also did not flee England because of religious persecution. Through careful documentation, he shows that at the time of the decision to colonize, Puritans were not being persecuted. Rather, the Puritan leaders desired a place where they could establish their own society and rule it as they wished, without interference from

¹⁰⁵ Thomas J. Schlereth, *Cultural History and Material Culture: Everyday Life, Landscapes, Museums* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990), 340.

¹⁰⁶ Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1984), 141.

anyone who disagreed with their beliefs or methods. In this version, the shining “city upon a hill” looked rather menacing.

Like the HBC editorial board, Wertenbaker had no intention of “divorcing myself from the twentieth century.” In any age, he “disliked the fettering of men’s minds and the denial of the right of the people to rule themselves,” a sentiment he felt was “apparent in these pages.” He thought it impossible to write “impersonal” or bias-free history in any case. Consequently, his work resembles many of the uses of the past explored in later chapters, particularly several of the *You Are There* episodes that examine 20th century tendencies toward totalitarianism through historical reenactments.¹⁰⁷

As that series did, Wertenbaker devotes considerable space to the Salem witch trials, describing the context as a “battle of the clergy against rationalism.” The people had begun to “revolt against mental fetters,” educating themselves with new ideas at the predawn of the Enlightenment, and conservative religious leaders feared for their own authority. The trials occur as the “invisible world fades,” soon to be replaced by a world of scientific observation and rational thought. But the clergy exploit feelings of uncertainty to demonstrate their usefulness and power. Evidence for this conclusion comes from a decision taken by eminent clergymen in 1681, more than a decade before the first trials, to combat the growing rationalism that threatened their religion and their power. Beginning in that year, they made a coordinated effort to publish examples of “divine judgments, tempests, floods, earthquakes, thunders as

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *The Puritan Oligarchy: The Founding of American Civilization* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1947), viii, ix, 26, 32-33. Wertenbaker’s philosophy is suggested by his statement that, “The task of the historian is not so much to praise or condemn as to analyze and interpret” (offering an interesting rebuttal to Frank Monaghan’s contemporary declaration on *Cavalcade of America* about historians’ duty to label people as good or evil).

are unusual, strange apparitions, or what ever else shall happen that is prodigious, witchcrafts, diabolical possessions, remarkable judgments upon noted sinners, eminent deliverances and answers to prayer.” The objective was to reintroduce the “invisible world” to a people that seemed to be maturing past the point of believing in such things – past the point of needing leaders who promised to defend them against Evil. The most popular of these works was Increase Mather’s *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences*, a book still credited with providing the intellectual foundations for the witch hunts. It “planted the seed,” Wertenbaker writes, “which soon sprouted into the rankest harvest of witchcraft in the history of New England.” Like everything he finds revolting about the Puritan State, the blame for the witchcraft scare rests with the clergy elite, a group Wertenbaker viewed similarly to history’s worst totalitarian dictators. Like them, Wertenbaker’s Puritans contribute to civilization only with their fall from power. There is no evidence suggesting that DeVoto made a connection between Wertenbaker’s Bible State and his own scathing history of the Mormon state, which happened to be his own home state of Utah; nevertheless, the same theme of a manipulative, exploitative, and authoritarian clergy elite permeates both histories.¹⁰⁸ DeVoto seems to have relished subjecting founding myths to critical scrutiny.

In March 1948, in the same letter that informed Dovell of his resignation due to irreconcilable differences with the club’s increasingly profit-oriented philosophy, DeVoto authorized one last monthly selection. He decided to use this opportunity to make a clear political statement, even if Dovell ended up rejecting the recommendation and choosing another book himself. He selected *The Great Forest*,

¹⁰⁸ Wertenbaker, ix, 269, 345.

by Richard Lillard – to DeVoto a long historical argument in favor of environmental protection.

DeVoto had been crusading for conservation for many years by this point. In the late-1940s he was extremely vocal in denouncing the efforts of Western corporations and their allies in the Republican congress who would turn over vast expanses of public lands to industry. At the time of the Lillard selection, DeVoto recorded that he was crusading for conservation by promoting three books wherever he went: *The Great Forest*, Fairfield Osborn's *Our Plundered Planet*, and William Vogt's *Road to Survival*. He felt very strongly the urgency of the situation given the likelihood of a Republican victory in November, in which case, "we are all going to be called on for harder and more urgent work" if public lands were to be protected.¹⁰⁹

The Great Forest itself offered a modified frontier thesis, with the North American forest providing for the nation in ways similar to those of Turner's frontier. It was the immense supply of wood that made America great, ran the argument, and as the forest disappears, so does the country's future. Lillard demonstrates the significance of wood from the colonial era through the 1940s. Plentiful forests meant wooden masts for wooden ships, which not only increased America's wealth but also helped win independence. Then wood "subsidized a century of progress." Gilded Age corporations and their "reputable lawbreaking" threatened to obliterate this resource, but the Wisconsin "halfbreeds" and then the progressives managed to at least slow them down. Finally, during World War II, the military used more wood than steel, to build everything from tank crates to PT boats, not to mention paper.

¹⁰⁹ DeVoto Mi242, Box 6, Folder 45, DeVoto to William Sloane, May 8, 1948. DeVoto mentions in particular his effort to persuade Walter Lippman at a recent cocktail party at Elmer Davis's and his pitch to the crowd at another party, thrown by Mrs. Gifford Pinchot.

Lillard's book also provides a rich social history of lumber camps and backwoods life, and relates the long history of labor struggles in the timber industry. It is unflinchingly pro-union and anti-capitalist. And Lillard concludes with dire warnings for the future if the forests are not protected and replenished. Americans had already cleared too much forest and desperately needed to replant; "We need vigorous, farsighted conservation of forest resources."

Lillard also argues that the forest served a key function in collective memory and consciousness. "Backwoods life survives as a pervasive national memory," he writes. It has been a "people's playground" and a "refuge from mechanized life and mass neurosis." Losing the forest would be catastrophic to America's conception of itself, which, Lillard believes, included important group memories of backwoodsman, log cabins, lumberjacks, Indians, and transcendentalists in their New England woods. In truth, these memories probably *have* faded since the time of Lillard's writing – superseded by the West and more recent frontiers, as Americans put greater distance between themselves and the "great forest."

All of these selections challenged readers to engage in some way with contemporary issues. They also challenged historical memory by revealing less familiar episodes from American history, and suggesting alternative interpretations of better-known people and events. As DeVoto said, they made a point of refraining from romanticizing or mythologizing the past and hoped instead to foster a critical appreciation of history, and of history's value to the present. After the first year, it still remained to be seen whether any significant part of the American public would accept that kind of approach.

Troubled Waters...

Making any new business run smoothly and profitably takes time. Problems with publishers, the lack of subscribers, and conflict between the editors and the business office plagued the HBC's first year of operation. Publishers failed to mail books as promised, and some of them, like Alfred Knopf, objected to the Club selling their books at lower prices. Tellingly, DeVoto, rather than Dovell, fought the Club's battles with Knopf, despite his protestations to the publisher that he had nothing to do with the business side of things. But DeVoto, frankly, had more publishing experience than Dovell, and several publishing houses knew him well.¹¹⁰

Little, Brown accepted the club's arrangement, whereby subscribers would purchase their books for about 20% less than they would otherwise. This would not be especially profitable with the club's membership stuck at a few thousand, but once the club grew to 20,000 or more, the 20% discount would easily be offset by higher sales. Knopf meanwhile led the revolt against not only the HBC, but all book clubs save the entrenched Book-of-the-Month Club and the Literary Guild. Those two clubs seemed untouchable, but publishers thought they might limit the proliferation of discount clubs by "squeezing" the smaller ones. At the very least this would mollify the booksellers that made up most of their customer base. DeVoto tried to convince Alfred Knopf that the HBC opened a new market for him, the "small-town intelligentsia" that lacked easy access to many new books. But Knopf decreed that he would sell his books to the Club only three months after their initial publication

¹¹⁰ BDV M0001, Incoming Correspondence, Box 13, Folder 259, Dovell to DeVoto, June 24, 1947.

date. By July 1947, DeVoto had decided the publishers could not be relied upon; therefore, the historians would need to create a backlog of selections that could be ordered quickly in case of trouble with a publisher. When he left for vacation the following month, he remarked that agreeing with his colleagues on four book possibilities would probably still leave them scrambling to come up with more once it “develops that we cannot get any of these books .”¹¹¹

Meanwhile he had to get his editorial board organized. That proved difficult at a time when, “God damn it, the mail service is disorganized at the moment because, God damn it, the railroad service is disorganized.” As the editors saw it, these postwar labor troubles threatened to derail their nascent enterprise before it could gather sufficient steam. His colleagues expected books or galley proofs in a timely fashion but more often than not books arrived too late or not at all – sometimes because of the US Postal Service but more often because of the dysfunctional HBC office. To meet a deadline, Adams reviewed *Pontiac and the Last Great Indian Uprising* for the club newsletter without having laid eyes on the book. As their go-between, DeVoto bore the brunt of the complaints from the other historians. He protested that he was doing everything he could short of riding around to each of them on his bicycle to hand them their own copies, and accused them of acting like “a bunch of prima donnas.” He succeeded in quieting them down, though without satisfying any of them. In fact, DeVoto had tried for weeks to make the club’s distribution system functional, but to no avail. Remarkably, during the first board’s tenure, the HBC never standardized any method of getting manuscripts or books to

¹¹¹ BDV, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 38, DeVoto to Frank Dobie, June 20, 1947; DeVoto to Alfred Knopf, June 30, 1947; DeVoto Circular No. 10, July 14, 1947; DeVoto to Randolph, July 21, 1947; DeVoto Circular No. 12, August 4, 1947.

each of the five editors. The difficulties in distributing books – rather an important part of operating a book club – continued to frustrate everyone on the editorial board.¹¹²

In addition, the general incompetence of the business office infuriated DeVoto, who felt like he constantly had to act as their tutor. The office still had no telephone in late spring 1947, which meant all communication had to be by wire, through the mail, or in person.¹¹³ In addition to his reluctant visits to New York to help straighten things out in the office, DeVoto wrote Dovell many times explaining with step-by-step instructions how to go about the particular tasks that comprised his job. After such interactions, DeVoto would write to his colleagues of the many “vagaries, annoyances, and inefficiencies” of the HBC that plagued him.¹¹⁴ He complained that the office knew nothing about publishing; they were fixated on getting subscribers to the point that they ignored normal business operations; deadlines had become meaningless since the office was likely to suddenly demand selections at any moment; and most important, the office failed to send out the books.

DeVoto held a high-minded view of both the club and the historians’ role in it, and he seems to have created a set of principles that he afterward considered inviolable. Most vital, the historians’ professional opinions were sacrosanct and business considerations could not be brought to bear on their decision-making. Ray Dovell once asked DeVoto to edit a review by Frank Dobie that criticized the American Legion. In refusing, DeVoto protested first on principle, but also suggested

¹¹² BDV, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 42, DeVoto Circular to HBC Board, December 6, 1946; DeVoto to Dovell, November 9, 1946.

¹¹³ BDV M0001, Incoming Correspondence, Box 13, Folder 257, Dovell to DeVoto, March 17, 1947.

¹¹⁴ BDV Mi242, Box 6, Folder 45, DeVoto to Holbrook, April 5, 1948.

that the “appearance of such talk in the bulletin of a book club is a considerable novelty very favorable to us.” “We will always have to let the boys say what they want to – and I think that in the end we’ll profit from doing so.” The judges had to remain independent: from the club and from him. He thought it completely inappropriate to try to persuade anyone to accept a book they had already rejected on merit. “We’re telling our subscribers that one of the unique distinctions of the Club is the expert opinion of its board of editors. I don’t want to depreciate that uniqueness in the minds of either the editors or the subscribers.” To DeVoto, the club existed as a way for independent experts in the field to communicate with interested readers, and any hint of compromise for reasons of profit or politics would disillusion subscribers.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, he evidently had no qualms about editing a review submitted by Adams that, to DeVoto, revealed an “enthusiastic up-country Anglo-Saxon willingness to forget that there are other traditions.” DeVoto rewrote the introduction to mention some of those other traditions.¹¹⁶

By August 1947, DeVoto began to realize that the Club would have to be reorganized if it was to succeed. After a meeting with Carl Jones, he understood that fundamental disagreements existed between them. Jones had told DeVoto that his selections to date had not been popular enough and the historians would have to find some way of selecting books that would sell well. DeVoto countered that the reputations of the expert editors were the sole business assets of the club, and that jeopardizing those reputations in any way would undermine the club’s claims. He admitted that Jones might be right about the need to change things, but argued that

¹¹⁵ BDV, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 49, DeVoto to Dovell, April 17, 1947.

¹¹⁶ BDV, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 51, DeVoto to Dovell, May 11, 1947.

“you cannot advertise the Club as one thing and run it as another thing.” If Jones and Dovell insisted on choosing books for commercial reasons, DeVoto informed them that he and his colleagues would resign. “We began by saying that we would distribute the books which the board of editors regarded as the best American history being currently written. I still think that that is a sound idea commercially and also that it embodies something of a public service. Whether or not I’m right about that, I am not interested in doing something else...”

In fact, as DeVoto himself admitted, he had always “flexibly interpreted” this position. On occasion he had supported books that he thought more likely “than equally eligible ones” to appeal to the potential audience. Adams and Schlesinger did so too, he thought, but Holbrook and Dobie were always “for the best book regardless of all other considerations.” DeVoto would never, he told Dovell, select a book that did not satisfy his standards. Nor would he “consent to negotiate” with anyone in the business office about which book might prove popular. That would “break our contract with the subscribers” and “falsify” the very basis for the club’s existence.

The immediate crisis that led to this last declaration had been provoked by the business office resisting the selection of *Lions Under the Throne*, a history of the Supreme Court that seemed to them destined for low sales. After Jones told him that selecting a book on the Supreme Court was a mistake, DeVoto threatened immediate resignation if the book was not adopted. If the club limited the choice of topics or anything else, if it tried to “pick winners” and “pick the Americana” that would

generate the most sales, it could find a new board that would “work within the limits set but it can’t get me and I doubt if it can get any of the other four.”¹¹⁷

In December, to cut costs, the office asked DeVoto to fire two of the editors. He selected Dobie without hesitation, but had a more difficult time choosing between Schlesinger and Holbrook, both close friends. In the end, communicating with Holbrook through the mail often took too long and so Schlesinger remained by default. After their abrupt termination, the business office never even contacted Holbrook or Dobie, a situation that infuriated them and DeVoto too.¹¹⁸

The final straw came in March 1948, when the editors chose John Chester Miller’s *Triumph of Freedom, 1775-1783*, and Dovell declined their suggestion. The issue was cost – the book would cost subscribers \$4 or more, and club selections were supposed to be \$3. DeVoto thought the difference negligible for what the board considered to be one of the best history books of the year. The two men worked out a deal, whereby the club would offer the low-cost Dixon Wecter, *The Age of the Great Depression, 1929-1941*, in June to offset the “expensive” Miller in August. When DeVoto later discovered that Dovell had reneged, he quit. The fundamental basis of the club had been destroyed, and DeVoto divined no further advantage in his continued participation. If he and his colleagues could not determine the content of the history that subscribers would read, and that content instead would be determined by business considerations, the endeavor was from DeVoto’s perspective completely worthless.

¹¹⁷ BDV, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 3, Folder 56, Draft of letter from DeVoto to Dovell, August 4, 1947 (same text used in final draft of August 9).

¹¹⁸ BDV Mi 242, Box 9, Folder 47, DeVoto to Dumas Malone, July 8, 1948; DeVoto, Outgoing Correspondence, Box 4, Folder 62, DeVoto to Randolph, December 2, 1947.

On March 30, DeVoto sent the club his last review (*The Great Forest*), copy for his HBC newsletter column, “Editorially Speaking,” and his letter of resignation. It seemed apparent to him that the business office would not always accept the recommendations of the editors and that made the enterprise unacceptable. “The Miller book clinches it: the Club has rejected a unanimous choice of the editors... I can’t go along with you any farther.” The loss must have hit the New York office especially hard when DeVoto accepted the Pulitzer Prize less than a month later.

...And a New Crew

“If Dovell asks me for suggestions about possible successors, I will tell him to use his own judgment but to consider Louis Hacker, whose last name has one more syllable than it needs.”

- DeVoto to Adams, March 29, 1948

“Arthur has suggested that you might get Louis Hacker to take charge.”

- DeVoto to Dovell, March 30, 1948

Despite the above sardonic suggestion, when DeVoto, Schlesinger and Adams resigned, the club turned to Dumas Malone to build a new board of editors. Like DeVoto, Malone had already had a long career as a historian engaged with the world outside academia and was thus another natural fit for the venture. At the time, Malone was working on the second volume of his nearly endless work on Jefferson, which would take the rest of his life to complete. He had been on the faculty at Columbia, and would soon become “biographer-in-residence” at the University of Virginia, but in 1948, researching fulltime, Malone survived solely on a Rockefeller

Foundation grant before the addition of the HBC's monthly check for \$150 (soon to be reduced to \$100).

Malone and DeVoto knew and respected each other. DeVoto expressed considerable surprise when he learned that the club had managed to enlist Malone's services (he seems to have hoped the club would fail without his leadership).¹¹⁹

Writing Malone, he explained why he and the others had resigned, arguing again that the club violated "its explicit contract with its subscribers" by disregarding the judges' decision. He appealed to Malone to "stand on the same platform."¹²⁰

In the 1920s, Malone had edited the *Dictionary of American Biography*, and had asked DeVoto (as well as Randolph Adams) to write entries. That experience reveals quite a lot about the two men's approaches to writing history for the public. When DeVoto submitted his entries on Brigham Young and Joseph Smith, Malone asked him to "tone down" his critical perspective so that Mormons would not protest. Characteristically, DeVoto refused, and the Mormons complained. (According to Malone, DeVoto said, "You've got to face it. Either he was a faker or he wasn't." The historian *must* make the judgment.) Malone later noted that many of the entries for the *Dictionary* had to be edited for content that might prove offensive to one group or another, though he evidently saw nothing objectionable in that. Furthermore, he deliberately asked Presbyterians to write about Presbyterians, Southerners to write about the Confederacy, and so on.¹²¹ In other words, no entry would be permitted to disturb any group's cherished memories. This approach

¹¹⁹ Ian Tyrrell suggests the same in *Historians in Public*, 70.

¹²⁰ BDV Mi 242, Box 9, Folder 47, DeVoto to Dumas Malone, July 8, 1948.

¹²¹ Dumas Malone Papers at the University of Virginia (DM) 12712-b, Box 37, Folder "1954-81 – 'Interviews with Dumas Malone'," "Editing the Dictionary of American Biography, Interview Conducted December 10, 1954."

contrasted very sharply with DeVoto's; it would contribute to the success of Malone's long tenure at the HBC.

Malone proved much more willing to consider the commercial merits of a book. In his correspondence with his fellow editors, Louis B. Wright and Walter Millis, Malone often remarked on particular books that would be unlikely to sell well, and therefore should not be considered for selection by the club.¹²² This attitude extended to controversy as well. If one of the editors considered a book controversial, Malone agreed to drop it to avoid the possibility of complaints or low sales. Around the turn of the 1970s, the editors rejected at least three books on John Brown because they thought him too radical a subject (to be treated mostly favorably in a biography) and after Wright objected to Richard Hofstadter's *American Violence*, Malone accepted his opinion that they probably should try to avoid such works by recognizing "academic liberals."¹²³

The *History Book Club Review* reflected the changing philosophy at the Club. The HBC had from inception sent its readers reviews, written by the editorial board, of the books offered. In the beginning, when the club offered only one book each month, the reviews were long and educative. The historians "taught" the book as they might teach it in the classroom. This fit with their understanding of the club's mission to help Americans to comprehend their world through the history books they selected. In the early 1950s, the *Review* grew in overall length, offering more books

¹²² During his HBC tenure, Louis B. Wright served as Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library, as a historian at the National Geographic Society, and as Secretary of the American Historical Association. Walter Millis was on staff at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. Thus all three men resided in the same part of the country – a situation that evidently bothered no one at the club but one that represented a significant departure from the charter board's make-up.

¹²³ DM 12712-b, Box 9, Folder 1969-71, Louis B. Wright to Malone, November 18, 1970; Malone to Wright, November, 1970.

at discounted rates, but shortened the reviews and dropped the lecturing tone. By 1957 the *Review* contained dozens of book choices, and though the featured selection still warranted a longer write up, there was no longer any hint of a critical review (as there had been a decade earlier). Just two or three promotional sentences accompanied each of the many other books on offer.¹²⁴

Partly, this followed the change in emphasis from education to popular appeal but perhaps too, these later books did not require as much of a review since the topics were largely familiar to subscribers. Coincidental with these changes, the HBC began to offer books on topics other than American history. By the mid-fifties subjects ranged from the Dead Sea scrolls to the Notre Dame cathedral. Rather than revealing greater cosmopolitanism however (much less an increased engagement with contemporary foreign affairs), this change reflected a retreat into the safer territory of established collective memory. The move to world history offered more prominent historical subjects – more major battles, more great leaders, more conventional national histories – that subscribers would recognize at first sight. This approach contrasted with, for example, the earlier selection of *Concord*, which, while superficially more provincial, considered all sorts of cultural, social, political, and international issues from an unusual and challenging perspective that asked the reader to connect varied but interrelated experiences across time and space.

By the end of the 1950s the goals of the club had changed from instruction and guidance to sales. In correspondence with Malone, Dovell sought (in vain, it seems) to discover some pattern visible in the kind of history that sold well. In 1958, he and Malone analyzed the books sold through the club from 1955-1957 hoping to

¹²⁴ DM 12712-b, Box 37, HBC Reviews, 1953-62.

find a topic or theme that readers would want more of, but, as far as they could tell, no form of logic determined a book's popularity. Thus it would be impossible to predict which new books would sell well and which would not. Ten years earlier, DeVoto had warned Dovell that if he attempted such an enterprise (wrong-minded, of course, in DeVoto's view) this would most certainly be the case – otherwise publishers would have developed and stuck with a successful formula long before then.¹²⁵

For the publishers and the rest of the business office, this shift to focus primarily on salability may not have been a significant change at all. But for the historians, who through their selection process determined the philosophy of the club, the shift in emphasis meant the abandonment of loftier objectives to the profit motive. Partly this resulted from the change in personnel; but through the first ten years of the new board's tenure Malone and company continued to use rhetoric similar to that of DeVoto's group when discussing the club's purpose. Only later did they abandon the language that connected the contemporary world with the history they peddled. In an advertisement for the club in the mid-1950s, Malone assured subscribers that the historians were all "close observers of the contemporary scene," interested in the "story of their country" as it pertained to American engagement with "problems in the modern world." Whether this attitude had somehow carried over from the DeVoto period, or whether Malone for a time shared these sentiments, by the 1960s the club

¹²⁵ DM 12712-a, Box 3, Folder "1954-1959, History Book Club," List of Books with Sales, 1955-1957; Dovell to Malone, n.d. (1958).

had retreated fully into the past and reversed the founding principle that history should confront the present.¹²⁶

Like the purveyors of the past described in the other chapters, postwar historians also selected from the overabundant wealth of recorded history only a few gems they judged worthy of the public's attention. In many respects, the HBC business model rested on the same shaky foundation as that of *Cavalcade of America*, which is profiled in the next chapter. Both chose episodes from history that not only served their agendas, but would also, they hoped, appeal to a wide audience. Similar to the demise of Du Pont's television program, the HBC devolved into an enterprise that relinquished its goal of education (or propaganda) in order to appeal more directly to presumed consumer tastes.

This shift also had a deeper significance for the role of history in society. DeVoto's board believed that history should challenge the reader's conception of the past. Consequently, they selected only those works that offered some new information, interpretation, or perspective on historical events, and often on contemporary events as well. The whole point of the enterprise, as far as they were concerned, was to make a difference in the way that Americans thought. That could only be achieved through books that provoked and stimulated new ideas. In contrast, in their selections, Malone's board tried to appeal to America's collective memory. By choosing books that they hoped would sell well, the later editors showed less interest in confronting Americans with a challenging past than in helping readers to access a past that they already knew. Rather than following the earlier editors' example, and further deconstructing the narrative of American history into its rougher

¹²⁶ DM 12712-a, Box 3, Folder "HBC 1954-1958," Malone draft for Dovell, August 1, 1956.

components, showing confrontations between “elites” and the “people,” or exploring the conflict between patriotic collective memory and more critical history, they suggested works like Malone’s own biography of Jefferson: History that, while very well done, nevertheless reinforced the idea of a national heritage comprised mainly of Founding Fathers and later president-monuments. In other words, they offered a kind of history that would be very unlikely to challenge collective memory or affect contemporary social thought in any meaningful way. Instead they constructed a past that was usable in only the limited sense that it reassured the history buff and the patriot – and also generated some income for the historians and publishers.

The story of the HBC thus offers a paradigm of how history, when attempting to appeal to a broad audience, becomes subjugated to memory. The subsequent chapters follow this basic plot outline in their own unique ways. These popular “historians” attempted to create and disseminate their own historical interpretations. Instead, confronted by the public’s assumptions and desires (i.e. “the market”), their histories took on characteristics of memory, mythology, and iconography, and their educative missions devolved into catering to every recognized part of an increasingly segmented audience.

The next two chapters examine how two competing radio and television history programs, *Cavalcade of America* and *You Are There*, attempted to balance their educational or propaganda objectives with the need to appeal to a large audience. Despite very significant differences, in both of their stories the interaction of history and popular culture yielded similar and now familiar results. Each series began as an effort to influence social thought, transformed into merely popular

entertainment, and finally disappeared altogether as television matured during the later 1950s into a medium that made no pretensions of offering the public anything other than that which the majority seemed likely to watch.

Chapter 3: “Where Time Has No Meaning”: History as Myth on Du Pont’s *Cavalcade of America*

“Tucked away in a pleasant corner of space, away where Time has no meaning – there’s a part of the Promised Land reserved for Americans, where all comers are allowed to wander anywhere they want...”¹²⁷

So began a 1941 *Cavalcade of America* radio play about Davy Crockett.

These words also serve as an introduction to the *Cavalcade* itself. Blending together history and myth, accentuating nationalism and patriotism, and defining who and what belongs in the American story, the Du Pont Company’s two decade-long public lesson in American history did all this while reshaping the past into one long argument against government regulation. This was history made into something useful, both for the sponsor and for many other Americans, who saw the series as an educational opportunity that might encourage civic renewal through greater knowledge of the nation’s history. Educators, historians, and community leaders looked to Du Pont to provide what that they felt lacking – first on radio, later on television: the educational programming that had generally failed to flow forth as expected from these new technologies. Following the endorsement of prominent historians, schoolteachers across the country used *Cavalcade* films and phonographs to instruct their students in American history. Additionally, millions of Americans tuned in to the series on their own radio and television sets, to learn more about their own shared past from their de facto history teachers at Du Pont. The popularity of the program raises questions about how a carefully calculated propaganda campaign by one of the largest and most visible corporations in the United States could have been

¹²⁷ Hagley Library (HL), Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, “Davy Crockett,” Number 227.

so widely accepted as an educational tool for teaching American history (or even accepted *as* history in itself).

This mythic history retold tales from America's past, especially stories that celebrated individualism, the benevolence of big business, and a traditional America where men and women possessed "the consoling knowledge that no government taboos would interfere with their progress."¹²⁸ The program emphasized Du Pont's "contributions to people's welfare and happiness" and also elucidated the "fundamental religious, social, ethical, political and economic principles" which fostered (past, present, and future) the environment wherein the corporation thrived.¹²⁹ *Cavalcade* generally used familiar historical moments, but reconfigured the stories into usable fables. Through this process, history lost both context and chronology. No matter how "authentic" the production details, charming stories from the olden days proved a poor substitute for history. *Cavalcade of America's* highly selective picking and choosing from the past to find the desired lessons for the present bears close resemblance, in both act and consequence, to combing a religious text for a single verse that supports or refutes a particular argument. The failure to consider how the anecdote fits into the larger "text," including contradictory passages (whether of verse or of time), determines that any discovered meaning must have come from the one doing the choosing rather than from the broader text itself.

¹²⁸ Carl Carmer, ed., *The Cavalcade of America: The Deeds and Achievements of the Men and Women Who Made Our Country Great* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Co., Inc., 1956), viii.

¹²⁹ HL, Accession 1803, Box 11, Folder 29, "Suggested Presentation on the Purpose and Objectives of the *Cavalcade* of America – For Use at Sales Meetings – Prepared Internally" (July, 1950); Accession 1803, Box 26, Folder 11.

“Men do not actually search history to avoid the mistakes of the past,” wrote Thurman Arnold in 1937. Rather, said the head of the Justice Department’s Antitrust Division, “they seek convenient analogies to show the dangers in failing to adopt the creed which they advocate.”¹³⁰ Arnold’s words in *Folklore of Capitalism* could almost have been instructions for Du Pont’s *Cavalcade* instead of the critique of such kinds of “history” that he meant it to be, so closely did the series follow this agenda. David Lowenthal’s explication of the differences between history and heritage provides another useful way to think about this series, which was billed as history but better resembled Lowenthal’s definition of heritage. Heritage works with “exclusive myths of origin and continuance,” he writes, “endowing a select group with prestige and common purpose.”¹³¹ Certainly this was both objective and function of *Cavalcade of America*, which identified suitable heroes and legends and then linked them to both its corporate sponsor and its national radio and television audience. In fact, some episodes dealt quite openly with the question of admittance *into* the “cavalcade of American history” – who belonged, who had to be left outside the imagined boundary, and what behaviors made the difference (not a merely academic exercise in the age of HUAC).

Other historians have written about the *Cavalcade*, but only in the limited terms of corporate advertising efforts. In particular, the works of Elizabeth Fones-

¹³⁰ As head of the anti-trust division of Franklin Roosevelt’s justice department, Arnold initiated 180 antitrust cases between 1938 and 1942, about half the number prosecuted in the previous 50 years. David A. Hounshell and John Kenly Smith, Jr., *Science and Corporate Strategy: Du Pont R&D, 1902-1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 346; Thurman Arnold, *The Folklore of Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), 10-11.

¹³¹ Heritage is also, as Michael Kammen argues, “an alternative to history” which accentuates only the positive. Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 626; David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 128.

Wolf, Roland Marchand, William Bird, Jr., and Howell John Harris have situated the Du Pont series within the larger pre- and postwar public relations campaigns against the New Deal regulatory state and for “free enterprise.”¹³² Bird also traces the development of increasingly sophisticated corporate advertising strategies that eventually allowed Du Pont President Lamont du Pont and other corporate executives to grasp the bottom-line value of indirect campaigns and seemingly unfocused programs like *Cavalcade*.¹³³

Michael Kammen argues that a democratization of tradition and a renewed emphasis on referencing the past occurred during the 1920s and 1930s. Other works agree with this assessment, noting the proliferation of popular historically themed parks like Colonial Williamsburg and Ford’s Greenfield Village in the former decade, and attempts to position the New Deal (and the left) in the American tradition during the latter. Following an emphasis in the 1930s on more accessible theater and other forms of performance, the decade also saw a broader focus on theatricality as a way of making the past more appealing to the general public.¹³⁴ The *Cavalcade* that began in the thirties in a way exemplifies that “democratization.” Although it hired “experts” (historians) to check scripts for inaccuracies, the show’s creators and its audience hailed from outside of the historical profession.

¹³² Marchand described capital’s efforts to link the postwar corporation with a mythological small-town past but stopped short of either analyzing the specific texts or exploring how that past competed and interacted with other contemporary popular histories Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Howell John Harris, *Right to Manage: Industrial Relations Policies of American Business in the 1940s* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

¹³³ William Bird, Jr., *“Better Living”: Advertising, Media, and the New Vocabulary of Business Leadership, 1935-1955* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999).

¹³⁴ Kammen, 300, 410, 421, 423; Richard Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 262-268.

Sponsored solely by Du Pont and produced by the advertising firm of Batton, Barton, Durstine and Osborne (BBDO) – a typical arrangement in early radio and television – *Cavalcade* represented a significant part of a larger project to redefine America in terms that suited business. According to Bird, the series was the “foremost popular expression of business leadership to survive the election of 1936.” These efforts at persuasion largely failed during the 1930s, a decade during which Du Pont faced one public humiliation after another, but the series’ steady persistence prepared the way for greater success in the postwar years. Thus, continuities exist from 1935 through 1957 and it would be impossible (and inaccurate) to analyze the postwar *Cavalcade* without first understanding its prewar origins. Because the fundamental issues and concerns that motivated Du Pont’s campaign never really changed (even if immediate crises sometimes necessitated specific responses), the basic philosophy, apparent in episodes from across the decades, remained fairly consistent.¹³⁵

So did the exemplary heroes that the series identified as worthy of remembering: those Americans whose individual efforts introduced some measure of progress – usually material. Not surprisingly, the series drew many of its protagonists from the business world. Prominent scientific and political figures also appeared regularly. One type of hero *Cavalcade* generally *avoided* was the man or woman that questioned authority – generally, but not always. John Brown made it onto (but not quite into) the *Cavalcade*, and so did many women who questioned their inferior

¹³⁵ Du Pont concerned itself with public opinion despite the fact that the company sold few products directly to the public because of a growing recognition in the 1930s that politics – and voters – could greatly affect their business. Richard Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew Bruce Barton and the Making of Modern America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005), 146.

positions in society.¹³⁶ But there was a fine line between doing one's part to advance the grand march of the *Cavalcade of America* and gumming up the works with protest. Overall, things moved in the right direction – as they naturally should, this being America – with just a little nudge here or there by some responsible, well-mannered citizen. But any social issues left unresolved in America in 1940 or 1950 could not be addressed, even historically, on *Cavalcade*.¹³⁷ With rare exception, African American history was avoided at least partly for this reason. Political action could be celebrated in the past but only if Du Pont would also welcome similar actions in the present. Service and engagement (i.e., supporting the Cold War) could be reinforced by lessons from the past, but historical subjects that suggested controversy or disruption in the present were left out.

Cavalcade of America debuted in the fall of 1935, as the New Deal seemed poised to dramatically change the economic climate (and as the Communist Party opened itself up to cooperation with liberals as part of a Popular Front opposed to fascism and its supporters). At the same time, Du Pont faced an actively angry and hostile public. The Great Depression had turned opinion very much against “big business” – a group that certainly included Du Pont. To further sink Du Pont's reputation, the company became known as a “sinister symbol of war-making” following the publication of *Merchant of Death*, a Book-of-the-Month selection in 1934 (and appearing in short form in *Fortune* and *Reader's Digest*). In 1935 the Nye

¹³⁶ *Cavalcade* treated John Brown well, but ultimately allowed both Lincoln (“I reckon old Brown will go down in history as about the wrongest right man who ever lived”) and Lee (present at Brown's capture), two men included many times over in the *Cavalcade*, to condemn him. Nevertheless, *Cavalcade* saluted his spirit of “principle and conviction.” HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, no. 204, “John Brown of Ossawatomie,” December 11, 1940.

¹³⁷ This is perhaps the foremost difference between *Cavalcade* and *You Are There*, which did address troubling contemporary issues in almost every episode.

Committee on World War I profiteering held congressional hearings to interrogate Du Pont and other munitions manufacturers.¹³⁸

World War I transformed Du Pont from a large corporation into a global economic force. Gross revenue increased to ten times its prewar amount.¹³⁹ The war also enriched the du Pont clan while hundreds of their underpaid, non-union employees suffered horrible illnesses and painful deaths caused by working with hazardous chemicals in unsafe conditions. More irksome to the Nye Committee, however, was that Du Pont drove hard bargains for its gunpowder, first with the Allies and later with the U.S. government. The company also managed to secure public funding for its wartime factory expansions, yet kept all of the extraordinary profits in the family. And most troubling of all, the du Ponts used their money and influence to push the United States toward a declaration of war.¹⁴⁰

The du Pont family also announced their antipathy toward President Roosevelt through the creation and funding of the American Liberty League (and a number of more radical right wing groups like the KKK-dominated Southern Committee to Uphold the Constitution).¹⁴¹ Several leading du Ponts voted for Roosevelt in 1932, including the brothers Pierre, Irénée, and Lamot du Pont (then the former president,

¹³⁸ HL, Accession 1662, Administrative Papers, Box 4, Folder "1937," Letter from Dixon Ryan Fox to Roy Durstine, undated, probably March 1937; Bird, 66.

¹³⁹ Davis Dyer and David B. Sicilia, *Labors of a Modern Hercules: The Evolution of a Chemical Company* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1990), 89.

¹⁴⁰ Business historian Alfred Dupont Chandler argues in favor of Du Pont's claim to have profited at an insignificant rate on war production. Chandler also argued that Pierre du Pont, then company president, hoped and worked for peace, since war had typically created more uncertainty than profit for business. But as Gerald Colby demonstrates, the war accounted for 85% of Du Pont's business. More important, despite the uncertainties, for Du Pont, war always ushered in periods of dramatic expansion and profit. Pierre easily managed the return to peacetime levels of production, firing 37,000 workers at Christmastime in 1918, and 70,000 more at war's end. Gerald Colby, *Du Pont Dynasty* (Secaucus, New Jersey: Lyle Stuart Inc., 1984), 182-185, 195, 199-200; Alfred D. Chandler, Jr. and Stephen Salsbury, *Pierre S. Du Pont and the Making of the Modern Corporation*, (Washington, DC: Beard Books, 2000), 393-400.

¹⁴¹ Colby, 354-357.

chairman, and president of the company, respectively). Ending prohibition (in order to replace the income tax with a liquor tax) and the lure of a partnership between business and government, which offered both stability and control to the nation's largest corporations, drew the usually reliable Republicans into the Democratic camp – but only for a moment. The New Deal favored workers too much. Pierre du Pont, who served on the National Labor Board, dissented when the board ruled in favor of collective bargaining, then resigned from that appointment as well as his position on the NRA's Industrial Advisory Board in early 1934. By then, the other du Ponts had already rejected Roosevelt.¹⁴²

In 1935-1936, the du Ponts offered the most visible business opposition to the president. Irénée set to building the Liberty League, and the family contributed more than \$855,000 to the 1936 campaign of Republican Alf Landon. Both the League and the election were disasters for the du Ponts, and Roosevelt's easy victory was also seen as their own crushing defeat. Even Delaware, the family's virtual fiefdom, voted for Roosevelt.¹⁴³ In the aftermath, emboldened autoworkers led a successful sit-down strike at General Motors, then a vital part of Du Pont's empire.¹⁴⁴ By then, only 20% of the public held a favorable opinion of Du Pont.¹⁴⁵

Having failed miserably in traditional politics, yet realizing that public opinion mattered more than ever, Du Pont sought an alternative approach. Bruce

¹⁴² Ibid, 308, 314-319.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 355-357.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 377. In *Pierre S. du Pont and the Making of the Modern Corporation*, Chandler and Salsbury relate how Pierre du Pont took control of General Motors at the end of World War I and connected the companies through stock ownership and board memberships. General Motors provided between 20 and 30% of Du Pont's income, either through stock dividends or direct purchase of Du Pont products, and the carmaker was Du Pont's largest customer.

¹⁴⁵ HL, Accession 1662, Administrative Papers, Box 3, Folder C24, Letter from Bruce Barton of BBDO to Lamot Du Pont, President, E.I. Du Pont De Nemours & Company, Inc., May 18, 1935.

Barton, already famous as a genius of advertising, as a Republican Party activist, and as author of the books *A Young Man's Jesus*, *The Man Nobody Knows*, and hundreds of articles, wrote to Lammot du Pont in the spring of 1935 about the obvious image problem the company faced. Public opinion, whether due to “hysteria” or “decadence,” had turned almost 100% against war, and that same public strongly associated Du Pont with, not only war, but war-mongering. Barton compared the negative opinion to “infected tonsils,” and BBDO to the doctor who advised removing those tonsils before they “hurt you” – in Roosevelt’s America, one never knew “when or how it might hurt.”¹⁴⁶ For a remedy, BBDO proposed to change Du Pont from “merchants of death” to the people who brought you “Better Things for Better Living... Through Chemistry,” the slogan devised by Barton and adopted by Du Pont for the first *Cavalcade* broadcast. Barton convinced Du Pont that he could “create a vast constituency... willing to accept readily anything that bears the Du Pont name.”¹⁴⁷

The trick would be to do these things without seeming to engage in self-promotion. By employing the historical trope, and presenting “educational”

¹⁴⁶ General Motors and Du Pont shared several board members and the companies held close enough ties that the Justice Department brought an antitrust suit against them both in the 1950s. Interestingly, in 1932 Lammot du Pont pushed to have GM literature available in Du Pont waiting rooms and other company areas, hoping that Du Pont employees and customers would get the message that they would “do well to use General Motors’ cars.” HL, Accession 1662, Administrative Papers, Box 3, Folder C24, Memo from Lammot du Pont, President, to William A. Hart, Advertising Director, Du Pont de Nemours & Company, Inc., September 27, 1932; Letter from Bruce Barton of BBDO to Lammot du Pont, President, E.I. Du Pont De Nemours & Company, Inc., May 18, 1935.

¹⁴⁷ Years later, BBDO would produce a history of *Cavalcade of America* that passed over the original purpose of countering a negative image by suggesting Du Pont’s mid-1930s need to expand its already *positive* image. In this version, Americans already appreciated Du Pont, but not enough. BBDO answered Du Pont’s need by presenting two proposed radio programs to Du Pont’s Board of Directors. The Board chose *Cavalcade* over a “sentimental” half-hour monologue narrated by Channing Pollock. HL, Accession 1803, Box 11, Folder 42, BBDO-written history of *Cavalcade of America* for article in *Sponsor*; HL, Accession 1662, Administrative Papers, Box 3, Folder “Advertising Dept, July 1932-Dec1935,” Barton to Lammot du Pont, May 18, 1935; Bird, 68.

programming (rather than advertising or propaganda) Du Pont might avoid the trap. In 1938, Lamnot explained how, through *Cavalcade*, the company minimized the suggestion of “paid self-advertising” or “tooting one’s own horn” and most importantly, any hint that, as he put it, the “‘economic royalists’ were ganging up.” Learning from Du Pont’s earlier public relations disasters, in the late 1930s Lamnot refused all requests for more overt cooperation and coordination from the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and other organizations, which might have exposed *Cavalcade* as propaganda.¹⁴⁸

The series opened on October 9, 1935 with “No Turning Back.” The first lesson dealt, appropriately enough, with the Pilgrims. Establishing a pattern for the series, the broadcast explicitly linked the Pilgrims’ refusal to return with their ship to England with, in the second half, present-day descendants refusing to leave their midwestern farm after brutal dust storms and a plague of grasshoppers of biblical scale had devastated their crops. Thus, perseverance and self-reliance, two defined traits of Americans – as necessary in 1935 as three hundred years before. In the hundreds of broadcasts that followed, Du Pont and BBDO interpreted the past to emphasize these and other desirable traits, as well as those aspects of American

¹⁴⁸ HL, Accession 1662, Administrative Papers, Box 4, Folder “1938,” Letter from Lamnot du Pont to Lawrence K. Watrous, February 18, 1938; Letter from Lawrence K. Watrous to Lamnot du Pont, February 11, 1938. This letter is significant not so much for its suggestion of a new radio program (based on *Cavalcade*) that would relate the life stories of famous businessmen, but for a sentence that *equates* the situation of Jews in Germany to that of business in FDR’s America; Letter from Lamnot du Pont to W.H. Logan, July 27, 1938; Accession 1662, Administrative Papers, Box 4, Folder “January 1941 to July 1952,” Letter from Lamnot du Pont to R.R. Deupree, President, The Procter and Gamble Company, September 16, 1946; Letter from Mabel Randolph Brooks to Lamnot du Pont, April 1944; Letter from Lamnot du Pont to Mabel R. Brooks, June 7, 1944; the radio-monitoring program was proposed by B.E. Hutchinson, Chairman of the Finance Committee, Chrysler Corporation, in a letter to Lamnot du Pont, February 4, 1946; Lamnot du Pont to B.E. Hutchinson, February 13, 1946; Folder “1938,” William A. Hart, head of the Advertising Department at Du Pont, agreed with Lamnot du Pont in a July 26, 1938 memo that each company had better stick to its own advertising, though “having in mind all the time the main objectives, to help industry be better understood and appreciated.”

history deemed suitable to their contemporary objectives of deregulation, lower taxes, weaker labor unions, and a reversal of the New Deal tide. In so doing, they worked to shape collective memory and redraw the boundaries of acceptable political, social and economic activity.¹⁴⁹

BBDO used the word “*Cavalcade*” to mean a “moving panorama of the historical characters and episodes entering into the formation of the American character.”¹⁵⁰ The title had originated with NBC’s Stanley Hoflund High, who proposed to NAM the sponsorship of a program called *American Cavalcade* in early 1935.¹⁵¹ This countered the sponsor’s proposal for a series called *The Men Who Made American Industry*. High understood that the public in 1935 was antipathetic to such overtly pro-capital propaganda and thus suggested “an ‘epic of America’ sort of thing” that would offer “just as good a chance there for propaganda and a whale of a lot better chance that the public will swallow it.” As High explained to Lamot du Pont, *American Cavalcade* would not dwell on opposition to the New Deal; rather “the material will be historical.” But instead of dramatizing “events, as such,” it would “dramatize those American qualities which dominated the events.” High’s vision of those qualities proved to be too moderate for both Du Pont and NAM, and he soon departed the network to write speeches for FDR, famously coining the phrase “economic royalists” for the 1936 campaign (in reference to his former clients).¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ HL, Accession 1803, Box 12, Folder 3, Lyman Dewey introduction to the preview of the first television *Cavalcade*, September 12, 1952.

¹⁵⁰ HL, Accession 1803, Box 11, Folder 42, BBDO history of *Cavalcade of America* produced for article in *Sponsor* magazine.

¹⁵¹ The word cavalcade had recently become well known from Noel Coward’s play *Cavalcade*, the movie version of which won best picture for 1932.

¹⁵² Bird, 84. Interestingly, as written by High, Samuel I. Rosenman, and Thomas Corcoran, FDR’s national convention speech in Philadelphia inverted the whiggish *Cavalcade* story. The President recalled that since 1776, “man’s inventive genius released new forces in our land which reordered the

NAM sponsored the program eventually titled *American Adventure*, which ran on NBC for three months in the summer of 1935, but it was the Du Pont series that started in October (on CBS) that followed (or plagiarized) High's plan.¹⁵³

The series, designed to be educational as well as entertaining, ran on radio from 1935 to 1953 (suffering cancellation by Du Pont's Executive Committee twice in the late thirties) and on television from 1952 to 1957. As soon as CBS started broadcasting, NBC began an effort to win the Du Pont account back; after 1939 the show aired on NBC radio.¹⁵⁴ Much about this program was unique in the world of commercial media, including the high level of control and responsibility over content exercised by the sponsor, the involvement of prominent historians, and the distribution of episode soundtracks and films to schoolchildren. Du Pont wanted a program that would stand apart from the crowd and earn the company critical praise. The company never considered this to be merely a sponsorship; Du Pont wanted the public to associate the company with an admired *institution* in the world of broadcasting.¹⁵⁵

lives of our people... The age of machinery, of railroads; of steam and electricity; the telegraph and the radio; mass production, mass distribution – all of these combined to bring forward a new civilization and with it a new problem for those who sought to remain free. For out of this modern civilization economic royalists carved new dynasties. New kingdoms were built upon concentration of control over material things. Through the new uses of corporations, banks and securities, new machinery of industry and agriculture, of labor and capital – all undreamed of by the fathers – the whole structure of modern life was impressed into this royal service.”

¹⁵³ Bird, 62-66. Durstine later explained that CBS offered much better terms, allowing BBDO control of the program and better placement through affiliates. Bruce Barton had prevailed in convincing the Executive Committee of the soundness of the program over Lamot's initial objections.

¹⁵⁴ WHS, National Broadcasting Company Records, Correspondence, 1921-1942, Box 67, Folder 81, “Du Pont's *Cavalcade of America*,” memo from Stanley High to John Royal, October 10, 1935; memo from Bertha Brainard to John Royal, October 11, 1935. The original *Cavalcade* creator, Stanley High, was among those at NBC who expressed their dissatisfaction with the first *Cavalcade* program aired on CBS. “I thought it was terrible,” he wrote, adding, “The action was slow and the climax sounded like a page out of Horatio Alger – and a poor page at that.”

¹⁵⁵ HL, Accession 1803, Box 11, Letter from Robb M. De Graff to Wayne Tiss of BBDO, August 22, 1955. De Graff wrote, “One of the unique things about ‘*Cavalcade* is the control that we (the agency and ourselves) have exercised over story suggestions.” Du Pont refused many promising offers over

BBDO publicists assured that *Cavalcade* advertisements and hundreds of newspaper columns around the country asserted the series' allegiance to historical fact. Critics responded to this effort with praise and awards for the radio series, and later declared *Cavalcade* to be among the "best of TV."¹⁵⁶ The claim of disinterested education and history was bolstered by the prominent historians brought in to consult on the show, beginning with Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr. and Dixon Ryan Fox, and continuing with Frank Monaghan, James Truslow Adams, Marquis James, Julian Boyd, Francis Ronalds and folklorist Carl Carmer.¹⁵⁷ Each of these men shared an interest in the wider diffusion of historical knowledge and a revitalization of civic engagement. Fox and Schlesinger edited two book versions of the early *Cavalcade*; Carmer edited a longer, full color edition in 1955; Monaghan, who joined following four years as research director and historian to the New York World's Fair of 1939, linked his work on the *Cavalcade* with his other postwar project, the "Freedom Train" of 1948.

Fox's foreword to the first *Cavalcade* book reveals something of the historians' hopes for the *Cavalcade* and their reasons for participating in its

the years from producers and networks because the company insisted on total control and ownership of its series.

¹⁵⁶ HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 16, clipping from *Variety*, October 22, 1953.

¹⁵⁷ Bruce Barton may himself have been more involved in the history and philosophy behind *Cavalcade* than one would at first think likely. Barton had given a speech he called, "They Knew Not Joseph," – based, like much of his writing, on his own or his father's interpretations of the Bible – which argued the necessity of constantly re-educating the ever-changing public. If the people had difficulty recognizing their messiah, Barton could help point them in the direction of his clients. New consumers (and voters) emerged every day, and really affecting mass thought and behavior meant a consistent, long-term, educative approach to advertising. Though never trained as a historian, Barton considered teaching the subject before he got into journalism or advertising, and was offered a fellowship at Wisconsin by Frederick Jackson Turner. As a young journalist, he interviewed H.G. Wells, historian and novelist and one of the greatest influences on Barton according to his own estimation. The Reverend William Barton, Bruce's father, researched and wrote about Lincoln extensively. His study of Lincoln's youthful relationship with Ann Rutledge may have had some connection to the several *Cavalcade* episodes that dealt with the subject. Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew* 31, 65.

production. Wrote Fox, “We thought that one of the best uses [the public] could make of a half hour once a week would be to listen to a series of spoken dramas which revealed the spirit of America.” Schlesinger, a vocal supporter of the New Deal, had reservations, writing Fox, “The connection with the Du Pont company bothers me somewhat.” Specifically, he worried about becoming “involved in an undesirable type of propaganda,” i.e. the “glorification of the employer who maintains the ‘American system’ of the open shop against the labor unions.” He also objected to the characterization of the show as “true stories” and instead thought of it as “telling stories about true incidents.” In communications with his colleague, Schlesinger often downplayed both their roles and the series’ importance. In contrast, Fox said they were doing real historical work, important “for the American tradition and particularly for the DuPont Company as an American institution.”¹⁵⁸

Fox’s declaration that *Cavalcade* was “what people ought to want” best reflects the attitude of the historians associated with the show: history, generally speaking, was something the public could use a bit more of.¹⁵⁹ Monaghan later explained his role, saying, “In those days of world chaos it was increasingly important that every student become better acquainted with the colorful and sturdy traditions of America’s past. That was the basic concept of *Cavalcade of America...*”

¹⁵⁸ Bird, 72, 75, 81.

¹⁵⁹ Fox, vii. Fox’s concern with what the people “ought” to tune in to reflected one side of the same attitude with which Du Pont and BBDO approached their show. Whereas Du Pont looked at *Cavalcade* as the right kind of education, ideologically, for the listening public, Fox and the other consultant historians - as well as countless other educators who admired the program - seem to have been excited by the mere fact of *any* educational program going out over the airwaves. The politics behind the history never got much attention from the historians beyond some cheerful statements about the “patriotic faith” that motivated both the historical research and the series. Like Fox, Carmer edited a book version of the series, his published with full color illustrations in 1956. Carmer’s association with the program is easy to understand given his own work collecting and telling stories that explain and define America, especially *Listen for the Lonesome Drum*, his classic folklore collection published in 1939.

The possibilities for history education on the radio ultimately won Schlesinger over, as they would the other historians hired as consultants (of course they also received compensation for their participation). He still thought it was propaganda, but “not in any objectionable sense.”

BBDO initially promoted the series as the “new social history” with which Fox and Schlesinger had become associated because of their co-editorship of the twelve-volume *A History of American Life*.¹⁶⁰ When the two historians signed on with Du Pont, the American Historical Association (AHA) was seeking its own radio program. Fox thought the *Cavalcade* would be just what the AHA desired, “though, of course, the Association is not being brought into it.” In fact, the AHA as well as other prominent historians continued to try (and fail) to mount historical series on the radio; interestingly, one of the biggest obstacles was *Cavalcade*’s success.¹⁶¹ When Allan Nevins, then President of the Society of American Historians, launched his own series in 1954, critics pointed out that it was “not an original series.” There had been “others of this general type, and of these, Du Pont’s ‘Cavalcade of America’ is probably the most outstanding.” Nevins insisted that “to comprehend their responsibilities, their national ideals, their capacities under stress, Americans need a better knowledge of their past.”¹⁶² But Du Pont had already said the same thing.

¹⁶⁰ Bird, 72-73.

¹⁶¹ Martin Grams, *The History of the Cavalcade of America* (Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 1998), 7; Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 56.

¹⁶² HL, Accession 1803, Box 7, Folder 5, “American History to Take to the Air,” *Long Island Press*, May 26, 1954; Ian Tyrrell relates several other such efforts by academic historians in “Historians in Public in the Early Televisual Age: Academics, Film, and the Rise of Television in the 1950s and 1960s,” *The Maryland Historian* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 41-60.

Du Pont and Education

“To students in schools and colleges and to all thoughtful persons who would grasp the meaning of our troubled times, the program [Cavalcade] offers complete authenticity for illuminating material of absorbing interest.”

- Dr. James R. Angell, President Emeritus of Yale¹⁶³

While the historians appreciated the opportunity to spread the gospel, history for history’s sake was hardly what Du Pont had in mind. Beyond *Cavalcade*, Lammot Du Pont involved the company with other education efforts, and with other historical activities that served similar purposes to that of the series. Education, he said, was the “only preventive, or cure, for attacks on industry” perpetrated during the 1930s by the “horde of alphabetical organizations.”¹⁶⁴ As Chairman of NAM’s Educational Cooperation Committee, Lammot oversaw business efforts to weed out negative depictions of advertising and business from the nation’s schools. This coincided with a wider textbook controversy and fears of “subversion” in schools (and elsewhere) in the 1930s, but Lammot’s interest also derived from his concern about public opinion toward Du Pont. His *Cavalcade* historical consultant, Dixon Ryan Fox, warned Lammot of the hostility directed specifically at the company by American colleges who taught students to hate the du Ponts.¹⁶⁵

Under Lammot’s leadership, the education committee attempted to walk a thin line between censoring free speech and allowing perceived attacks on capitalism to go unchecked in the schools. Rather than create a textbook blacklist, as the American Federation of Advertisers had done, the committee drew up broad guidelines for distribution to educators. These stipulated that textbooks *could* explain controversial

¹⁶³ Testimonial advertisement reprinted in Grams, 18.

¹⁶⁴ HL, Accession 1662, Box 2, Folder “Addresses, Lammot du Pont, Chairman of the Board,” “National Association of Manufacturers’ Educational Work,” March 19, 1941.

¹⁶⁵ HL, Accession 1662, Box 4, Folder “1937,” Dixon Ryan Fox to Lammot du Pont, April 3, 1937.

economic or political programs, “provided they are not ADVOCATED;” “favorable” aspects of American capitalism must be included along with “unfavorable;” controversial material should be presented only to mature students; and the “community,” not an individual teacher (who might be a radical), should decide the content of instruction. The questions the committee concerned themselves with were both timeless and particular to the Age of Roosevelt: Should a “factual foundation” be present before children are exposed to controversial interpretations of history? Is some “understanding of traditions behind American institutions” necessary before students can grapple with current issues concerning those institutions? How does society balance fostering “healthy skepticism” against the creation of “morbid cynicism?” Is it necessary to first root oneself in the past? Du Pont knew the answers, and *Cavalcade* should be read as an effort to prepare that foundation, establish that sense of tradition, and explain what it all meant to what they saw as an uneducated yet increasingly powerful public.¹⁶⁶

A confidential memorandum prepared by Lammot’s committee offered explicit suggestions for how to transform students into “citizens” of the sort preferred by the association’s membership. The program’s stated objectives are strikingly similar to those of *Cavalcade*, and suggest even more specifically some solutions to the problems they have identified in public history education. As such, they help to explicate Du Pont’s grander vision of how history related to the economic and political climate of the present. Principally, since the educational system had failed to

¹⁶⁶ HL, Accession 1662, Box 4, Folder “1938,” Advertising Federation of America, *Facts You should Know About Anti-Advertising Propaganda in School Textbooks* (New York: Advertising Federation of America, 1939); Box 2, Folder “NAM,” Speech given in Atlanta, GA by Lammot du Pont about National Association of Manufacturers Educational Work, March 19, 1941.

cultivate the “American Way,” manufacturers needed to assume greater responsibility for public education. The report suggested, first, a “revival” of history that explained the “historical and spiritual foundations of the American system” in such a way that unequivocally encouraged “patriotic pride in our institutions.” Second, the nation’s teachers needed better historical perspective of social and economic issues, which business would provide. The gospel of capitalism must replace the leftist economic theories allegedly being taught. “Academic freedom ends” before criticism of the American political system, which included “free private enterprise,” begins. In fact, free enterprise should be taught and understood as the foundation of representative democracy and religious freedom. Schools should also begin to maintain thorough reports on “character attributes, intelligence and aptitude tests and personal conduct,” which, made available to employers, would help to weed out subversives. The list continued with several more recommendations, including the specialized training of handicapped children, increased educational funding and higher teacher pay (perhaps to make them more solidly bourgeoisie), and allowing students time to participate in religious activities (essential to citizenship).¹⁶⁷

While working with educators – particularly with Teachers College at Columbia University – to instigate these proposals in the curriculum, NAM also distributed 1.5 million “You and Industry” booklets directly to high schools (which were “part and parcel of our capitalistic system”).¹⁶⁸ And of course Du Pont had an

¹⁶⁷ HL, Accession 1662, Box 54, Folder “NAM Educational Cooperation Committee, 12/39-12/40,” “Official Draft of a Memorandum of Industry’s Recommendations for the Improvement of American Educational Methods in the Preparing of Students for Citizenship in a Republic,” June 28, 1939.

¹⁶⁸ HL, Accession 1662, Box 54, Folder “NAM Educational Cooperation Committee, 12/39-12/40” “History of the Activities of the National Association of Manufacturer’s Committee on Educational Cooperation” (undated, circa 1940); “What Does Capital Want for Itself and America? An Address by Charles R. Hook, Chairman, National Association of Manufacturers, before the Annual Convention of

even straighter line to students and the public through *Cavalcade*. Additionally, offensive textbooks could be removed, teachers could be accused of disloyalty, or educators could be brought to Wilmington for reeducation. But all of these would come later.¹⁶⁹

After World War II, research and public relations firms fostered the belief that “left-wingers” taught “false” history in schools and colleges so that companies like Du Pont would engage their services. Their reports suggested that university courses “tend[ed] toward critical evaluation” of capitalism and taught only its shortcomings.¹⁷⁰ Du Pont responded to these reports by increasing its educational advertising during the 1950s. Besides the continued distribution of *Cavalcade of America* films and records, the company distributed job pamphlets in high schools and colleges, produced motion pictures in the fields of science and economics, and donated large sums of grant money that would link the company to other scientific communities. In the mid-fifties the company also started to increase its philanthropic activities, giving about \$300,000 in 1954, over a million in 1957, and two million by 1964.¹⁷¹

the Missouri State Teachers Association, St. Louis, Missouri, November 16, 1939.” The question of what capital wanted, said NAM’s chairman in 1939, was really a question of what every American wants. The answer is, “first and foremost... preservation of our capitalist system, including our educational system.”

¹⁶⁹ In Chapter 7 of *Selling Free Enterprise*, Elizabeth Fones-Wolf tells the story of postwar corporate efforts to reeducate educators through various means, including seminars of several weeks’ length, held at Du Pont and other companies’ plants. There, teachers were instructed in economics courses that explained the benefits of the free enterprise system.

¹⁷⁰ HL, Accession 1803, Box 29, Folder 17, “College Campaign – Surveys 1948, 1954.”

¹⁷¹ HL, Accession 1803, Box 29, Folder 24. The Advertising Department considered advertising in *Scholastic Magazine*, as General Electric and the U.S Air Force had done. Scholastic made a strong pitch to Du Pont, emphasizing a readership of over 7 million students weekly, and an editorial policy that “parallel[ed] your own activities and objectives.” *Boys Life* also courted Du Pont, and advertisers N.W. Ayer & Sons suggested donating a scientist to the Boy Scouts. Most of the money Du Pont gave funded scientific research and academic departments.

During the *Cavalcade*'s final season in 1957, as if to illustrate how Du Pont had used history education to promote conservative, business-friendly politics, Emile F. du Pont, Director of the Employee Relations Department, spoke at the dedication of the Hagley Museum in Delaware. The museum and research library would be built on the site of the abandoned Du Pont powder works on the Brandywine River outside Wilmington. Its dedication culminated two decades of intensive historical work sponsored by Du Pont, primarily but by no means exclusively in the form of the *Cavalcade of America*. This particular du Pont told the assembled guests that "we derive from history maximum benefit only if we learn from it, only if we derive from it truths that we can apply to our own times and our own problems." Here, as on *Cavalcade*, the history sponsored by Du Pont would be functional.

"History is like a mine," he continued. "It serves no useful purpose until the ore is extracted and refined into metal." Yet, converting the idle powder works into a museum would "produce no physical wealth." Extricating himself from this convoluted metaphorical paradox, Du Pont explained to his audience that using the site to demonstrate how the free enterprise system had benefited all Americans would, in fact, be profitable, both for the company and the country. Too many Americans supported laws and regulations that would soon "cripple" large corporations, and the American people "will pay the price for that sort of blunder." The penalties for violation of "natural" economic laws were "inevitable and inescapable"; if the United States continued down the road of regulation, nothing could "keep us secure." Speaking amidst the ruins of the original Du Pont powderworks, Emile Du Pont closed by noting, "The ruins of Greece and Rome,

among others, are stark, if beautiful, reminders that these laws of which I speak should not be trifled with, unless one is prepared to pay the penalty.” A grim picture of the country’s future if Americans failed to learn from the history Du Pont provided.¹⁷²

Defining the *Cavalcade*, Defining America

There is much to recommend in *Cavalcade*, both as history and as public service. Historical consultants made it as “accurate” as possible and many viewers saw the program as an effective method of teaching history. The identifiable lessons for the present included such unobjectionable themes as community and national service, the equality of women, and the inalienable right of free speech. On the other hand, despite the somewhat surprising presence of actors and writers from Group Theatre and other leftist backgrounds, the politics never strayed into even vaguely anti-capitalist territory. Contrary to the reasoning of the anticommunist forces behind the postwar entertainment industry blacklists, the show’s content was never much affected by the left-wing talent that occasionally worked on *Cavalcade*, which included performers such as Carl Sandburg and Orson Welles, and long-term scriptwriter Arthur Miller. As Miller explained, the subjects and themes came from above; writers were well paid but restricted in their work by the sponsor’s objectives. *Cavalcade* could have Ethel Barrymore read Stephen Vincent Benet’s “Listen to the People” and simply delete the lines about “apple-sellers in the streets... the empty

¹⁷² HL, Accession 1410, Du Pont Public Affairs, Box 39, Folder “Hagley Museum,” Dedication of the Hagley Museum by Emile F. du Pont, May 24, 1957).

shops, the hungry men,” and change Benet’s fascist character’s speech promoting “home grown” American fascism “wrapped in cellophane” (a well known Du Pont product) to fascism “wrapped in tissue.”¹⁷³ At any rate, if individual scripts, characters, or lines deviated from the conservative Du Pont political philosophy, assessing the overall effects of two decades of calculated history as presented by Du Pont remains more important.

During the first season the show was divided into two halves, with two distinct yet related stories separated by a brief commercial. Martin Grams, the *Cavalcade*’s chronicler, perceives (correctly) that in these episodes the theme was put forth rather “didactically,” a practice eventually replaced by more entertaining fables. So, for example, the debut on October 9, “No Turning Back,” explicitly linked the “Pilgrims” refusal to return with their ship to England with present-day descendants refusing to leave their midwestern farm. *Variety* thought this first show a bit obvious in its concern “with what America is thinking”; it may “help galvanize the already conservative thinking” into firmer resistance to the New Deal, but it was “hard to believe” the average listener would take heed.¹⁷⁴ These early broadcasts also began and ended with the company’s brand new slogan, “Better Things for Better Living... Through Chemistry,” and a summation of the main point that Du Pont hoped to get across (a technique later abandoned). In the third broadcast, “The Spirit of

¹⁷³ Bird, 110, 114-115. Orson Welles starred in “The Great Man Votes” in December 1941. Carl Sandburg read his own poems on “Native Land,” which also starred Burgess Meredith as the young Sandburg. Arthur Miller, who wrote scripts for *Cavalcade* in the early 1940s, said the program used ambiguity to sell its overall message. Miller had been told to write about the Merritt brothers’ discovery of iron in the Mesabi Range. Rockefeller had obtained the rights to the ore after the Merritts had been unable to get out of debt. Miller didn’t understand why Du Pont would want this story, but was told by Fickett that Du Pont saw this as a story about a large corporation that was able to manage what the two brothers couldn’t handle – in the interests of the country.

¹⁷⁴ Bird, 72.

Competition,” the lead-in neatly expressed the point of the whole series, which was to identify Du Pont with America, and to define America in terms acceptable to Du Pont.

Just as traditions of American character grew up with our nation – so did the Du Pont company grow up with the nation to occupy an increasingly useful place in our economic life. And Du Pont presents “The *Cavalcade of America*” in the belief that the stories of faith and courage you will hear on this program represent an heritage too precious to be forgotten. [...] What trait is more American than the spirit of healthy competition? Friendly rivalry has done much to advance our nation’s progress.¹⁷⁵

At the close of the program, listeners were asked to give thanks “that this inherent quality remains an essential element in our country’s lifeblood.” Indeed, *competition* (of a very specific kind) was one of the key American traits identified throughout *Cavalcade*’s two decades: Competition free of government involvement, competition in which the victor always deserves to win, competition that results in new and better business enterprises and, most important, competition that leads to larger corporations like Du Pont. This theme became even more prevalent during the 1949 antitrust suit brought by the Justice Department against Du Pont. A later television ad that appeared after a 1954 teleplay (as always, in the guise of an educational film) covered the “benefits of free competition” in the nation’s fabric industry, noting that Du Pont had “plenty” of competition, a situation maintained by the distinct *absence* of regulation.¹⁷⁶

Another key *Cavalcade* trait was perseverance, or self-reliance, which meant the refusal of “outside” aid and, often, an unwillingness to migrate – an important

¹⁷⁵ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, Number 3; HL, Accession 1803, Box 11, Folder 42, BBDO history of *Cavalcade of America* for *Sponsor*. The second episode of that program featured the famous 1870 race up the Mississippi between the Robert E. Lee and the Natchez. Betting takes place all over the world – in London an MP argues with his assistant, who asks “Just why are they doing it, sir?” MP: “Americans are always racing and competing...”

¹⁷⁶ HL, Accession 1803, Box 8, untitled folder containing scripts for television commercials in 1954-55 season.

point for a family concerned about the revolutionary potential of millions of displaced workers.¹⁷⁷ Several early episodes suggested that struggling families stay on their farms instead of leaving for the city. “We’re the sticking kind,” says one father. “That’s our heritage.” And, added the announcer, that fundamental belief of sticking it out, no matter what, is “one of America’s real riches.”¹⁷⁸ More to the point, the first *Cavalcade* “Thanksgiving” revealed that, “from the early days of our country, America and her communities have been solving their own problems without asking for outside aid.” As the Mayflower made landfall and the Pilgrims established their colony, the first Americans did for themselves (help from Indians does not count – nor do Indians count as “Americans” in this series). “Thus, even before they set foot on the soil of America, our forebears displayed the spirit of self reliance and as a community successfully faced the problems that confronted them without seeking outside aid.” The condescending morals of these early episodes were almost irrelevant given the circumstances facing many Americans in 1935; how could families “stick it out” on foreclosed farms?¹⁷⁹

The frequently aired “willingness to share” parable similarly supported the notion that “outside aid,” i.e. government assistance, was un-American. The first of

¹⁷⁷ Colby, 344-345. Irénée was particularly vocal about the threat posed by unemployed workers but his brothers also expressed concern, which is why all three felt compelled to take the radical step of voting Democratic in 1932.

¹⁷⁸ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, Number 4. This episode is also a great example of how Du Pont sometimes seamlessly transitioned into the closing advertisement. The farming story led into a technology story about how Du Pont first began to produce “fixed nitrogen” to improve the soil of American farms. Du Pont and BBDO only got better at integrating story and commercial. After episode 13, the first of several episodes about the Declaration of Independence: “The *spirit of independence* is well exercised by the American housewife as she does her daily shopping. A good example of Mrs. Housewife’s firm intention to get the things she buys in first class condition, fresh, clean and sanitary, and to see exactly what she’s buying --- is shown by the *revolutionary* improvements in packaging during recent years, particularly transparent wrapping... [Italics added].”

¹⁷⁹ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, Number 8.

these, broadcast in 1935, recounted tales of disasters during which *individual* Americans donated money, clothes, food, et cetera to help those in need. Clara Barton is present in a few of these stories, probably so that BBDO could use the Red Cross to cross-publicize – a technique used to great effect over the two-decade run. The episode closed with Du Pont’s articulation of the promise of American life: “the naked will always be clothed, the hungry fed, new homes spring up, crops revived, business resumed” – not because of an expansive role for government, but due to self-reliance and individual efforts.¹⁸⁰

Cavalcade also strove to personalize the corporation – to put a specific historical face on the faceless corporate giants of contemporary America. This may have motivated the relatively large number of female lead roles and women’s history episodes since BBDO and Du Pont recognized the need to present a flattering self-portrait to both female and male consumers and voters. The sixth broadcast, “Women’s Emancipation,” celebrated the fact that “American women have taken the lead in assuming women’s proper place in the affairs of the world.” Moreover, as the “purchasing agents of America’s homes,” they play a vital role, “not only politically but economically.” Because of the suffragists heard on that evening’s *Cavalcade*, “today we find women successfully competing with men in every walk of human

¹⁸⁰ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, Number 7. *Cavalcade*’s message in the early, “didactic” episodes was still sometimes confusing. At the end of the second episode of the debut broadcast (Midwestern farmers), after all of the local farming families gather to pray for an end to the plague of locusts, government airplanes fly overhead and begin to spray pesticide. The answer to their prayers and the reward for perseverance thus seems to be a responsive federal government. Similarly, the series’ second episode seemed to call for increased government support of technological development, as it recounted the drama of finding a route through the Sierras for the transcontinental railroad and the first airmail flight over those same mountains a half century later. Yet most of the time individuals (or local communities) triumphed over adversity without government aid (or interference), as demonstrated above. One explanation might be that in the mid-1930s, Du Pont struggled to develop a popular alternative to the New Deal. It becomes much harder to detect any such ambiguity about government in the later years of the *Cavalcade*, especially after the show moved to television in the 1950s.

endeavor,” including literature, the arts, industry, and politics. Now “welcomed as an equal – admitted to her place in the *Cavalcade of America!*”¹⁸¹

While more men figured as protagonists, women made significant contributions to American progress on *Cavalcade*. From the first broadcast women had strong roles to play on *Cavalcade*. Those Pilgrims that had to decide whether to adopt the distinctly American trait of perseverance or to resign themselves to European defeatism followed the lead of the determined Sarah, a widow and mother who is steadfast in her decision to stay. In the second act, a later Sarah again argues for standing fast when the family farm is threatened.

Time and again on the program, female pioneers prove they are made of tougher stuff than their male counterparts. They are quite often widows, that traditionally safe position from which women could engage in activity otherwise reserved for men, but even married women with all-consuming careers were celebrated. Rebecca Lukens, widow and owner of Lukens Steel and Nell Donnelly, wife and founder-owner of a huge garment factory in Kansas City, featured in two similar stories of businesswomen defying sexist stereotypes. As a woman, Donnelly’s rise in garments in the 1930s probably generated far less controversy than Lukens mid-19th century rise in steel, but the broadcasts of their stories both occurred in the 1949-1950 season, years during which we might expect to find Du Pont’s history advocating that women “return” to the home.

Yet, rather than increasing our confusion, the Nell Donnelly episode helps to pinpoint the politics behind *Cavalcade*. This broadcast drew the ire of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union because Donnelly was one of the last

¹⁸¹ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, Number 6.

holdouts in the industry still forcefully resisting unionization. The seemingly liberal point of view about women thus contrasts starkly with the episode's anti-union message. The series' politics were not particularly interested in gender, and were in fact generally supportive of women active in the professional and political world, but they were without question concerned with economics. The series featured women entrepreneurs, women scientists and doctors, and even women activists, but never would these women (at least as portrayed on *Cavalcade*) engage in economically radical activity. Rather, they generously added their previously unwanted talents to the system and devoted their energies to maintaining the status quo.¹⁸²

Radicals such as Margaret Fuller and Anne Hutchinson appeared on the program too, but their presence only served to elucidate a part of what was great about America. In her identifiably American quest "to think and write what I believe," Fuller becomes, first, the editor of *The Dial*, then literary critic for Greeley's *Tribune*, and finally the first American female foreign correspondent.¹⁸³ Similarly, Anne represents an early manifestation of American freedom, even though things end badly for her personally. Portrayed as a vicious, bloodthirsty usurper, John Winthrop attacks Agnes Moorehead's Anne for spreading the "doctrine of free conscience" and

¹⁸² It is not clear whether any unions voiced similar protests over episode number 152, 1939's "Allen Pinkerton." This was the story of "patriots" "who devoted their lives – and are doing so today – to enforcing the guarantee of justice to our citizens." Women of science also appeared on *Cavalcade* on occasion, confirming that women were capable of high-level scientific research. See for example, No. 559, in 1948, "Paging Miss Ellen," which starred Geraldine Fitzgerald as Allen Swallow, graduate of Vassar and MIT, who opened a lab for training women in scientific research.

¹⁸³ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, No. 224. There were other newspaperwoman stories. See No. 175 from 1940, about Anne Newport Royall, a pioneering female newspaper editor.

he orders her banished, in the middle of winter, though he knows it means certain death.¹⁸⁴

In the postwar era, the historical dramas emphasized the wives of successful men admitted to the *Cavalcade*. “The Justice and the Lady,” about Oliver Wendell Holmes and his wife, “Fanny,” exemplified this change. An earlier *Cavalcade* that dealt with Holmes barely mentioned that he had a wife. In this postwar version, the wife makes the man – much to her surprise. As they grow old, Fanny “continued quietly to make his home his castle,” but, as she complains, “Sometimes it’s a bitter fact for a woman to face that the great man in her life would be just as great without her.” Fanny is wrong, of course. On his eightieth birthday, the judge toasts “the lady without whom I should never have survived” or found “the power to write the words.” By staying home and taking care of him, Fanny made her man into the great Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Cavalcade similarly treated Abigail Adams in a 1947 story, “Abigail Opens the White House,” starring the well-known (and left-wing) actress Ida Lupino. Mrs. Adams understood the strain on her husband and “determined to spare him every needless worry.” Though short on money and nice things, she managed to make an attractive home. She “discovered that the success or failure of her counsel rested upon her own capabilities as a hostess.” Rather than acting as an “aloof and dignified First Lady,” Abigail performs as a “loving wife who inspired her husband’s

¹⁸⁴ Winthrop also accuses her of luring the people in with gifts of food (welfare), “which the Lord had denied them for their sins.” He believes she “used her good works to incite the people to rebellion.” Is this an unsubtle attack on Roosevelt and his amassing political power by dispensing largesse to the poor? Anne is the heroine though, and she later warns that those “who are not vigilant of their liberties” will surely lose them. The announcer later clarifies that this story is really about the continuing need to fight for “our democracy and its traditions.” As with several other episodes from 1941, this one seems to be preparing citizens for war.

achievements, comforted him in despair and renewed his courage. Then, as now, the resolute faith of American wives and mothers helped our country weather its most trying times.”¹⁸⁵ Other postwar episodes reinforced the theme of wifely support.¹⁸⁶

While the series aired on the radio, the narrator had to explain to listeners that women’s rights activist Susan B. Anthony was not a “repulsive-looking female,” but rather beautiful and “becomingly-garbed”.¹⁸⁷ Once the series moved to television in 1952, fans could see for themselves just how attractive these feminists were. While not surprising – it is universally acknowledged that only beautiful people appear on American television or in Hollywood films – it is still important to recognize that *Cavalcade* transformed almost all of its historical characters, women and men (but especially women), into dazzlingly attractive heroes.¹⁸⁸ The much-publicized authenticity did not prohibit this idealization through casting and make-up.

The television series also emphasized marital teamwork, which was thought to be of particular interest to female viewers. Many episodes featured the “triumphant husband and wife team” that overcame obstacles together to achieve greatness – for

¹⁸⁵ HL, Accession 1803, Box 3, “Cavalcade Publicity,” “Abigail Opens The White House,” February 24, 1947.

¹⁸⁶ See, for example, the episodes on Ann Zenger, supportive wife of John Peter Zenger. No. 500, “Mother of Freedom,” in 1946, and no. 626, “Remember Anna Zenger,” in 1949. In 1947’s “Builder of the ‘Soo’,” no. 507 “Charles Harvey’s determined efforts, backed by a woman’s faith in his unproven ability, opened the way for the industrial development of a whole new section of America.” HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts.

¹⁸⁷ Hagley Library, Accession 1803, Box B-3, “Radio version of *Cavalcade*,” Program Number 192.

¹⁸⁸ See the television episodes “Petticoat Doctor” and “A Medal for Miss Walker,” available at the Library of Congress (LC), Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division. “A Medal for Miss Walker,” written by future *Rambo: First Blood* writer William Sackheim, starred the very beautiful Maura Murphy as the indefatigable Dr. Mary Walker, the first woman to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. In an episode that also featured future stars Dennis Hopper and DeForrest Kelley, Abraham Lincoln grants Dr. Walker’s request to serve the Union Army (as a contract surgeon, not a commissioned officer) then must fight against sexism in both armies. In “Petticoat Doctor,” Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell (Betty Caulfield, who also brought glamour to her character) fights both gender discrimination in the medical profession and ignorance among the poor in order to begin her medical practice and dispense drugs to an uneducated population. Jack Bennet, who wrote the teleplay, also wrote two *You Are There* episodes, 1957’s “The End of the Dalton Gang,” and 1956’s “Hitler Invades Poland.”

the husband.¹⁸⁹ “Toward Tomorrow,” the Ralph Bunche story, presented a variation on this theme. As usual, the “woman has been consumed to produce a man,” but in this case the woman is Bunche’s grandmother. Still, the expectation was that female viewers would appreciate and identify with the grandmother’s role in sacrificing for “her man.”¹⁹⁰

This episode was a rare exception: African Americans seldom appeared on the television *Cavalcade*, and were heard from only infrequently on radio. Rejecting anything that might embroil the company in controversy, Du Pont steered clear of African American subjects. Native American characters, on the other hand, appeared in many radio scripts before disappearing almost completely when the show moved to television. They were a safer group to caricature than African Americans, but shots of Hollywood Indians would hardly distinguish *Cavalcade* from the lowbrow television programs that Du Pont wanted to stay a class above. Cowboys and Indians did not offer “prestige.”

In the 1930s and 40s radio shows, Indians still had roles to play, as either obliging friends or vicious savages. *Cavalcade* featured an amicable Sacajawea on several broadcasts, beginning with “Courageous Curiosity or the Will to Explore,” in fall 1935. True to its early form, the show’s opening announcement linked Lewis and Clark exploring the unknown continent with Du Pont “exploring unknown realms of science and industry” – both were “bright pages in the history of the nation” and

¹⁸⁹ HL, Accession 1803, Box 4, Folder 50, John Dollard Report on “Mr. Peale’s Dinosaur.”

¹⁹⁰ HL, Accession 1803, Box 4, Folder 48, John Dollard Reports. A similar tale was told in 1948’s “The Exiled Heart,” in which Louisa May Alcott leaves her only love in Poland and returns to America to write “Little Women” and take care of her family. Duty to family, career, and country trumps her personal happiness. Similarly, in “The Proud Way”(1948), 17 year-old Varina Howell “risked her happiness and even her life to meet the challenge of rebuilding a man’s broken spirit. She fought to bring Jeff Davis back from his past... to meet his destiny.”

“good evidence of the finest traits of American character.” Sacajawea proves herself braver than anyone else in the party and receives due credit for assisting the *Cavalcade*’s westward march. In the spring of 1936 the program presented its first male Indian character. After greeting us with, “Ugh. How,” Squanto teaches a white family how to farm corn. Though even less developed than Sacajawea, his role is the same: to assist as best he can the great American expansion.¹⁹¹

In the months leading up to American entry into World War II, Indians appeared with their greatest frequency on *Cavalcade*, usually as violent enemies. For a series that historians have described as deliberately pacifistic, these and many other 1940-1941 *Cavalcade* broadcasts sound a surprisingly martial tone.¹⁹² The utter inaccuracy of that interpretation, as well as the related claim that Du Pont worked to avoid war, explains the discrepancy. In fact, the du Ponts welcomed the massive global rearmament at the end of the 1930s and, as in World War I, profited enormously from World War II.¹⁹³ The pre- and early wartime Indian episodes, which depict Americans at war with a savage adversary that must be beaten and tamed (and eventually must accept American civilization), support the conclusion made by the less hagiographic studies of Du Pont that the company actively sought to capitalize on the deteriorating international situation by rearming not only the Allies, but, to some extent, the Germans too.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, no. 32; no. 241.

¹⁹² Eric Barnouw, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Volume 2: The Golden Web* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 269.

¹⁹³ Hounshell and Smith, 332-333. In *Pierre Du Pont and the Making of the Modern Corporation*, Chandler and Salsbury make the same claim about Du Pont resisting both world wars.

¹⁹⁴ Colby, 385-386. Colby even suggests Du Pont’s complicity in Hitler’s “final solution” based on the price fixing and trade agreements signed between the company and I.G. Farben as late as 1939, when I.G. was both Hitler’s largest financial backer as well as supplier of poison gas to the concentration camps.

These episodes also articulate, dramatically, the vision of Henry Luce's "American Century," also offered in 1941. During that year on *Cavalcade*, Americans defeated the bloodthirsty "Geronimo" (1941) and imposed their law on his people. The white hero of the story also modifies his original view that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian" and accepts that he has an obligation to govern and civilize the Indians. Promised a fair trial, we hear that Geronimo's "land and liberty will be protected." Whites and Indians would be "at peace with each other, from this moment on, for all time."¹⁹⁵ And so it happened, on *Cavalcade of America* at least. Similarly, a 1941 iteration of the Sacajawea story brought the Indian Wars to an idealized conclusion. After Sacajawea threatens to kill Clark, and harangues him for failing to protect her people, Clark (and white America) refutes the charge and promises that "these wrongs you speak of will be made right. They must be." Fortunately, as the narrator explains, "the Great White Father" established a "council of white chiefs" to assuage the Indians' "sorrows" and make everything all right. For a program that prided itself on (and was praised for) its attention to historical detail, the vague conclusion wrapped things up a little too neatly. But continuing the story in specificity would surely have complicated the happy ending rooted in *Pax Americana*.

In November 1941 Henry Fonda and Errol Flynn both performed *Cavalcade* adaptations of their just-released Warner Brothers productions, *Drums Along the Mohawk* and *They Died with Their Boots On*, respectively. The drums of approaching war are indeed audible in Fonda's portrayal of an ordinary farmer, forced by savage Indians into fighting, killing and nearly dying in order to bring

¹⁹⁵ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, "Geronimo," no. 243.

about “a better world for our son to live in.” Flynn played a most courageous, just, and almost prophetic George Armstrong Custer. His oddest lines though came in a wrap-up interview in which he revealed a bizarre conflation of past and present, reality and fiction:

“Flynn: You know it made me kind of nervous working with those Indians. You see they were real Sioux from the Dakota reservation – the actual descendants of the braves who fought the original battle. I kept remembering I was dressed like General Custer, and had my fingers crossed hoping they’d remember I wasn’t really Custer.

Collyer: Well, Errol, it’s good you did or you’d probably be wearing a wig right now.

Flynn: Yeah, a bald one.”

In both of these episodes, whites were outnumbered and attacked by a more powerful enemy.¹⁹⁶ As historian Tom Englehardt argues about Hollywood films about Indians in this period, the oft used ambush, or “last stand” narrative, “flipped history on its head, making the intruder exchange places with the intruded upon.” Thus, he argues, by December 1941, tales like these two episodes had prepared white Americans to understand the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor as another in a long series of unprovoked attacks by darker-skinned peoples.¹⁹⁷

Several other episodes in 1941 also prepared the nation for war, which, again, seems counterproductive to Du Pont’s propaganda objectives.¹⁹⁸ One of the motives

¹⁹⁶ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, nos. 252 and 253.

¹⁹⁷ Tom Engelhardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 39-40.

¹⁹⁸ In October, Paul Muni starred as “Bolivar the Liberator,” “a man who foresaw the need for free men to unite against the forces of tyranny and oppression abroad in the world. Later that month, Claude Rains appeared, to celebrate the life of John Paul Jones and the greatness of the U.S. Navy. *Cavalcade* aired several programs on the “undefended border” and stalwart friendship between the United States and Canada both before and during the war. In 1940, Stephen Vincent Benet’s version, which starred Raymond Massey (the *Cavalcade*’s standard Abraham Lincoln) scolded Europe for ignoring the “lesson which it might profitably have taken.” “John Keats and America” aired as a “symbol of the common concern, the mutual interests and the dual nature which marked the progress of the British and American peoples in the history of civilization.” In 1948, “Incident at Niagara” again presented an opportunity to reflect on the “good-neighbor relations” between Canada and the

behind *Cavalcade* was to demonstrate that the men who ran Du Pont would never push the country into another world war. Yet the content of these episodes and the ubiquity of the theme of necessary wars indicate that the company's objectives had changed by 1940. Assertions by several pro-Du Pont historians to the contrary, the company and the family actively supported Roosevelt's increasing involvement in World War II at the end of the 1930s.¹⁹⁹ Rapprochement between the elite families had already been helped along by the 1937 marriage between Franklin Roosevelt, Jr. and Ethel du Pont. In July 1940, Roosevelt ordered \$20 million of Du Pont's smokeless powder (a month after the company signed munitions deals with France and Britain), the first of many profitable wartime transactions for Du Pont. Lamot led the cheers for the return of the "seller's market." He lectured a NAM meeting that, "They [the government] want what we've got. Good. Make them pay the right price for it." During the war, Du Pont built 54 new plants, with \$1 billion contributed by taxpayers. In addition to explosives, the war demanded unheard of quantities of the company's nylon, paints, dyes, cellophane, insecticide, and many other products.²⁰⁰ As in World War I, Du Pont took advantage of the opportunities presented by the global conflict to expand rapidly and inexpensively. The final frontier was nuclear energy, and Du Pont's successful management of the Manhattan Project brought the company invaluable knowledge, influence, power, and later,

United States through a dramatization of the historical plot by "unscrupulous" Americans who tried to annex Canadian territory. Robert Montgomery discovers and foils this plot. "Today, in a world of suspicion and distrustfulness, the United States and Canada are continuing to strengthen friendly relations by building together for better living." Better living "through chemistry," one would imagine.

¹⁹⁹ Hounshell and Smith, 332.

²⁰⁰ Colby, 387-389.

profit. Du Pont's Crawford Greenewalt oversaw the massive operation, the success of which launched him into the company's presidency.²⁰¹

Beginning in 1940, and then with increasing frequency in 1941, *Cavalcade* aired the historical "reasons" for American involvement in the war. No story was left to wilt in the past when its lessons for the present seemed so vital. However, during the conflict, many *Cavalcade* episodes featured dramatizations of current events (or very recent history), something that occurred only rarely afterward, and never before. For once, contemporary events were as safely devoid of controversy as was the past. Most of the historical episodes also referred in some way to the war. On more than one occasion *Cavalcade* dramatized the "dark days" at Valley Forge to encourage Americans to keep fighting. It also invoked Thomas Paine to rally another generation of patriots. Claude Rains and Basil Rathbone both played very effective Tom Paine's on the wartime *Cavalcade*: Rains in the spring of 1942 and Rathbone in the fall of 1943. The stories are very different, but the uses of Paine are the same. Paine fights because "there can be no future life, unless some men are willing to die for it." Both Paine's quote from "Crisis," "These are the times that try men's souls... Tyranny like hell is not easily conquered, yet... the harder the conflict the more glorious the triumph." And, as might be said by a truly dedicated GI, "Where freedom is not, there is my home." At the end of his show, Basil Rathbone explicitly connected the history to 1943, noting, "Our problems today in waging war are much the same as in the days of Tom Paine and the need for working together are [sic] greater than ever." "Buy war bonds," adds the announcer.²⁰²

²⁰¹ Ibid., 399; Hounshell and Smith, 345.

²⁰² HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, no. 262.

When Claude Rains and Agnes Moorehead portrayed Benedict Arnold and his wife, “Peggy,” the story revealed the vital necessity of patriotism. This wartime Benedict Arnold story stressed Arnold’s failure to remain patriotic more than the specifics of his treason. Arnold dies wearing his old Continental Army uniform, but outside the borders of the country that he belatedly realized he both loved and needed. Consequently, “for Benedict Arnold there is no place in the *Cavalcade* of America.” Historian Frank Monaghan introduced this episode by revealing some of the just-finished archival research that resulted in this new history of Arnold – so new, said Monaghan, that it was more up to date than any historian’s understanding. Apparently, *Cavalcade* provided listeners with cutting edge history as well as quality drama. Rains, who performed lead roles on the series quite often in the 1940s, reminded the audience at the end of the show that “a man without honor or love of country has no place with other men.” Nationalism or exile, your choice.²⁰³

Patriotic duty may have inspired some of the increasing number of stars who appeared on *Cavalcade* during the war years, but *Cavalcade*’s increased production value also helped to draw bigger names. Wartime tax policies that allowed corporations to deduct all advertising expenses led to increased radio budgets for Du Pont and many other companies, as well as the business associations, such as the War Advertising Council, that they funded. Corporate advertising of all kinds increased many times over during the war years.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* audiocassette recordings, “Benedict Arnold.”

²⁰⁴ Flora Rheta Schreiber, “Cavalcade from the Control Room,” *Film and Radio Discussion Guide IX*, no. 8 (May 1943); Daniel L. Lykins, *From Total War to Total Diplomacy: The Advertising Council and the Construction of the Cold War Consensus* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 30.

After the war, Du Pont continued to emphasize patriotic service on *Cavalcade*. In 1948, Basil Rathbone starred as Thomas Jefferson in Erik Barnouw's adaptation of Paul Green's play, "The Common Glory," then about to open in Williamsburg, Virginia. "Colonial Williamsburg" had itself become a useful historical site for the Cold War. Each of these performances – the play, the radio series, and the colonial city – adapted the past for the latest battle for freedom. In sponsoring Williamsburg's redevelopment, John D. Rockefeller III claimed, in words similar to those heard every week on *Cavalcade*, that it demonstrated how "freedom, self-government, and sovereignty of the individual have been the well-springs of our greatness." A grateful visitor suggested that the setting acted as a "stimulus for the preservation of our National Security."²⁰⁵ As Rathbone's Jefferson said in the play, "The struggle, for what we believe... the common glory... that has to go on, without rest."²⁰⁶ The Rockefeller Foundation's purchase and distribution of several *Cavalcade* episodes to the nation's public schools likely followed the same line of reasoning that led to the recreation of Williamsburg.²⁰⁷

Fittingly, given Du Pont's expanding global empire, several postwar episodes encouraged international engagement and expansion through stories of Americans making the wider world a better place. "Ordeal in Burma" (1954) related the history of American missionaries in 1820s Burma, specifically their "struggles to bring enlightenment to a backward country." With the action set abroad, this was an unusual episode – a story of the "men and women who made America

²⁰⁵ Kammen, 583-587.

²⁰⁶ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, "The Common Glory," no. 574, June 28, 1948.

²⁰⁷ HL, Accession 1803, Box 4, Folder 19.

great"...overseas. After several ordeals, the missionary couple struggles to keep faith that the pitifully backward people really do want their help to bring them out of darkness. They succeed through the power of their medical science and their ability to mediate between the British and the Burmese, who cannot understand each other. Only the American missionary can end the war because only he "understands" both sides impartially. Thus America brings peace to the region. In another example, "The Gentle Conqueror," Father Junipero Sera's 18th century mission to the Indians of California represents American missions overseas. Pleadingly, he says, "We want to help you, not harm you... teach you, not beat you. If only you could understand."²⁰⁸

In the common area where history meant to serve Du Pont's interests and history made to support the war and other forms of civic engagement overlapped, many people, including educators, historians, businessmen, and government officials, heard something they liked. But the joy expressed by historians at hearing their subject on the air loses its gleam once we look closer at how Du Pont attempted to benefit from *Cavalcade*'s manipulation of historical memory.

American history as individual achievement remained the series' core conceptual framework. One of the repeat lessons of this strain was affirmation of the Horatio Alger-style myth. A 1941 episode used Alger himself to promote the ideology of individualism.

"Against the charge that his rags-to-riches formula was not true-to-life, there stands a scroll of immortal biographies in the American scene. For while Horatio Alger wrote, Thomas A. Edison was selling newspapers, Charles M. Schwab was driving a hack, and the late great

²⁰⁸ LC, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division, "Ordeal in Burma" and "The Gentle Conqueror."

John D. Rockefeller was out of a job. Yes, Horatio Alger was simply telling the old American story that is forever new.”²⁰⁹

And Du Pont continued to regurgitate that “old American story.” Any individual can succeed (get rich) through hard work. Of course, even in Alger’s stories hard work alone never achieves much of anything – some lucky happenstance turns the tide instead. But luck is the reward for diligence. Not surprisingly, rags-to-riches biographies appeared on *Cavalcade* frequently over the years, usually connecting an individual’s modest origins to a well-known corporation, and legitimizing the success and growth of that company. In 1947, for example, Don Ameche starred as Amadeo Obici, founder of Planter’s Peanuts. More than a story about peanuts, it was billed as “a tribute to a truly American system of free enterprise that made the rapid growth and success of such an industry possible.”²¹⁰

Even the episodes that featured the long history of Du Pont found ample evidence of hard times successfully overcome through the selfless dedication of various generations of du Ponts. From the beginning, *Cavalcade* linked Du Pont and the United States through their shared history; the company had “grown with the nation.”²¹¹ For a time, Lamot du Pont resisted a *Cavalcade* explicitly dedicated to the family history. But for a company so interested in history and its uses, it was too

²⁰⁹ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, no. 225, “The Trials and Triumphs of Horatio Alger.”

²¹⁰ HL, Accession 1803, Box 3, “Cavalcade Publicity,” “The Peanut Vendor,” April 14, 1947.

²¹¹ HL, Accession 1803, Box 3, “Cavalcade Publicity,” no. 681, “An American From France” (January 2, 1951) starred Joseph Cotton as Eleuthere Irénée du Pont. This episode is essentially the same as the earlier, 1939 episode.

much to resist, and, “at the request of many listeners,” they eventually presented their own story.²¹²

The episodes dealing with Jefferson and the Louisiana Purchase offered the most direct route to locating Du Pont in American history (and in the present as well). In response to the “merchant of death” charge, *Cavalcade* dramatized Jefferson’s request (really, almost an executive order) to company founder Eleuthere Irénée (“E.I.”) du Pont de Nemours that he build a powder works for the benefit of the American nation. Who would dare to call Jefferson a merchant of death? That very same Du Pont powder used for weapons also helped farmers grow their crops, as demonstrated in episodes that related the history of American agriculture.²¹³ In another (repeated) story, Jefferson’s friend Lafayette visited E.I. du Pont’s struggling factory on the Brandywine in 1824, which offered du Pont an opportunity to share with his compatriot (and the audience) the hardships he and his family had endured, as well as their benevolence to their employees. His wife explained that du Pont “felt he should take care of our people here. So he built homes for them and gave them pensions.” As his father had taught him (in the episode’s opening scene), “No privilege exists that is not inseparably bound to duty.”²¹⁴

Such benevolence (historically) obviated any need for unions (presently). Du Pont fought as hard as any corporation to prevent its workers from unionizing (unless one considers the company’s Du Pont Council to be a union), yet vigorously sought

²¹² HL, Accession 1803, Box 3, “Cavalcade Publicity,” no. 167, “E. I. du Pont: Founder of the Du Pont Company” (May 29, 1939). The story begins in the French home of the Sieur du Pont, Louis XVI’s Inspector General of Commerce.

²¹³ Some of the farming stories never come close to mentioning Du Pont, but rather talk only about the benefits of someone using nitrate powder on their fields in one historical context or another. Of course, later, during the advertisement, this would be linked with the specific Du Pont product.

²¹⁴ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, no. 167, “E. I. du Pont: Founder of the Du Pont Company,” May 29, 1939.

public approval of its industrial relations.²¹⁵ One of the questions asked as part of almost every survey that attempted to gauge how *Cavalcade* affected public opinion toward Du Pont dealt with how the company treated its employees. The surveys consistently reported that regular listeners believed Du Pont treated employees rather well, and much better than most large corporations.²¹⁶ Of course that would be expected of a family with such a strong, historic sense of duty.

According to *Cavalcade*, the single greatest contribution of the du Ponts to America in the time of Jefferson was the Louisiana Purchase. For this land, which more than doubled the area of the United States, listeners learned they owed a special debt of gratitude to Du Pont. Evidently, Pierre du Pont first suggested to Jefferson that the United States might gain not just New Orleans but the entire Louisiana Territory. Later, when negotiations broke down in Paris, and Talleyrand schemed to deprive America of its manifest destiny, Pierre intervened to restore the natural course of American history. *Cavalcade* related these events on the series' final radio broadcast, on March 31, 1953.²¹⁷

Henry Adams's extensive history of the negotiations treats du Pont's role in Paris similarly. The claims made in these Louisiana Purchase episodes never strayed far from fact. Yet the emphasis and repetition of this version meant the exclusion of

²¹⁵ Colby, 802-803. Du Pont determinedly undermined unionization efforts within the company of course, but the du Ponts also worked to reverse the broader twentieth century trend toward unionization, through political contributions and propaganda campaigns (including *Cavalcade*).

²¹⁶ For example, HL, Accession 1803, Box 24, Opinion Research Corporation Survey, n.d.; Box 7, Folder 6, BBDO Report on Public Opinion Survey, April 5, 1956. This latter survey also found that in a three-month period, 4 out of 10 American adults had viewed at least one *Cavalcade* episode.

²¹⁷ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, no. 781, "A Time to Grow." In negotiations, Livingston "realized he was trapped in a web of diplomatic maneuvering and intrigue!" "Bitter... disappointed... he turned to the one friend he could depend upon in Paris: du Pont de Nemours... the man Jefferson had chosen some months before to carry secret dispatches from Washington to Livingston in Paris..." The 1953 television treatment was also entitled, "A Time to Grow," and starred Stacey Keach as Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours.

many other chapters of American history, including segments bearing directly on Louisiana. And, of course, the purpose of portraying Du Pont's historical contributions was the promotion of the contemporary corporation, rather than the elucidation of the historical episode.

Similarly, other companies' histories, likewise featured on *Cavalcade*, often used this device (the "just doing what was asked," for the good of the country, or "God's will" explanations for their existence). For example, in "The Forge," Eliphalet Remington reluctantly enters the gun business only after his fellow Americans demand it of him (just as Jefferson demanded that Du Pont manufacture gunpowder). Afterward, he reflects, "Maybe it's almost like I've got a... well... duty – do you know what I mean?" The announcer knew just what he meant: "Firearms for the pioneers who were to transform a vast wilderness into a land where millions of Americans could live in freedom and plenty."²¹⁸ The fact that Remington Arms was a Du Pont subsidiary went unmentioned in the story.

These episodes reflected the lingering perception at Du Pont and BBDO of the need to defend the company against the old "merchant of death" charge. But perhaps they also reflect a climatic change, when, by the start of the Cold War, the notion that guns had been necessary to the American success story seemed pretty reasonable. This was the message that *Cavalcade* had subtly promoted since the mid-1930s, even while Du Pont professed a disinclination for war in other arenas. The experiences of World War II, the nascent Cold War and Korea certainly lent support to the idea that America's gun and powder manufacturers had played a key role in the nation's

²¹⁸ LC, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division, no. 69, "The Forge," television broadcast October 26, 1954.

history. In this new environment, the voice of Du Pont's *Cavalcade* grew more confident.²¹⁹

The New Medium

Soon after the war, BBDO and Du Pont began to consider broadcasting *Cavalcade* on television. In 1946 Du Pont aired an experimental television simulcast of a radio broadcast of *Cavalcade of America*, the first time a radio series had been aired on television. In a 1947 report, Du Pont's Film Steering Committee (an exploratory group made up of executives from the Advertising and Public Relations Departments) drew on the educative and propaganda successes of World War II military films to conclude that film would be a more "effective media" for Du Pont's purposes. Unlike radio, movies and television "command undivided audience attention."²²⁰ BBDO created the first made for television film of *Cavalcade* in September 1951, broadcast only to a limited audience in New York and Los Angeles.²²¹ Not long after, excited about the rapid growth of television viewers, Du Pont and BBDO prepared for a televised 1952-53 season.²²²

²¹⁹ Roland Marchand (*Creating the Corporate Soul*, 221) suggests that Du Pont's public relations and advertising shifted from a mostly defensive posture to an offensive approach after 1940, when Walter S. Carpenter became president of the company.

²²⁰ HL, Accession 1410, Du Pont Public Affairs, Box 37, Folder "Du Pont Story," Memo to William A. Hart, F.C. Evans, Harold Brayman, from the Motion Picture Film Steering Committee (V.L. Simpson, Advertising Department, William S. Dutton, Public relations Department, E.F. Du Pont, Service Department) February 27, 1947.

²²¹ Barnouw, 298-299.

²²² HL, Accession 1410, Du Pont Public Affairs, Box 36, Folder "*Cavalcade of America*," undated news release from 1946; HL, Accession 1410, Du Pont Public Affairs, Box 27, Folder "Exhibit 'H': Scenario for theatrical film based on Du Pont history." Du Pont had also been approached by "various Hollywood studios" about doing newsreel versions of *Cavalcade* along the lines of the *March of Time* newsreels. They were rejected as too "commercial in character" and also because Du Pont would have needed to give up control of the *Cavalcade* title. Another idea discussed within the Public relations

At BBDO, questions persisted about the wisdom of continuing with the historical format. Du Pont stayed with *Cavalcade* because, for one thing, residual rights to *Cavalcade* would be more valuable than for any other program yet made for television, according to a BBDO analysis. History programming never became outdated (more than it is to begin with), and *Cavalcade* episodes, whether first-runs or repeats, could be shown in any sequence, since each episode stood on its own.

BBDO also considered recommending sponsorship of a political forum type show (*Meet the Press* or *American Forum*). This would continue to meet Du Pont's "prestige" requirement but the subjects would naturally be "controversial." Du Pont would be identified with controversy and perhaps even controversial stances on major issues of the day – precisely what Du Pont had tried to avoid since 1935. Similarly, newscasts had to be rejected because of the "lack of sponsor approval of content." BBDO thought about recommending Murrow's critically acclaimed *See It Now*, but content control was again a problem – though not as much as its abysmally low ratings.²²³ Du Pont's insistence on full creative control, as well as all residual rights, meant that other interesting proposals, like a partial sponsorship of the science films made by Frank Capra for AT&T (such as "Our Mr. Sun" and "The Moon"), had to be rejected. The "tense" atmosphere of sporting events would not provide the proper mood for reflection about Du Pont's contributions to America. Similarly, musical programs would be either too light for the serious Du Pont message or, if the

and Advertising Departments of Du Pont in the late 1940s was 16mm films of *Cavalcade* for schools, clubs, patriotic societies, and "welfare agencies, particularly those working among the foreign-born." The decision to use film for the television series in the 1950s allowed this particular vision to be fulfilled.

²²³ HL, Accession 1803, Box 8, Folder 1, Nielsen Presentation to Du Pont Advertising Department, January 18, 1955. *See It Now*'s ratings numbers were less than half those of *Cavalcade*.

programs could be limited to art music, ratings would be too low to justify the change.²²⁴

In the end, BBDO and Du Pont agreed to continue with their half-hour program of historical dramatization. Both parties agreed that the investment in *Cavalcade* had generated tremendous “dividends” in “favorable public attitude” toward Du Pont. Public opinion had improved, from 20% favorable in 1935 to 82% in 1952.²²⁵ Continuing to monitor each proposed television episode, Du Pont executives maintained total control of the show’s content, vetoing any subject with even a hint of controversy. Under such scrutiny, the message sent over the airwaves remained notably consistent.

The show’s reach was impressive. BBDO claimed that 7,500,000 people heard *Cavalcade* each week over the radio. Estimates for the television audience varied considerably, but audiences of 10 to 15 million tuned in during the mid-1950s, though this number declined by the 1956-1957 season.²²⁶ Additionally, about 6 million students regularly watched *Cavalcade* films distributed free of charge, as did men and women of the Armed Services, members of various clubs and societies, and millions of Du Pont’s clients, workers, and their families.

BBDO research suggested whole families watched *Cavalcade* more than almost any other program.²²⁷ Mothers wrote to Du Pont that they modified

²²⁴ HL, Accession 1803, Box 22, Folder 23, BBDO report for Du Pont, “Du Pont Company Advertising: A Glance Backward... A Long Look Ahead,” November 1952.

²²⁵ Ibid; HL, Accession 1803, Box 1, Folder 2, “Digest of Talks Given at Du Pont Advertising Department Clinic, May 28, 1953.

²²⁶ HL, Accession 1803, Box 13, Folder 7, “Quarterly reports 1954-57”; Box 22, Folder 23, “Du Pont Company Advertising.”

²²⁷ HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 29, BBDO Report, “*Cavalcade of America* Audience Composition by Groups, 2/2/55.” Report showed *Cavalcade* drew more viewers per set than other

dinnertime once a week so the family could watch together.²²⁸ One mother invited the superintendent of schools and her child's history teacher to watch the show so that they could see for themselves what a wonderful educational tool Du Pont provided.²²⁹ Many teachers told Du Pont that they required their students to listen to or watch the show as homework, and of course many classes watched and learned history from Du Pont collectively.²³⁰ A California schoolteacher wrote that she considered *Cavalcade* "a special part of our history curriculum" and a Santa Ana school administrator thanked Du Pont for making "our jobs easier and more effective."²³¹

Besides schools, particular episodes targeted specific groups. Regional history allowed for concentrated promotion through historical and patriotic societies, state boards of education and business associations. For episodes with heroes of a particular ethnicity BBDO worked with organizations active in that community. For example, "Breakfast at Nancy's," which told the story of a Revolutionary War heroine in Georgia, led BBDO to contact the state boards of education in Georgia and in surrounding states, all local and regional newspapers, and the many patriotic and historical organizations that focused their attentions on the revolutionary period or the South. Releases for the Ralph Bunche film were sent to two hundred "Negro

programs at that time slot (730-8pm), 2.65 to 2.40, and much more even distribution: 1.64 children (vs. .55 for av. Evening program), .88 women (vs. 1.11), .73 men (vs. .74).

²²⁸ HL, Accession 1803, Box 7, Folder 5, correspondence from fans; Folder 6, *Looking in on Cavalcade* I, no. 2, March, 1953.

²²⁹ HL, Accession 1803, Box 7, Folder 6, *Looking in on Cavalcade*.

²³⁰ HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 10, BBDO Report, "Cavalcade of America Studies on General Public, Teen-Age School Children, Public School Teachers," March 1953; Box 7, Folder 5, Du Pont Advertising Department, "Meeting to discuss measurements of Cavalcade's effectiveness," June 20, 1955; Box 29, Folder 23, Study for Du Pont Motion Picture Personnel, "To Promote the Study of Science and Engineering Among High School Students," 1957. Du Pont had more specific goals regarding high school students. For 12-15 year olds (the "tentative choice period"), the company wanted to encourage thinking about careers in science. Du Pont hoped to encourage 16-18 year olds (in the "realistic choice period") to do the same but also to begin associating their future scientific careers with working for Du Pont.

²³¹ HL, Accession 1803, Box 7, Folder 5.

publications whose circulation is around 2 millions,” and the NAACP promoted it through its 1200 branch offices.²³²

BBDO activated all sorts of promotional networks as part of their “Total Exploitation” package for Du Pont. Unlike many contemporary programs, the months of planning and back-and-forth communications between sponsor and agency for each episode of *Cavalcade* meant that late changes were rare. This enabled long term “exploitation.” The “big monthlies with their three-month deadlines” could (and would) do features that coincided with the broadcast; editorials, photos, long Sunday features, “home-town” stories on cast members in their regional papers, fact sheets and other material could be distributed to newspapers and magazines across the country. Syndicated columnists included *Cavalcade* information written by BBDO in their columns. Additionally, BBDO developed a campaign to distribute free “booklets” in listening areas, to give school newspapers “specially angled stories,” to list the program in a series called “Listenables and Lookables,” which was distributed to 2500 schools and libraries (sustaining advertisers included U.S. Steel), and to offer slides from still photo shots to high schools for viewing during auditorium assemblies. Occasionally, films that seemed particularly important were screened for

²³² HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 5, “A Proposed Publicity Plan for ‘Cavalcade of America’ Television Program, September 1952,” and “A Campaign Directed Toward Grade and High Schools”; Box 5, Folder 15, BBDO report on Promotional Activities for “Breakfast at Nancy’s”; Box 5, Folder 21, Promotional activities of local television stations; Box 5, Folder 41, Report on Publicity and Promotional Activities, October 1955. Syndicated columnists Danton Walker and John Lester are mentioned by name, but it appears that other columnists, such as Jack O’Brien, allowed BBDO to plant words in their columns, and one must conclude that they did this in exchange for money or some other consideration.

select critics at BBDO offices in New York. This was true, for example, of the Bunche film and of “Sunset at Appomattox.”²³³

The frequent focus on business history allowed for additional exploitation, as featured companies could be relied upon to distribute publicity material to dealers, employees, local chambers of commerce, and publications that Du Pont would not normally use.²³⁴ Sometimes this worked well, as with “The Melody Man,” the story of the Magnus Harmonica Company, which advertised for the program in music stores nationwide. For “Sam and the Whale” on the other hand, an effort to engage the whaling industry, which BBDO discovered no longer existed in the United States, failed.²³⁵ And when BBDO proposed to AT&T that they insist on signage promoting “The Great Experiment” (the first transatlantic cable) in every stockbroker office nationwide that sold AT&T stock, the telecommunications giant declined to participate.²³⁶ Trade associations publicized episodes too. When “Spindletop” (about the discovery of oil in Texas) aired each October during “Oil Progress Week,” the American Petroleum Institute made and distributed prints of the film. A Milwaukee television station reported back to BBDO during the 1954 “crude” celebration that “a letter was sent to all the Milwaukee Oil companies and Distributors... [and] we were able to incorporate promotion for ‘Oil Progress Week’ and ‘Spindletop’ into our *news*

²³³ HL, Accession 1803, Box 22, Folder 18, BBDO “‘Total Exploitation’ for Television Programs of BBDO Clients,” May 1956.

²³⁴ HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 5, BBDO memo dated September 2, 1952 laid out this plan.

²³⁵ HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 15, “Promotion- Publicity Report on Cavalcade of America 9/29/53 – 12/1/53.” Nevertheless, BBDO successfully reached out to historical whaling areas in the northeastern U.S., as well as to historical organizations such as the Sons of the American Revolution, Colonial Dames of America, the American Historical Association, and the New York Historical Society.

²³⁶ Perhaps because of AT&T’s involvement in the television industry as the monopolist of the coaxial cables used by all networks. The Remington Arms and AT&T linkages are discussed in a Fall 1954 promotional activity report from BBDO, found in HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 23.

programs for the week preceding [italics added].” A *New York Times* article on Oil Progress Week similarly worked in the *Cavalcade* program. History, institutional advertising, and news (and petroleum) had been successfully blended into a consumable commodity.²³⁷

Local television stations did quite a bit of their own publicity, and BBDO made certain that they always had *Cavalcade* material on hand.²³⁸ The agency also prepared spots – historical teasers – to be read on air (with still photo slides) in advance of each episode. This practice began on radio and continued through the television years. NBC radio had also promoted the show to educators, inviting state and local superintendents of education to the studio to watch *Cavalcade* performances.²³⁹ ABC, the television network for *Cavalcade* after its first season on NBC, created its own promotional kits for the show, distributed in the fall of 1953 to 1,050 newspapers with a combined circulation of over 44 million, 40 magazines with combined circulation of over 60 million, and affiliates, which then distributed material to additional local publications.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 28. WCAN-TV of Milwaukee also reported the usual promotional activities, such as “special written releases” sent to the Chamber of Commerce and the public library system, and twenty-second announcements on television and one-minute spots on their radio station.

²³⁸ HL Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 14, local station advertisements.

²³⁹ HL, Accession 1662, Box 4, Folder “1939-1940,” Letter from James Roland Angell, NBC Educational Counselor to Lamont Du Pont, January 11, 1940. Angell notes his delight that *Cavalcade* “is employing a type of material which heretofore we have been able to utilize as a rule only on sustaining programs.”

²⁴⁰ HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folders 15, 16, and 24, Promotion and Publicity Reports on *Cavalcade of America*. These reports document the efforts of BBDO and ABC to promote the show. The Advertising Department at Du Pont obsessed over circulation numbers. They kept a scrapbook of all newspaper clippings relating to *Cavalcade*, many of which are exactly the same thing (because prepared by BBDO) but published in several papers. The result is a scrapbook with page after page of identical clippings, with only small inserts that contain the publications’ circulation numbers to differentiate one from the other. ABC also used *Cavalcade*, Du Pont, and BBDO to sell itself. A 1954 trade magazine advertisement for the network was titled “Old Friends,” and featured a still photo from “Sunset at Appomattox” of Lee and Grant shaking hands. A short paragraph explained that “prestige-conscious” Du Pont and “Neilson-wise” BBDO had wisely brought their award-winning *Cavalcade*

Du Pont and BBDO could not force people to watch *Cavalcade*. Educators, from elementary school teachers to law school professors, requested records and films; various clubs, associations, and fraternal societies gathered to watch films they had a particular interest in; and the public tuned in each week in consistently high numbers. *Cavalcade* made history enjoyable. “I remembered having that in history but it was more interesting and well brought out on TV,” said one viewer. “They tell you more than history books tell you. It’s an easy way to learn,” declared another. Although the programs found their way into schools across the nation, the majority of home viewers were adults, nearly 50% between the ages of 30 and 49. Half of *Cavalcade* viewers had not graduated high school, so their interest in history may have been in part a quest for knowledge they felt they lacked. Some noted that the history classes they did take would have been more effective if they had adopted the *Cavalcade*’s method of instruction. For many viewers, the only significant difference between history in school and history on *Cavalcade* was that they enjoyed the latter.²⁴¹

Du Pont invested almost as much in measuring the effectiveness of its program as in producing it. Advertising Director William Hart first hired the Psychological Corporation, a business and advertising research firm founded in 1921,

back to ABC for another year, ensuring that Tuesday night remained “ABC night” on the nation’s television screens. This clipping is in folder 31.

²⁴¹ HL, Accession 1803, Box 4, Folder 50, John Dollard Reports; Accession 1814, Papers of Crawford Hallock Greenewalt, Box 4, Folder “Advertising Department, 1953-56,” letter from Edward A. Hogan, Jr., of the University of California Hastings College of Law, to President Crawford H. Greenewalt, October 25, 1955. Hogan wrote that his law students “feel that it has made much more understandable a very important period in the development of our Constitutional Law. I would like to make the suggestion that if the film of that particular presentation could be made available to the law schools of the United States, that your company would render a real service to the cause of legal education.”

for *Cavalcade* studies beginning in 1938.²⁴² According to its 1939 study of the program, attitudes toward Du Pont varied according to whether, and how much, one listened to *Cavalcade*. Listeners were three times as likely as non-listeners to positively change their impression of the company. Even among listeners who could not remember (consciously) the name of the sponsor, attitudes toward Du Pont were significantly more positive than among non-listeners.²⁴³

Over the years the company used several research firms to determine who watched the program, what they liked and did not like, what they remembered, and most importantly, how *Cavalcade* affected their opinions on economic issues.²⁴⁴ The results are striking in several ways. First, they tell us a lot about how viewers understood history and its relation to their lives. Second, they offer at least some insight into the impact of television and advertising on the public. Third, and most clearly, they reveal exactly what Du Pont and BBDO attempted to achieve through their historical drama.

One reason fans enjoyed *Cavalcade* was its allegiance to convention. Publicity material emphasized the complete *absence* of interpretation and viewers knew it was “based on actual facts.” Fans appreciated reinforcement of their own historical memories. One father told an interviewer, “I like my children to see the events of American history as they always remember it.” Another noted, “It is good... I know what they’re talking about.”²⁴⁵ Many identified themselves as history

²⁴² Bird, 99.

²⁴³ HL, Accession 1662, Box 4, Folder “1938,” “Test-Tube Study of the Influence of ‘Cavalcade of America’ on Attitudes Toward the Du Pont Company,” August 16, 1939.

²⁴⁴ HL, Accession 1803, Box 7, Folder 5, “Meeting to Discuss Measurements of ‘Cavalcade’s’ Effectiveness, June 20, 1955,” June 22, 1955.

²⁴⁵ HL, Accession 1803, Box 4, “Wave 1 and 2 Reports,” by the Psychological Corporation. Other interesting free responses include a college student noting it “helps me at Trinity University,” and a

buffs. The authenticity of the costumes, the attention to obscure details, and the interesting minutiae – these things appealed to *Cavalcade* viewers (and to appreciative critics). Even a museum curator noted he used *Cavalcade* to brush up on “details.”²⁴⁶ The authenticity of uniforms and southern accents in “Sunset at Appomattox” so impressed a Virginian that General Lee and General Longstreet “seemed as if though they had stepped out of the pages of history.”²⁴⁷ Clearly a willingness to believe was at work here – a desire to be fooled into thinking that what is on the screen is real. Nevertheless, the great attention to detail on the program invited suspension of skepticism.

According to Francis Ronalds, fans drove the “harassed” *Cavalcade* historical consultants crazy. Besieged by complaints of minor errors (at least in his mind), Ronalds tried to explain to his bosses that viewers confused “source” with fact. When sources used for *Cavalcade* scripts contradicted conventional wisdom, letters poured in from people intent on displaying their “superior erudition.” Occasionally, disgruntled interest groups and individuals voiced discontent too, like the irate Daughters of the American Revolution member who declared it inconceivable that Jefferson Davis’s daughter would have “demeaned herself” by contemplating marriage to a Yankee.²⁴⁸ Self-identified patriots especially enjoyed the program, and

history major who expresses a similar sentiment. Countless respondents comment on the high educational value of the program, and many identify themselves as teachers and principals.

²⁴⁶ Probably no word appeared with more frequency in reviews of *Cavalcade* episodes than “authentic.” Critics loved the attention to dress and scenery especially, which for them meant they could tell readers to consider the program to be authentic historically.

²⁴⁷ HL, Accession 1803, Box 7, Folder 5, letters to Du Pont Advertising Department, 1956.

Northerners appreciated these stories too. The War Library and Museum of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States in Philadelphia wrote to express gratitude for a film copy of “Sunset at Appomattox” and noted that the film “will be among our prized possessions.”

²⁴⁸ HL, Accession 1803, Box 11, Folder 32, letter from Francis Ronalds (Curator of Historic Sites for the United States Park Service, Trustee of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, and

organizations like the American Legion awarded the show repeatedly over the years.²⁴⁹ More than critics, educators, and perhaps even BBDO, the fans of *Cavalcade* understood the politics behind the history. One fan, New Mexico state legislator Ervin W. Mitchell, wrote in several times to express his appreciation for the conservative message. “Every schoolchild should see it” of course, but “it also makes one, on reflection of the sacrifices made by so many, ...feel that there is only one part of the anatomy by which traitors to this country should be hung.”²⁵⁰

Critics seemed unaware of this particular subtext in the *Cavalcade* dramas, but Mitchell was hardly the only fan who understood the series in political terms. Many thought that the show “[would] help to defeat Communism,” “shake evil out of our country,” “help mankind,” and “[inspire] people that consider themselves 100% Americans.” The inspirational aspect of the program appealed to many Americans, including Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, who believed it to be “one of the most constructive programs on the air.”²⁵¹ Many fans opined that this “intelligence pill” would benefit children most of all; *Cavalcade* gave young children “reasons for their love of America, and [planted] faith before traitors [could] place doubts.”²⁵² Du Pont

Historical Consultant for the *Cavalcade of America*) to Harold Blackburn of BBDO, July 10, 1951. The “airslips” were the subject of a 1951 *Du Pont Magazine* article that gently ribbed the historical consultants for their professional errors. HL, Accession 1803, Box 11, *Du Pont Magazine*, October-November 1951.

²⁴⁹ In the first fifteen years on the radio, *Cavalcade* brought Du Pont over forty awards for “educational value” or “patriotic service.” The “Golden Mike” was presented “for patriotic dramatic programs of highest inspirational, educational and entertainment appeal on TELEVISION during 1954 as determined by a nation-wide poll of American Legion Auxiliary members.” That year, the radio award in that category (which Du Pont had won previously) went to *I was a Communist for the FBI*, produced by the Frederic W. Ziv Company. Some of the award mentions can be found in HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 25; Box 8, Folder 36, Clipping from *Du Pont Magazine*, October-November 1950; Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, no. 167; Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 31, ABC advertisement.

²⁵⁰ HL, Accession 1803, Box 7, Folder 5, clippings from fan letters, 1953-1955.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

won praise for working to “sell America to this generation,” something many viewers thought necessary and urgent after several decades spent “forgetting American history and traditions, debunking the great men who built this nation.” As one woman declared, “*This* is the material with which American young ones should be subjected.”²⁵³ With luck *Cavalcade* might act as a “powerful antidote for juvenile delinquency.”²⁵⁴

Most pleasing to Du Pont (the Public Relations department marked these responses with smiley faces) were unsolicited comments that linked the patriotism of the program to the company and carried praise for one over to the other. One episode made a Clinton, Michigan viewer so “proud to be an American” that she wrote in to inform the sponsor that “the Du Pont company stands for our American ideals.” A New Orleans man thanked the company for the “reenactment of the famous figures of our Nation in years past, who like Du Pont, have helped to make our Country strong and great.”²⁵⁵ An Illinois teacher who required her students to watch the program, wrote in to express her students’ condolences when Pierre Du Pont passed away in 1954. They had come to think of the du Ponts as dear friends.

Many fans unconsciously blended patriotism and consumption in their letters, and many of those responses included references to Du Pont as surrogate for the United States. Mrs. Beatrice Swartz of Detroit wrote, “You cannot realize how

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. The letter writer, Mr. Wolf, continued, “You have been persecuted by Government Officials and others in years gone by because of your greatness and your ability to do a job when we needed it most.” Many wrote to praise Du Pont commercials, “the finest on TV” according to one viewer from Berkeley, California. Other viewers expressed similar sentiments, noting the educational format of the commercials, which allowed them to learn something about chemistry and Du Pont’s many contributions to the field. After that lesson, “No one needs to say, ‘Buy Du Pont products!’ We couldn’t be kept from it, once we understand.”

important you are to the country as you create desire and interest for new things for a fuller and richer life.” Another viewer thought an episode’s “simplified portrayal of our capitalistic system” “excellent,” and greatly appreciated Du Pont’s efforts to “inform” the public on economics. A Middletown, Ohio viewer wrote, “Continue to talk about free enterprise and pro-Americanism – it can’t help but do good!” In their fan letters, viewers consistently demonstrated an excellent understanding of Du Pont’s mission. If some Americans remained ignorant of the show’s politics, too many fans mentioned the conservative nature of the program for it to have gone unnoticed by most regular viewers. Over time, one could hardly have missed the repeated lessons.

These lessons came from both the evening’s teleplay and the Du Pont commercial, a three-minute film shown at the end of the program that sometimes closely tied in to the theme of the episode. These films usually told a “a brief story of chemistry,” i.e. some successful Du Pont research, or linked the company’s industrial products to consumer goods, showing how Du Pont “contribute[d] to everyone’s better living.” Polled viewers generally saw these spots as “educational.” “You don’t even realize it’s a commercial,” said one man. “All selling is on an educational basis,” noted another, yet it’s “not a program trying to sell you something.” For most of its run, the radio version also followed this format, airing commercials that aspired toward education. Many of them taught listeners/viewers about the American economic system and their roles in that system. Two of the most common roles described were consumer and stockholder. As consumers the American people determined which products and thus which companies succeeded; as stockholders

they acted as business owners. “YOU may own Du Pont stock too without knowing it as your insurance policies or fraternal organizations or banks may own stock using your money.” So, “anything that hurts business – hurts you. And anything that helps business – helps you.”²⁵⁶

Other companies appreciated what *Cavalcade* did for them. Irving Olds, Chairman of the Board of U.S. Steel, wrote that the program demonstrated “the benefits from our American system of free private enterprise.”²⁵⁷ Robert Brown of Minute Maid especially liked a Christmas program that explained that “American business is based on the fundamentally Christian principle of the sacredness of the individual and his enterprise.”²⁵⁸ After an episode that portrayed the early years of the Dennison Company, H.E. Dennison wrote, “It is one of the landmarks in our history to have had the Dennison story placed before so high an audience.”²⁵⁹ In thanking President Crawford Greenewalt for the *Cavalcade* story of his World War II heroism, Eddie Rickenbacker, then president of Eastern Air Lines, wrote, “If we had more programs like it on radio and television, it would help eliminate the crimes blamed on youth delinquency, as well as to help recreate in the youth of this country the true American spirit of our forefathers...”²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 3, BBDO Research Report on the commercial aired at the end of “The New Salem Story” in March 1952; Box 12, Folder 3, Lyman Dewey’s introduction to the preview of the first television *Cavalcade*, September 12, 1952; Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, no. 683, “There Stands Jackson!” January 16, 1951. The closing announcement is about how practically everyone owns stock in Du Pont.

²⁵⁷ HL, Accession 1814, Box 4, Folder 52. Irving Olds to Crawford Greenewalt, September 6, 1950.

²⁵⁸ HL, Accession 1814, Advertising Department, Box 4, Folder 52, Robert Brown to Greenewalt, December 26, 1951.

²⁵⁹ HL, Accession 1814, Advertising Department, Box 4, Folder 52, H.E. Dennison to Crawford Greenewalt, November 9, 1950.

²⁶⁰ HL, Accession 1814, Advertising Department, Box 4, Folder 52, Eddie Rickenbacker to Crawford Greenewalt, June 1, 1951.

Identifying and Evaluating Content

“While people as we know them are never wholly good or bad, posterity demands of historians that they label their leading characters either one extreme or the other.”²⁶¹ This approach, voiced by Frank Monaghan, describes how *Cavalcade* transformed historical figures into “real symbol[s] of evil” to hate and real heroes to love. For dramatic and didactic purposes, this method of practicing history worked well. Every listener knew for whom to root and whom to disdain in these myths made from history.

Research conducted on Du Pont’s behalf by John Dollard Associates attempted to formulize the episodes in order to maximize their impact.²⁶² He found that foreign villains contrasted best with American heroes. Sometimes a good villain made up for an overly intellectual story, as in “Mr. Peale’s Dinosaur.” In this case, he suggested that the “mass audience” would enjoy hating the condescending and “effeminate Frenchmen” so much that they would endure the artist-scientist subject of

²⁶¹ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, no. 181, “A Continental Uniform: The Story of General Benedict Arnold,” April 2, 1940.

²⁶² HL, Accession 1803, Box 4, Folder 46, Dollard Report, “A Man’s Home,” May 6, 1955. Using advance copies of scripts, Dollard and his researchers predicted how men and women would respond to each character, each scene, the overall plot, storyline, and subject. With revealing exceptions (discussed below), the focus groups and surveys used to test the predictions affirmed Dollard’s analyses. The analyses were insightful and creative, and they emphasized the overwhelming concerns about gender in the 1950s. They also indicate the types of heroes Du Pont emphasized. Much to Dollard’s disappointment (as someone interested in maximizing the show’s effect), the protagonists were a varied group of men and women, doctors, scientists, statesmen, lawyers, artists, lawmen, and poets. On the other hand, they were nearly all white, all American, and, more often than not, businessmen. The purposes of the reward scale studies were to “predict the reward value of a play from its script and to test the prediction; to derive a new index of audience size, so the audience of one show can be compared to that of another; to combine index of audience size with reward score of play, so as to derive a new statistic which measures reward to sponsor; to invent a reward scale for commercials and learn to predict their reward value; to study man-woman differences in reaction to play and commercial; to test program innovations as an aid to policy formation; cautiously to derive ‘bench marks and guide posts’ for creative people.”

the episode.²⁶³ American heroes could be women as well as men, as in “Breakfast at Nancy’s,” a Revolutionary War story. In that play, men could identify positively with a woman “capable of masculine hatred, determination, and courage,” and they could easily hate the male Tory villain, “disloyal to both his marriage and his country” (what could be more evil than that in 1950s America?).²⁶⁴

On the other hand, some television episodes showed greater character complexity. “Betrayal,” a television version of “Benedict Arnold,” examined the psychological reasons behind the decision to betray one’s country. Unaccepted by his peers, his honor insulted, Arnold looked elsewhere for status.²⁶⁵ Dollard recommended more stories like this one, which capitalized on Cold War interest in spies. In fact, spies were among the most celebrated group of patriots on the program. Spies for the Continental Army, the Union, and the Confederacy all appeared on *Cavalcade*.²⁶⁶

Patriotism, *Cavalcade* style, followed something of a southern model that emphasized honor and duty above justice or idealism. “My Country, Right or Wrong,” the title of *Cavalcade*’s Stephan Decatur story, sums up this meaning perfectly. The stories about Confederates further illustrate the sort of patriotism advocated by Du Pont. In tenor and substance they appealed to Americans who found something in the extinct Confederacy that they found wanting in the

²⁶³ According to Dollard’s analysis, Peale’s occupation, a “painter-naturalist”, was “not a masculine one.”

²⁶⁴ HL, Accession 1803, Box 4, Folder 20, John Dollard Report, “Breakfast at Nancy’s.” Of course a male hero with the same qualities possessed by Nancy would have been “more satisfying.”

²⁶⁵ LC, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division, “Betrayal,” 1953. Kenyon, a prolific writer for television in the 1950s and 60s, would later be President of the Writers Guild of America, West, from 1959-1961.

²⁶⁶ In addition to the spy stories mentioned above, see also no. 151 on Nathan Hale, no. 146 on John Honeyman, and no. 176 on Enoch Crosby.

contemporary United States. Many viewers appreciated the frequently pro-Southern viewpoint. As a typical example, a Marylander wrote, “it is most gratifying to know that there is [sic] still those who recognize the good and outstanding qualities of the leaders of the Confederacy.”²⁶⁷

Those “qualities” shone best through Robert E. Lee, the protagonist of several episodes, including “Sunset at Appomattox.” The 1953 “Sunset” television premiere was a major historical event. The Reverend Richard Henry Lee (a last minute replacement for Rear Admiral Fitzhugh Lee) attended for the Confederates, and Major General U.S. Grant III attended for the Union. After speeches by Du Pont representatives and the screening of the movie, the print was solemnly carried to Appomattox Historical National Monument and presented to the Director of the National Parks Service. Simultaneously, the battle flag of the 61st Infantry Regiment of the Army of Northern Virginia, taken by a Union soldier at the surrender (and discovered just in time for the premiere), was also presented to the monument as an artifact equal in stature to the reel of film.²⁶⁸

Confederates appeared first on the radio show and remained a part of the *Cavalcade* until the end. Du Pont and BBDO always took pains to make sure their portrayals would not offend southerners, perhaps because new Du Pont plants were increasingly located in the South, a “place of increasing opportunity” as a result of its non-union workforce. So, for instance, the 1940 episode on Robert E. Lee, who “symbolized all that was noblest in a struggle that was... a proud last stand of a great culture and a vanishing way of life,” was approved by Richmond’s Douglass S.

²⁶⁷ HL, Accession 1803, Box 7, Folder 5, letter from Philip A. Ridgely of Upper Marlborough, MD, 1953.

²⁶⁸ HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 16, undated clipping from unknown Virginia newspaper.

Freeman, author of the pro-South, Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, *R. E. Lee*. That broadcast was performed live in front of a Richmond audience that, presumably, “remembered” the General rather favorably.²⁶⁹ The series also twice “salute[d]” Sam Davis, spy for the Confederacy. “The ideals for which he gave his life are principles of American character – loyalty to a promise, devotion to a cause, and unselfish and sacred honor.”²⁷⁰

The 1950 radio play, broadcast from Nashville, centered on the romance between Sam and “his girl,” Connie Hardison (Joan Caulfield). Not even mentioned in the prewar version of this story, Connie stands steadfastly by her man in this postwar production, but the end result is the same: he hangs. The Confederate spy he protects tells Connie that Sam “will always be remembered whenever men, in the North as well as in the South, speak of loyalty and sacrifice... honor and virtue...” The fact that Sam Davis spied *against* the United States did not disqualify him from the *Cavalcade*.

Cavalcade featured the popular Stonewall Jackson in an emotional 1951 story about an old man who remembers, and still suffers from, watching Jackson die. Jackson had developed over the years into a Christ figure for many Southern

²⁶⁹ HL, Accession 1803, Box 3, Folder “*Cavalcade of America* Programs,” no. 184, “Robert E. Lee,” April 23, 1940. The introduction to this episode included the following comment-advertisement: “All America honors the memory of Robert E. Lee – just as all Americans have deep affection for our Southern States... But America’s pride in the South is not alone for things of spirit. We see it today as a place of increasing opportunity, whose people are well out in the forefront of progress in many fields. The transition of the South from a largely agricultural community to a section of constantly increasing industrial importance is a thrilling chapter in the American *Cavalcade*. And in Du Pont and other research laboratories, many of which are located in the South, scientists are working hand in hand with the people of the South who are producing more and more of the raw materials necessary for American industry [mention of key materials used by Du Pont – cotton linters, vegetable oils, pine, etc.]. Thus we find in the South men and material helping to fulfill the Du Pont pledge Better Things For Better Living Through Chemistry” (and thus we have an explanation for Du Pont’s historical focus on the South.

²⁷⁰ HL, Accession 1803, Box 3, Folder “*Cavalcade of America* Programs,” no. 179, “On Jordan’s Banks.”

Christians (especially the Christian Reconstructionists, whose project of revising American history to discover its Christian significance commenced in the fifties). Du Pont's show reflected their interpretation of the "martyred" General. In the episode, Jackson prays almost constantly. He uses *Joshua* 10:8 to form his battle plan at Chancellorsville:

"And the Lord said unto Joshua: Fear them not, for I have delivered them unto thine hand. There shall not a man of them stand before thee. Joshua therefore came unto them suddenly, and the Lord discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with great slaughter."

So Jackson proposes to Lee that he "Come unto him [Hooker] suddenly," and because of his faith (and, it is implied, the justness of the South) the plan works. But Jackson is killed by friendly fire. The old man telling the story to his grandson weeps as he tells him of how, on his deathbed, Jackson asks to be read the psalms. The granddad "cries out in sorrow, 'Why did he have to die, boy? Why did it have to happen that way?'" It is an oddly disconsolate ending for a *Cavalcade* program. As William Boddy argues in *Fifties Television*, institutional advertisers like Du Pont, General Electric and U.S. Steel always provided an upbeat story to make sure audiences associated them with happy feelings instead of sad. Perhaps the sadder memorial-type broadcast made it on air because it was Jackson's birthday.²⁷¹

Another 1950 Civil War lesson starred Lee Bowman as the Confederate spy, Beasley Nichol, an underling of General Nathan Bedford Forrest, future founder of the Ku Klux Klan. After the same interpretation of Civil War history heard in every related *Cavalcade* broadcast ("Confederate brains licked the Yankees, but they'll lick us in the end because there are more of them"), Bowman returned to the mike to relate past to present, advising listeners to "attend conscientiously to your duties of

²⁷¹ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, no. 683, "There Stands Jackson!"

citizenship,” and “stand by to do whatever is asked.”²⁷² The direction sounds strange coming from the man who gladly took orders from Nathan Bedford Forrest.

A solemn consideration of gendered interpretations permeated the research conducted on *Cavalcade* in the 1950s. The Dollard reports and correspondence with BBDO and the Du Pont Advertising Department analyzed the appeal of each episode in terms of separate male and female “reward scales.” Before production, scripts were deconstructed in an attempt to measure how each sex would respond. For example, Samuel Morse is “not a true man’s hero (since he needs help)” but he partly redeems this by persevering, then fully transforms from the “effeminate occupation of artist” to the “masculine occupation of inventor.” Dollard warned that opening the episode in the artist’s studio might cause men to change the channel immediately. On the other hand, “women consider artistic things worthwhile” and they also like a man who, like Morse, needs their “comfort and care.” Unfortunately, the many “gadgets” will repulse women. Gadgetry and technology appeals to men however; such things inherently interest them. Guns, particularly, held high value in this regard, since “a gun is a fascinating object for men.”²⁷³ So in “Spindletop,” the anyone-can-strike-it-rich favorite reprised on television for Oil Progress Week in October 1954, the “technical talk of oil diggers [would be] unfamiliar to women,” but men, presumably, would understand oil industry jargon instinctively. On the other hand, scientific and medical research stories, almost the bread and butter for Du Pont’s show, were not the “very highest man’s stuff” in any case. Health is “one of women’s highs” – they respond favorably to “the sight of ill people.” So, paradoxically, episodes that treated

²⁷² HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, no. 680, “A Mockingbird Sang.”

²⁷³ HL, Accession 1803, Box 6, Folder 27, John Dollard report, “The Man Who Took A Chance,” which told the story of Eli Whitney’s contribution to the mass production of guns.

advanced medical research received higher reward scores for women than for men.²⁷⁴

“Spindletop” also contained a love story – a danger for the male audience, which disliked “love stuff” – but a bonus for females – usually. In this case the plot is problematic because “nothing happens” – the female lead has her husband and child at the beginning, so it hardly mattered to her whether he struck oil or not! “Actually her problems may lie in the future when his newly gained wealth will make him more sought after by other women.”²⁷⁵

Dollard tested his predictions for the scripts, and focus groups responded more or less as predicted. The discrepancies usually came with women’s responses to violence – they did not show the revulsion that Dollard predicted (he suggested that he must have missed a sympathetic angle) nor did they always appreciate the characters who preached non-violence and the element of forgiveness. For example, women unpredictably enjoyed and remembered a violent scene in which British soldiers battered American patriot James Otis in a bar fight. Dollard suggested that they must have been overcome with maternal feeling for Otis.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ HL, Accession 1803, Box 6, Folder 23, “G for Goldberger.” A few of Dollard’s analyses appear odd fifty years later (and perhaps they reveal something similarly odd in Du Pont’s calculations). This episode on the scientific discoveries of Dr. Goldberger (“it should be a relief to admire a Jew who is doing a great job. Anti-Semitism is, after all, against our mores”), namely his work on a cure for pellagra, suggested to Dollard: “The use of convicts as experimental subjects should be of interest to men. Men are likely to have a sneaking sympathy with convicts in any case, and should identify with them here, since they are taking risks in order to help solve an important problem. Men will hope that they get their reward of freedom. Some viewers may find a bit of humor in the behavior of the convicts at table. The stupid and prejudiced pair who would needlessly rescue the convict subjects should get some well-deserved dislike.”

²⁷⁵ HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 28, Oil Progress Week News Release by American Petroleum Institute, September 24, 1954.

²⁷⁶ HL, Accession 1803, Box 6, Folder 46, John Dollard Report, “A Man’s Home” and the commercial accompanying “Letter to a Child”; Folder 48, Dollard Report, “Toward Tomorrow. There were instances when women should, according to the Dollard reports, greatly appreciate violence. In “Breakfast at Nancy’s,” a female character shot and killed an ex-lover, a Tory and would-be rapist. “Most” women would not mind this because she had no alternative, and, “as a good woman should, she stands stunned after the gun explodes.” One other interesting discrepancy occurred when Dollard tested predictions for “Toward Tomorrow,” which focused on the life of Ralph Bunche. They had

Men, on the other hand, required violence in order to stay focused. “Man-against-nature” themes held high appeal, but man-against-man promised even higher ratings.²⁷⁷ A good brawl kept them watching intently, while the absence of physical assault ruined entire episodes. Full annihilation was best. Young Abe Lincoln fights his rival for Ann Rutledge’s affections in “New Salem Story,” but the scene fails because Lincoln “doesn’t really clobber his rival” and he “forgives the bully at the moment when he should have been resonating with angry excitement.”²⁷⁸ Violence had real meaning on *Cavalcade*. Timid statesmen were often contrasted negatively with courageous military men of action, and indecisive thinkers usually lost out to inventive doers.

While violence played well to all men according to Dollard, some men did possess more refined tastes, and the reports addressed this discrepancy by explaining the presence of distinct divisions of intellect and class within the viewership. Two legal histories generated concern about how to appeal to an audience of both educated and uneducated viewers. In “John Yankee,” young John Adams makes an unpopular decision to represent British soldiers on trial for murder. While “liberal and intellectual” viewers would “identify” with Adams for defending the right to due process and a fair trial, and would appreciate his “going against the crowd,” less

failed, so they reported to Du Pont, to account for a high “guilt factor” among whites regarding African Americans. The “escape from guilt” offered to those viewing the play led many to become “passionate” in their approval.

²⁷⁷ HL, Accession 1803, Box 4, Folder 25, Dollard Report, “Crazy Judah.”

²⁷⁸ HL, Accession 1803, Box 6, Folder 29, Dollard Report, “New Salem Story.” Unlike male viewers, left unfulfilled by Lincoln’s lack of bloodlust, women would love the “New Salem Story” presentation of young Abe Lincoln’s “painful” love affair with Ann Rutledge. They would be eager to help Lincoln in his sad state. Because “it brings anguish to see the hero depressed and despondent,” men will “steel” themselves against identification with Lincoln. Dollard predicted that men would decline to say they had abandoned Lincoln, rather they would “give mute evidence of a tendency to avoid remembering the story” – the worst possible outcome for the sponsor.

educated (and less liberal?) men would be confused by seeing one of the founding fathers defending the enemy. They would not be “permitted to ‘enjoy’” the massacre at the beginning, nor would they be allowed by the film to support the American mob, even though the mob expressed popular historical opinion that the British soldiers committed an atrocity. Thus the “average” man would be left unfulfilled by this story, despite the violence (all women would be left confused by this story, since “the courtroom is no place for a woman, and legal technicalities mean little to them”).²⁷⁹ The intellectual audience for *Cavalcade* was not large, but as Dollard explained, “it may be of value to hit them hard once in a while” anyway, even though the “lack of overt action and physical aggression” would undoubtedly lose countless male viewers (non-intellectuals at any rate).²⁸⁰ On the other hand, *Cavalcade* had a reputation to uphold and episodes lacking “educational” information or enough history for the history buffs might disappoint important audiences. “Gunfight at the OK Corral,” though “true” historically, exemplified this danger.²⁸¹ Indeed Dollard worried that women, especially, would actively resent Du Pont for airing such a “trivial” episode.

While the Dollard reports suggest how some contemporaries may have viewed *Cavalcade*, there is little to suggest that Du Pont or BBDO altered the series in response to his firm’s suggestions. On the other hand, the great number of these reports paid for by Du Pont would seem to indicate that these analyses were taken

²⁷⁹ HL, Accession 1803, Box 6, Folder 26, John Dollard Report, “John Yankee.” “John Yankee” assured viewers that John Adams, founding father, was incapable of acting unjustly, no matter what the situation. Dollard casually remarked that “any TV play about ‘our country’ cannot be disapproved” – a nice unstated principle for Du Pont to work from. Also, “because of the patriotic taboo,” women would be unable to express boredom with this film.

²⁸⁰ LC, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division, “One Nation Indivisible”; HL, Accession 1803, Box 6, Folder 31, John Dollard Report, “One Nation Indivisible.” Horace Greeley worked to free Jefferson Davis in “One Nation Indivisible,” another drama of “intellectual type” that held additional appeal for southerners.

²⁸¹ HL, Accession 1803, Box 6, Folder 24, John Dollard Report, “Gunfight at the OK Corral.”

very seriously. At the very least, they indicate something of the thought and planning process behind this television series (and probably others of the same period). These episodes were shaped by advanced calculations that tried, as much as possible, to predict how particular segments of the audience would respond to specific scenes – even specific lines.

Selling Bigness

The Depression-era radio shows may have been didactic, but they expressed a cautious approach to politics. In contrast, the postwar radio and television broadcasts more confidently announced the supremacy of business (not just the fallacy of the New Deal). Even during the 1949 antitrust suit, Barton informed his client, “I think the public is getting about to the point of being willing to support a vigorous stand on the part of industry in defense of its constitutional rights and in defense of the future of our economic system on which depends our national prosperity and security.”²⁸² Public opinion had turned enough in favor of business by the end of the war that, despite lingering fears, large corporations argued confidently for their interests. Even the 1949 recession that led Du Pont to lay off thousands of plant workers caused less of a decline in confidence than a renewed sense of urgency in the fight to change the political economy in favor of large corporations.

Hoping to maintain the gains in strength and popularity made during the war, corporate America initially feared a postwar economic downturn and a return to the anti-business sentiments of the Depression years. Historians such as Elizabeth Fones-

²⁸² WSHS, Bruce Barton Papers, Box 76, Client Correspondence, Du Pont Folder, Barton to William Hart, July 13, 1949.

Wolf and Roland Marchand have documented these changes in focus and strategy, mainly in terms of advertising and public relations work, demonstrating the great (and in retrospect, surprising) extent to which corporate America feared for its future. Capitalism, many business leaders thought, would soon “face the greatest challenge in its history.” This challenge required a massive propaganda effort to convince people in Washington and across the country that their interests lay with business.²⁸³

The discussion about what types of advertising benefited Du Pont most was ongoing. Conservative publications from the *Wall Street Journal* to *American Mercury* aggressively sought Du Pont’s advertising money, but to no avail. Du Pont executives repeatedly explained that Du Pont had no interest in general advertising because the company sold few products directly to the public. Institutional advertising made the public aware of Du Pont’s contributions to the American economy and also attempted to positively influence public opinion toward large corporations. Advertising in trade publications helped Du Pont establish contacts throughout industries that used its products. However, the company would not spend money for general advertising, even for the sake of supporting friends whose politics were “right.”²⁸⁴ The same logic underpinned Du Pont’s sponsorship of *Cavalcade*, which presented a broad picture of the company and what it stood for rather than promoting specific products. Similarly, for the 1939 World’s Fair in New York, Du Pont used the company’s exhibit space to highlight the “superiority of private

²⁸³ Roland Marchand quotes General Electric President Charles E. Wilson and a Psychological Corporation Survey of American businessmen in *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 317-318. Other historians have said much the same thing about corporate America’s fears in the 1940s. See, for example, Harris, *Right to Manage*, 6.

²⁸⁴ HL, Accession 1662, Box 3, Folder C24 “Advertising Department July 1932-December 1935,” William H. Hart to Bernard Kilgore, President of the *Wall Street Journal*, December 22, 1948; Paul Palmer, Editor, *The American Mercury*, to Irene Du Pont, August 27, 1936.

ownership and management versus government ownership,” rather than to showcase new Du Pont products.²⁸⁵

Like business in general, the advertising industry also made incredible strides during the war; in the peace that followed, ad men envisioned an expanded role for themselves in the economic and political life of the nation.²⁸⁶ Four days before Hiroshima, Du Pont’s J.W. McCoy spoke to his advertising department, one of the most revered corporate advertising sections in the country (and one of the largest, at 2,500 people), about creating “new demands and desires.” “A satisfied people is a stagnant people,” and the department bore the responsibility of making sure “Americans are never satisfied.”²⁸⁷ By 1946, the Advertising Department under McCoy and William Hart began to look positively at cooperative, industry-wide advertising campaigns. The war had taught industry the “value” and “power” of a “united effort by all advertisers using the same, or coordinated types of appeals.” Du Pont would not abandon its own institutional advertising, but it would increasingly support campaigns by organizations like NAM, the United States Chamber of Commerce, and the Advertising Council (see chapter five).²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ HL, Accession 1662, Box 4, Folder “1938,” Lamot Du Pont to Pierre S. Du Pont, November 21, 1938.

²⁸⁶ HL, Accession 1803, Box 1, Folder 2, “Digest of Talks Given at Du Pont Advertising Department Clinic, May 28, 1953.”

²⁸⁷ HL, Accession 1803, Box 1, Folder 1, J.W. McCoy Advertising Clinic, August 2, 1945; Colby refers to the mid-century advertising and public relations departments at Du Pont as the “most imaginative and efficient” in American history, in Colby, 208.

²⁸⁸ Some of NAM’s projects paralleled the efforts of Du Pont to influence public opinion. The close relationship between NAM and Du Pont dated to the early 1930s, and the high-level coordination continued into the television age. Beginning in 1950, NAM produced *Industry on Parade*, a television program always similar in spirit to *Cavalcade*, if less similar in format. *Industry* profiled the histories of over 1,400 U.S. businesses by 1957. These histories lacked the drama of the *Cavalcade*, but the focus on business history as part of the “natural” growth of America, as well as the emphasis on the “contributions of American industry” to the national defense, “higher standards of living,” and the “civic, religious, and social life of American communities,” followed Du Pont’s lead. NAM operated its program on a non-profit basis, not charging broadcasters for the use of their films. In fact, NAM’s

Du Pont joined other businesses to fight against labor unions and, in the later 1950s, the growing threat of “left-wing censorship by taxation,” their words for what the IRS referred to as an appropriate tax on corporate campaigns for “free enterprise.”²⁸⁹ In 1958, in a “scandalous violation of free speech,” the IRS ruled that institutional advertising was in fact propaganda.²⁹⁰ In their reading of changing social and political conditions, the heads of Du Pont’s Advertising and Public Relations Departments thought that “increasing pressures and intensities of the ‘cold war’ have developed a certain amount of hysteria among many people, leading them to accept as the lesser of evils any penalization of large companies, through taxes or otherwise...”

public relations department followed television guidelines for “public service” time, which meant they also paid nothing for airtime on over 250 television stations. Like *Cavalcade of America*, *Industry on Parade* films were given free of charge to schools. Exact numbers cannot be found, but one state level affiliate of NAM in Utah reported that 75 percent of the state’s high schools received the series in 1957. NAM received highly favorable responses from educators who used the films primarily in civics, social studies, science, and vocational classes. Thanks to Voice of America and the Armed Forces Information Service, *Industry on Parade* could be seen all over the world by the mid 1950s, in English and in many other languages as well. In addition to several awards from the Freedom Foundation and the National Citizens Committee for Educational Television, the program won the 1954 Peabody Award for “Outstanding National Public Service by Television” and received high critical praise from the New York Film Council.

HL, Accession 1662, Box 3, Folder C24, Letter from Walker B. Weisenburger, Vice President, National Association of Manufacturers, to Lamot Du Pont, October 9, 1936; Accession 1411, Records of the National Association of Manufacturers, Box 157, Folder “Radio, Industry on Parade, 1957,” memo from G.W. (Johnny) Johnson, NAM’s Director of Radio and Television Public Relations and the creator of *Industry on Parade*, to “All Concerned” regarding “Operational Information re NAM’s weekly TV series ‘Industry on Parade,’” July 13, 1953; “Fact Sheet” from April 1, 1955; letter from Utah Association of Manufacturers Field Secretary, Frank Nelson, to Roger Young, Jr., Producer, Radio and TV Department, NAM, August 15, 1957; Associated Industries of Alabama distributed the program to nearly 100% of Alabama high schools according to a “Fact Sheet” dated April 1, 1955; “Reaction to Industry on Parade by schools in New England receiving films on a continuing basis,” 1953; Undated NAM Press Release from 1958; HL, Accession 1662, Box 4, Folder “January 1941-July 1952,” Memo from William A. Hart to Lamot du Pont, June 11, 1946; Letter from Lamot du Pont to Herman W. Steinkraus, President of Bridgeport Brass Company, June 13, 1946.

²⁸⁹ HL, Accession 1814, Box 4, Folder “1957-58,” Memo from Advertising and Public Relations Departments Directors F.A.C. Wardenburg and Harold Brayman to Crawford Greenewalt, January 22, 1958; Memo from Harold Brayman to Crawford Greenewalt, John Daley, and F.A.C. Wardenburg, July 15, 1958.

²⁹⁰ HL, Accession 1814, Box 4, Folder “1957-58,” Press Release from the Southern States Industrial Council, July 13, 1958.

As in 1935, public “hysteria” threatened Du Pont. By the late 1950s however, the concern was high taxes rather than New Deal regulatory programs (or socialism).²⁹¹

Du Pont and other large corporations worried about public opinion toward big business. One of the most persistent and important themes Du Pont tried to communicate through *Cavalcade* was the “interdependence” of “small” and “big” business. The answers given to the ubiquitous question of the respondents’ attitudes toward large corporations permeate the piles of research reports on *Cavalcade*. As it had faced the war profiteering charge in the 1930s, Du Pont faced several antitrust suits in the early postwar period (according to *Newsweek*, at the end of the 1940s the company was in a “neck-and-neck race with General Electric for the dubious honor of being the Justice Department’s No. 1 target”). At times like these, history had to be summoned to service quickly. To fight the 1949 antitrust suit (in the public relations arena), BBDO moved *Cavalcade* even more in the direction of propaganda, and presented historical episodes that explicitly argued the benefits of trusts. The opening show of the fall 1949 season, “Wire to the West,” revealed the true story of Western Union. With the “telegraph industry in utter confusion because so many small companies were in the field,” founder Hiram Sibley bought everyone out, increased efficiency and reduced costs: “a place where big business greatly improved a bad situation.” The rest of September’s shows followed this script for other sectors where big business had served consumers’ interests. Emphasizing the contributions of business was not new of course, but the intensity of the pitch during that fall season

²⁹¹ HL, Accession 1814, Box 4, Folder “1957-58,” Memorandum from Advertising and Public relations Departments Directors (Wardenburg and Brayman) to CHG, January 22, 1958.

marked a change in approach. And BBDO executives figured to “use a good many more of this kind of shows [sic] than we have in the past.”²⁹²

Du Pont’s forays into, and uses of the past extended well beyond *Cavalcade*. It is remarkable how much of Du Pont’s propaganda took the form of history lessons of some kind. To commemorate Benjamin Franklin’s 250th birthday the company created an exhibit on the man they labeled the “best example of free enterprise in action.”²⁹³ For its twenty-fifth anniversary cover, *La Revista Du Pont*, a Spanish-language magazine for clients and employees in Latin America, featured the famous scene of E.I. du Pont and Jefferson discussing plans for the new company in 1802.²⁹⁴ Most ambitiously, in 1951, the company produced a motion picture called, simply, “The Du Pont Story.” The Technicolor production used 225 “Hollywood actors” and 91 different sets. According to a publicity release, the highlight of the film occurs when Jefferson, at the White House, “gave his support” to E.I. du Pont. During this 1801 meeting, Jefferson first mentions America’s debt to Irénée’s father, Pierre, who “was of great service in our peace negotiations with England.” Then the president becomes agitated about America’s economic dependence and excitedly tells the younger du Pont, “We need that powder – not only for defense, but for blasting –

²⁹² WHS, Bruce Barton Papers, Box 75, Client Correspondence, Maurice Collette to Bruce Barton, August 31, 1949. Not surprisingly, many of the *Cavalcade* programs attempted to naturalize big business in the American past. Company presidents Lamont du Pont and Crawford Greenewalt also spoke and wrote publicly on the theme often. They focused particularly on the notion that large companies fostered the growth of the smaller businesses that contracted with them; small businesses multiplied and grew as large corporations grew. In 1949, Greenewalt sat down for an interview with *U.S. News and World Report*. In response to questions about “bigness,” Greenewalt explained that the condition directly results from “usefulness.” If a company serves the public well, it grows large. The larger it is, the more useful it must be. Accession 1410, Box 36, Folder: “Big and Little Business”: “Is Big Business Useful: An Interview with Crawford H. Greenewalt,” *U.S. News and World Report* (September 16, 1949); “Companies: Du Pont and the New Sin of Size,” *Newsweek* (May 2, 1949); undated and untitled “News Release” on new Du Pont-sponsored study on interrelatedness of big and small businesses.

²⁹³ HL, Accession 1814, Box 4, Folder 56.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

clearing farm lands – building roads...” (all of the uses for Du Pont’s powder that had been demonstrated throughout American history on *Cavalcade*). The only question concerned funding. Jefferson explained that in America, rather than government-funded projects, “we believe our citizens should take the risks of industry – and reap the rewards...” Later scenes emphasized how the du Ponts insisted on using the company’s great size to do expensive research that smaller firms could not afford. Unsurprisingly, this history never mentioned controversial wartime profits or the resulting investigations.²⁹⁵

Du Pont intended the film to be seen by employees, their families and friends, and locals in plant communities. This population was not insignificant; 6 million people (including 1.1 million high school students) viewed it within two years of the release. *Scholastic Teacher’s Magazine* helped publicize the film by recognizing it with an “Award for Outstanding Merit” and recommending it for use in the classroom. Du Pont also advertised to schools directly, putting the Jefferson scene from “The Du Pont Story” on the cover of a new full-color pamphlet, “Du Pont Motion Pictures for Colleges, Schools and Clubs.”²⁹⁶

The drive behind this motion picture history of Du Pont did not differ from the motivation that led to twenty years of *Cavalcade*. The film would “create a vivid and

²⁹⁵ HL, Accession 1410, Box 36, Folder “Frontiers Unlimited,” Script for “Frontiers Unlimited” (later “The Du Pont Story”).

²⁹⁶ HL, Accession 1410, Box 37, Folder “Dupont Story,” Memo from “CHR” and “Memorandum on ‘The Du Pont Story’ for Use at Stockholders Meeting, April 9, 1951.” Eduard Franz starred as E. I. du Pont, the founder; Sigrid Gurie as his wife Sophie; Stacy Keach as P.S. du Pont; Donald Woods as Irene du Pont; Lyle Talbot as Eugene du Pont; Tom Neal as Alfred du Pont; and produced by Jack Chertok. As late as April 1949 Du Pont was moving forward with three shorter films about Du Pont’s “place in American history.” The first was being created by the Advertising Department and was “largely documentary,” the second was prepared by the Public relations Department and was “primarily anti-communistic,” and the third was a script that combined the first two. The Executive Committee asked Jack Chertok to rewrite the historical-documentary script. Memo from F.G. Hess, Secretary, Executive Committee to Executive Committee Members, April 19, 1949.

lasting impression on the minds of today's younger generation" and would demonstrate that Du Pont "GAVE to America and grew WITH America, as distinguished from the mere exploitation of America's opportunities." Viewers watched as Du Pont answered Jefferson's call to "meet a national need," played a "vital part" in the "winning of the west," improved American research so as to gain economic independence from Europe, and created new products for consumers.²⁹⁷

The year 1952 not only saw the debut of the *Cavalcade* television series but also marked Du Pont's 150th Anniversary; a fact advertised every week on the *Cavalcade* program. As with history in general, but even more so, Du Pont viewed the anniversary as an "unparalleled opportunity for selling economic ideas of value to Du Pont specifically and business and industry in general."²⁹⁸ The company released its feature film as part of the publicity, and also considered such devices as a rail- or road-traveling company history exhibit (modeled on the Freedom Train of 1947), but in the end the celebrations fell along more traditional lines: a long day of festivities at Eleutherian Mills, including a historical play and several speeches. The play told the familiar story of E.I. du Pont's origins and his strong principles of "duty." Of the speeches, President Crawford Greenwalt's stands out for its bold rejection of the

²⁹⁷ Du Pont produced another very successful film in the 1950s called "It's Everybody's Business," which received the top motion picture award from the Freedom Foundation and great praise from the United States Chamber of Commerce. This animated film told the success story of America's system of free enterprise and was shown to junior and senior high school students, adult education classes, clubs and organizations of various stripes, and was also broadcast on some 266 television stations. By 1955, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimated more than 30 million people had seen it. HL, Accession 1410, Box 37, Folder "Du Pont Films," U.S. Chamber of Commerce News release, February 2, 1955; Du Pont Public Relations release, May 12, 1953; Memo to William Hart, F.C. Evans, and Harold Brayman, from the Motion Picture Film Steering Committee (V.L. Simpson, Advertising Department, William S. Dutton, Public relations Department, E.F. Du Pont, Service Department), February 27, 1947.

²⁹⁸ HL, Accession 1410, Box 31, Folder "150th Anniversary," Memo to J.W. McCoy from Public Relations Department, January 19, 1950; "A Checklist of Ideas for Tying in Sales and Advertising Activity with Du Pont 150th Anniversary."

Four Freedoms, as such. Business had begun to advertise a fifth freedom, free enterprise, almost immediately after Roosevelt enumerated his four.²⁹⁹ However, in this 1952 address, Du Pont's president expressed the idea, increasingly popular among corporate advertisers, that freedom could not be subdivided "into convenient piles, like so much laundry." American freedom was "indivisible." That said, freedom meant first and foremost the right to economic "self-determination." As proved by history, E.I. Du Pont succeeded because he was free to "deal with his employees as individuals, with his customers and shareholders as they and he saw fit." Perhaps freedom cannot be subdivided, but its meaning can be restricted.³⁰⁰

Greenewalt, who married into the Du Pont family but also worked his way up the company ladder from his first position as a chemist, showed at least as much personal interest in the *Cavalcade of America* as had Lamont Du Pont. He not only screened the films before broadcast but also listened to tapes of telephone interviews with viewers and read the reports prepared by John Dollard and other research firms. Interestingly however, his family would not have been able to view the program at home since the Greenewalt's did not buy a television until after *Cavalcade* left the air.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ Marchand, 322.

³⁰⁰ HL, Accession 1410, Box 31, Folder "150th Anniversary," 150TH Anniversary Ceremonies program; In closing, Greenewalt asked, "What has our present generation done with our heritage from the past?" Today the "torch of freedom burns less brightly." Lest anyone think this meant something grandly idealistic, he explained that this dimming of the sacred light followed from corporate taxes, "penalties so severe as to discourage both the desire and the ability to progress." Greenewalt delivered this speech on July 19, 1952. Interestingly, the Public relations Department had recommended holding the celebration before June 1 so it would not be subsumed by the political conventions nor lend itself to charges of politics. The Freedom Train idea seems to have had several supporters but it never made it to the planning stage.

³⁰¹ HL, Accession 1814, Box 4, Folder "Advertising Department, 1953-56." Memo from R.M. De Graff, Advertising Department, September 13, 1954; Letter from Greenewalt to Frank Stanton, President of CBS, April 1, 1957.

The Long March Comes to an End

By 1957, pressure on Du Pont to end or dramatically change *Cavalcade of America* came from several quarters. Its research firms became convinced that audience share would increase if Du Pont abandoned the historical format or altered factual evidence to make stories more dramatic.³⁰² Another source of pressure came from the changing nature of the television industry. When the show first aired on TV, about a third of American households owned televisions, and most viewers had only one or two channels to choose from. But by then the cost per thousand viewers on television had stabilized (at about \$1.68, down from \$6.29 in 1947 and \$2.95 in 1949), sales of television sets were rapidly rising, radio use was falling, and the trend was clear enough to warrant the switch in media.³⁰³ The move to TV initially went well, and ratings increased in both the second and third seasons. Habitual viewing increased at even greater pace. Nationally, two-thirds of this was “spot” coverage rather than network, since ABC still lacked affiliates. The combined network and spot coverage reached an average per broadcast of 11,000,000 homes in the 1953-54 season and almost 17,000,000 homes during the 1954-55 season. By the end of that season, two-thirds of American families owned a television set, and in the major markets the number was almost 90%.³⁰⁴

³⁰² HL, Accession 1803, Box 6, Folder 40, John Dollard Report on “Smyrna Incident.” The fact that Du Pont resisted such appeals from Dollard, and similar ones over the years from BBDO, ABC, and NBC, suggests that the company did retain some allegiance to history.

³⁰³ HL, Accession 1814, Box 4, Folder 1953-56, Greenewalt to Barton, September 28, 1954; BBDO report on television outlook for Du Pont, 1955.

³⁰⁴ HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 32, BBDO Ratings Report Comparing 1952-53 and 1953-54 seasons; Box 8, Folder 1, Nielson Report, January 18, 1955; Box 23, Folder 1, “United States television Households by Region, State, and County,” Advertising Research Foundation, June 1955; Box 23, Folder 6, BBDO, “An Examination of TV for Du Pont Company Advertising,” August 1952. Statistics varied considerably depending on the city, the time slot, and the researcher, but Nielson gave

The number of channels available in all markets increased along with set ownership. Two-thirds of Americans received four or more channels by December 1954 (and half could watch five or more), up from one-third when *Cavalcade* began in September 1952.³⁰⁵ This meant more competition for viewers' attention. A historical program attracted viewers when nothing else was on, but could it attract viewers who had several other channels to choose from? The answer was mixed and depended on the local market competition, but overall *Cavalcade's* audience share declined. Still, the series performed well compared to both other dramatic programs and programs sponsored by institutional advertisers.³⁰⁶

ABC never fully satisfied Du Pont, and the feeling was mutual. The third network had limited coverage, which meant that Du Pont had to pay for spot coverage on independent local stations. ABC hoped Du Pont would change *Cavalcade* into an hour-long entertainment program similar to *Disneyland*, the network's big success in the mid-1950s. BBDO concurred with ABC that improving the "entertainment value" to "meet television's increasing program competition" would be wise and at

Du Pont a 16% "average share" in 1952-53, a 22% share in 1953-54 and 26% in 1954-55. Also interesting is the fact that television ownership was spread evenly between groups of all educational levels. So at the beginning of 1953, half of high school educated Americans owned television sets, 44% of college educated Americans owned sets, and 39% of grade school educated Americans owned sets. Income level did not really affect television ownership either, except for the bottom quarter of Americans, who owned far fewer televisions in the early to mid 1950s. *Cavalcade* first aired only on alternating weeks. This was not uncommon in 1952. Such hits as *Dragnet*, *Burns and Allen*, *Amos and Andy* and *Four Star Playhouse* also aired every other week.

³⁰⁵ HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 32, BBDO report on television prepared for Du Pont, 1955.

³⁰⁶ HL, Accession 1803, Box 22, Folder 19, BBDO report on audience composition, August 31, 1956. BBDO reported at the end of the 1956 season that of the institutional sponsors' programs, only *GE Theater* and *You Are There* reached more men-per-set and more homes overall than *Cavalcade*. Other institutional programs (*Meet the Press*, *Omnibus*, *Person to Person*, *U.S. Steel Hour*, *Voice of Firestone* and others) sometimes had more viewers per set OR reached more viewers total, but BBDO tried to maximize both with *Cavalcade*. BBDO found that dramatic programs did not bring as many viewers to each set as comedy, quiz, or variety shows, but, with Du Pont, decided that none of the other formats would reflect as positively on Du Pont (they lacked "dignity") though they were, with the exception of high-cost talent for comedy programs, less expensive.

one point even suggested that Du Pont sponsor “Disneyland” itself.³⁰⁷ Every effort to change something about *Cavalcade* – whether the network, the production facilities, or the content – ran up against Du Pont’s determination to maintain full rights and control. Rights remained important to Du Pont because films could be rebroadcast, they could be shown in theaters, and most importantly, they could be distributed to schools and other organizations at no additional cost to Du Pont.³⁰⁸ BBDO characterized *Cavalcade* as “unique” in the entire mass media industry in this sense.³⁰⁹ If anything, this became even truer around 1955, as the networks then began to assert greater control over programming and content and most sponsors and their agencies disappeared from the production side of television.³¹⁰ By 1956, as BBDO sought to find a new television home for Du Pont for 1957, the agency complained that in the new “seller’s market,” networks could demand sponsorship of their own shows as part of any deal for airtime.³¹¹

BBDO still advised Du Pont to maintain full control of their television production. The other option, picking up a network show that someone else had sponsored previously, held little appeal because viewers would not identify the program very strongly with Du Pont, and, for Du Pont, there would be a

³⁰⁷ HL, Accession 1803, Box 5, Folder 32, BBDO report on television prepared for Du Pont, 1955; Box 11, Folder 42, “Functions of BBDO in Servicing the Du Pont *Cavalcade* Program on Television,” July 23, 1954.

³⁰⁸ HL, Accession 1803, Box 22, Folder 7, BBDO report, “Du Pont Company Advertising: A Glance Backward, November 1952.

³⁰⁹ HL, Accession 1803, Box 11, Folder 42, BBDO report, “Functions of BBDO in Servicing the Du Pont *Cavalcade of America* Program on Television,” July 23, 1954. BBDO went so far as to cut out the producer when purchasing prints of each episode for distribution to television stations – buying from the lab instead. This was something no other agency or sponsor did and a practice that BBDO said saved Du Pont thousands of dollars a month.

³¹⁰ William Boddy, *Fifties Television*, 160-171.

³¹¹ HL, Accession 1803, Box 22, Folder 19, BBDO analysis of audience composition, August 31, 1956; Fried, *The Man Everybody Knew*, 200.

“psychological drawback” in buying what someone else had “abandoned.”³¹² So BBDO concentrated efforts on moving to one of the two stronger networks while leaving Du Pont in full control of its program. In the end, these dual objectives could only be achieved by abandoning the historical drama format.³¹³

Conditions – in politics, in business, and in advertising – had changed considerably by the late-fifties. However, Du Pont continued to face public relations challenges (in a strange twist of fate, Bruce Barton was summoned to serve on a grand jury in 1955 that would consider an anti-trust suit brought against Du Pont – he was excused³¹⁴) and large corporations still felt besieged by public resentment of their economic dominance. A poll conducted in 1959 suggested that 38% of Americans thought large companies should be broken up, regardless of their value. Du Pont fared somewhat better in polls; BBDO believed this could be attributed to *Cavalcade*. Thirty-six percent of Americans said they knew the Du Pont Company “well,” by far the highest percentage for any company that did not sell, primarily, directly to consumers. And for the most part, Americans approved of the company; only 3% did not – quite a change from 1935.³¹⁵ Still, Du Pont’s top executives felt it would be necessary to continue an exclusive television sponsorship. Until 1961, the company sponsored the *DuPont Show of the Month* on CBS. The program featured mostly contemporary dramas.

³¹² HL, Accession 1803, Box 27, Folder 27, “Brainstorming Problem #13 – Television Programs Attract/ Be Compatible With Institutional Advertising,” 1956.

³¹³ HL, Accession 1803, Box 22, Folder 23, BBDO, “Recommendations for Du Pont’s Continued Use of Television,” December 6, 1956.

³¹⁴ HL, Accession 1814, Box 4, Folder 56, Bruce Barton to Crawford Greenewalt, February 7, 1955.

³¹⁵ HL, Accession 1803, Box 24, Folder 16, BBDO report on public opinion toward major corporations; Colby, 420.

A few years after *Cavalcade* left the air, historian Henry Steele Commager wrote that the American national memory was a “literary and in a sense, a contrived memory.” Here the “image of the past was largely the creation of the poets and the storytellers.” Commager wrote of an earlier age of popular historical stories, the antebellum period, but as his own writings suggest, the interest in a usable American past was quite strong in the mid-twentieth century.³¹⁶ Du Pont sponsored some of the successful “poets and storytellers” of the age: the writers, actors, directors and producers behind *Cavalcade of America*. Whether they told the story of Johnny Appleseed or Jefferson Davis, Susan B. Anthony or E. I. du Pont, the ubiquitous repetition of the company’s message on the air, in books, in the home, and in the classroom had no close competition. No other single source offered as much information about American history, for so long, to so many people. Finally however, even the mythologized history on *Cavalcade* succumbed to the new realities of the maturing television industry; the public, offered more choices, proved unwilling to sit through propaganda disguised as historical dramatizations.

³¹⁶ Henry Steele Commager, *The Search for a Usable Past and Other Essays in Historiography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 25.

Chapter 4: History as News: CBS's *You Are There*

"It's a damn good program... How do you get away with it?"

- Edward R. Murrow

"History served us well. We had no need to invent conflicts to serve our purpose. They were there for the taking and we happily and conscientiously took them."

- Walter Bernstein

In 1953, the year during which Du Pont moved *Cavalcade of America* to television, another historical program, CBS News's *You Are There*, also made the jump from radio to television. *You Are There*'s historical interpretations presented 1950s audiences with a leftist political ideology almost exactly opposite Du Pont's. On this series, one heard political dissidents extolling "resistance to tyranny" and the historical episodes included both the "most shameful moments in American history" as well as a few triumphs. Themes of revolution and struggle occurred with much greater frequency than stories of bold (yet responsible) entrepreneurs or triumphant westward expansion. Power – a major focus of the writers behind the series – rested with the people rather than with their leaders. *You Are There* was also anti-exceptionalist, and incorporated American history into a broader world history that linked ideas and events across cultures and time.

The defining characteristic of the series however, was its nearly perfect chronological overlap with the blacklist in the entertainment industry. The first incarnation, *CBS is There*, debuted on radio just months after the "Hollywood Ten" confronted the committee of Representative James Parnell Thomas at the end of 1947. The final television episode aired in the summer of 1957, as the era of the

blacklist began its slow fade into history. The series had an almost symbiotic relationship with anticommunism, which provided much of the subtext of the ostensibly historical episodes, both on radio and TV. It also provided much of the talent, especially the writers, who, blacklisted from Hollywood, found not only work but also a medium through which they could fight back against the forces that would deny them almost everything.

You Are There featured the key historical events that “alter and illuminate our time” – the telling phrase writer Abraham Polonsky had penned for the voice of anchor Walter Cronkite. By design, it possessed the same sense of immediacy as the network’s newscasts, putting the viewer in the center of the action. The title of the program itself fascinates, with its implicit recognition of film’s power to persuade the viewer that the camera indeed captured a past reality. Ironically, this very confidence followed from the same logic that imposed the contemporaneous blacklist in film, television, and radio. In the wake of the presumed successes of propaganda films during the 1930s and through World War II, belief in the potential power of media to persuade audiences increased.³¹⁷ Broadcasters, advertisers, writers and directors with an interest in reaching a broad audience had witnessed the power of the Mercury Theatre’s *War of the Worlds* broadcast and of films from Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* to Capra’s *Why We Fight*, and they believed in the persuasive possibilities for their art. The *You Are There* writers, who had gone to Hollywood to make movies that were both entertaining and politically significant, thought they might achieve similar ends through the television medium.

³¹⁷ Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 10.

At the same time, cultural critics, politicians, social scientists, and many writers and intellectuals began to fear those very possibilities and sought to eliminate the opportunities for the manipulation of political thought through mass media. Some on the political right, like the publishers of *Counterattack!* and *Red Channels*, both of which sought to expose communists in the entertainment industry, became obsessed by the thought that communists were secretly disseminating their ideology to millions of unwitting Americans. Corporations, advertisers, networks, writers and other industry workers, as well as the anti-communist crusaders who successfully imposed the blacklist, all shared a belief in the power of mass media (and they all probably exaggerated the impact on the average viewer). The sponsors played the crucial role in the operation of the blacklist by withdrawing advertisements from shows that employed alleged communists.³¹⁸

You Are There's relationship with this side of the business determined the course of its history. While on radio the show aired un-sponsored, as public affairs programming provided by CBS as a public service. On television, the Prudential Life Insurance Company, and later, America's Electric, Light, and Power Companies, sponsored the show only every other week, leaving alternate weeks un-sponsored. At first, the producers tried to air the more obviously controversial episodes on off weeks, but whether they did or not did not seem to bother the sponsors. More important, the advertisers had no control over the content of the show (again, the exact opposite of *Cavalcade*), and apparently never knew that blacklisted writers

³¹⁸ Ibid.; Ronald Radosh and Allis Radosh, *Red Star Over Hollywood: The Film Colony's Long Romance with the Left* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2005), 168; David Everitt, *A Shadow of Red: Communism and the Blacklist in Radio and Television* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2007), 51, 59.

worked on the program.³¹⁹ However, this situation left the writers without any security. When executive producer William Dozier eventually decided to fire them (to *really* fire them), they could do nothing about it. Thus not only were their positions precarious, but their defeat, through the specific peculiarities of 1950s corporate power in the media marketplace, was perceptible even before they began to write.

Since the program left the air in 1957, nothing like *You Are There* has been attempted on television; no other program has premised itself as a live news report from another time and network news divisions have refrained from producing dramatic series. That CBS News ever considered historical dramatization a worthy pursuit (for a network news division) speaks to the greater role for history sought by many people at the time, both inside and outside CBS News. After cancellation, the series lived on beyond primetime in classrooms across the country, where at the height of the Cold War, millions of schoolchildren watched historical dramas written primarily by three unrepentant former communists: Arnold Manoff, Walter Bernstein, and Abraham Polonsky.

These three men channeled into the series all of their frustrations at being blacklisted, their disgust at the direction in which their country was moving, their disappointment in their fellow Americans for failing to live up to the ideals they believed inherent in the American tradition, and their astonishingly unvanquished faith in the basic goodness of their country. Two of them had served during the war;

³¹⁹ Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner, *Hide in Plain Sight: The Hollywood Blacklistees in Film and Television, 1950-2002* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 20; John Schultheiss, "A Season of Fear: Abraham Polonsky, *You Are There*, and the Blacklist," in Abraham Polonsky, *You Are There Teleplays: The Critical Edition*, ed. John Schultheiss and Mark Schaubert (Northridge, CA: The Center for Telecommunication Studies, 2003), 9, 17.

all three remained loyal despite their persecution; none chose the expatriate route; and none turned “friendly witness.” They earned a very modest living while managing to challenge the anticommunist terror more publicly and more consistently than almost anyone else at the time. As Polonsky later said, *You Are There* became “probably the only place where any guerrilla warfare was conducted against McCarthy in a public medium.”³²⁰ While this is an exaggeration, perhaps the only truly false note to this claim is the writer’s failure to recognize the strong stand taken by the earlier radio version of the same program.

The series has been recognized by historians for airing historical dramas that attacked anticommunism, but that recognition has obscured its other, broader goals and accomplishments, both as a watershed radio and television program and as an important site of historical analysis.³²¹ *You Are There* was also an innovative news program, where CBS News tried out techniques later used in “real” news broadcasts. And the talent behind the writing, directing, acting, and reporting nearly boggles the mind. As history, several of the programs anticipated future trends in the historical profession such as greater social and cultural emphases, attention to issues of class and race, subaltern and transnational history. The search for anti-anticommunist meaning in every episode has also ignored other, more reasonable possibilities of contemporary interpretations (both viewers’ and the writers’). Neither persecution by

³²⁰ John Schultheiss, “A Season of Fear: Abraham Polonsky, *You Are There*, and the Blacklist,” in Polonsky, *You Are There Teleplays*, 12.

³²¹ I refer specifically to the treatments by John Schultheiss, Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner in their books about the blacklist, parts of which recall the series as anticommunist (and very little else). They (and other authors, such as Thomas Doherty and Brenda Murphy) tend to cite only a few episodes. This approach has partly misrepresented the series and also oversimplified the intellectual work behind it. The detailed discussion of many individual episodes that follows in this chapter is an effort to examine the wide-ranging subjects of the show as well as the varied intellectual or artistic concerns of the writers.

the state nor artistic concerns about such persecution began in 1947 with the Hollywood Ten; rather, the subjects returned to again and again by *You Are There's* writers – Galileo, Socrates, Joan of Arc, Salem – had been used and were still being used to denounce fascism, totalitarianism, and any other political system in which artists, scientists, writers, and intellectuals were forced to conform to an obnoxious political standard. For the most part, *You Are There* more closely resembled Orwell's writings against totalitarianism than any sort of distinctly communist attack on America's contemporary drift toward "fascism." Descriptions of the series in isolation miss the broader meanings of these plays in exchange for a false certainty that the authors always referred specifically to American anticommunist crusaders of the late-1940s and early 1950s.

The "radical" label describes the series' unconventional subject matter as much as its implicit anti-anticommunism. The topics included white America's perfidious treatment of Native Americans; black Haitians and southern slaves rising up to seize their freedom; Joan of Arc, Ann Hutchinson, Lucretia Mott, and other "feminists"; the "theft" of jazz music from African Americans; the uneasy relationship between art and politics; American empire; and, of course, plenty of historical trials in which unscrupulous demagogues attack the right to free speech, thought, and association.

To whom though was this program addressed? Would a mainstream audience appreciate the nuance of the historical interpretations (much less the veiled references to contemporary politics and society)? In a Gallup poll taken in 1952, over 60% of respondents could not correctly identify Plato in any way, to any degree. Seventy

percent could not name a single artist of the previous fifty years.³²² Yet *You Are There* seems to have assumed that the audience would appreciate shows about just such topics. The creative forces behind the series would have known that much of what they put into the show would be over the heads of many viewers, but they often had another audience in mind – or rather they wrote and produced these shows for multiple audiences (or a diverse grand audience). Many episodes contain lines obviously intended by the writers for their fellow persecuted, with others for an elite audience that might absorb the message (and maybe even respond with some action). Viewers also included young students, anticommunists investigating the industry, CBS (News and Corporate), and “average” Americans. While a single program might reach the varied parts of this whole, not everyone would see the same thing. The idea, as expressed by Polonsky, was to reach as many people as possible with “some truth.” For the writers, the appeal of the show was the same as that which drew a generation of leftist cultural workers to Hollywood in the 1930s: a medium that offered a way to connect with, and communicate to, a broad public.

CBS News also had an agenda for the series, which must be considered along with that of the writers, directors and other contributors. Like *Cavalcade of America*, *You Are there* also began as a radio series. During the 1930s, the decade that saw network radio come into its own, CBS lagged considerably behind NBC. Rather than spend huge sums to lure talent away from the dominant network, CBS invested more modest amounts in its news department, using news programs to fill airtime (after World War II CBS President Bill Paley decided to also purchase top NBC talent). By

³²² Gallup Poll #486 of February 9-February 16, 1952, <http://institution.gallup.com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=AIP00486K>, accessed July 2008.

the end of the 1930s, NBC still dominated entertainment programming, but CBS had achieved supremacy in less costly (and less remunerative) news programming. The network's fortunes really began to change with the coming of the Second World War, which generated unheard of audiences for news.³²³

In a move partly motivated by a desire to use existing resources for added benefit, the news division drifted into an ambiguous area of educational entertainment with *CBS is There*, which later became *You Are There*. Newsmen staffed the series, which CBS News produced rather than CBS Entertainment. Even more than the Du Pont series then, *You Are There*'s radio and television producers intended the program to represent documented history. Following Roy Rosenstone's designation of "history film," which he contrasted with the more clearly fictionalized tales of the past made by Hollywood, this series might be labeled "history radio" and "history television."³²⁴

CBS presented the news from the past through historical figures appearing "live" on radio or television while being interviewed by reporters who acted as if they reported the events of the day circa 1950. The same men trusted to provide honest reporting of key current events were thus entrusted with recorded history. Regulars included Walter Cronkite, whom executive producer William Dozier selected after watching his acclaimed coverage of the 1952 national party conventions.³²⁵ His "voice of authority... communicated a strong sense of authenticity for the show."

³²³ James L. Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture: Journalism, Filmmaking, and Broadcasting in America since 1941* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 19.

³²⁴ Roy Rosenstone, *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3,4.

³²⁵ Just before the conventions, Cronkite and William Wood oversaw a free CBS course in effective use of television for the two presidential candidates and thirty-four senators up for reelection in 1952. Cabell Phillips, "Learning How to Act Like a Senator," *New York Times*, May 25, 1952.

When Cronkite told the audience that “all things are as they were then, except ‘You Are There,’” he was convincing in a way that few other broadcast journalists could have been.³²⁶ The reporters included John Daly, Mike Wallace, Harry Marble, Don Hollenbeck, Edward P. Morgan, Allan Jackson, Bill Leonard (later head of CBS News), Winston Burdett (until he confessed to being a Soviet spy in 1955³²⁷), Lou Cioffi, Charles Collingwood, and Ned Calmer. As pioneers of television news reporting, the experiences of these newsmen and the direction they received on *You Are There* undoubtedly impacted not only their own styles and techniques, but also those of generations of later television news reporters.

Historians have recognized the power of Cronkite’s voice of authority/voice of god, but *You Are There* actually had multiple gods. More authoritative than Cronkite even was the unseen, unnamed announcer who opened the show by bellowing out the appropriate date from the past and the tag line, “YOU... ARE... THERE!” The same voice closed each episode. Since the reporters stayed off camera, they also fit the definition of voice-of-god narration. They represent lesser deities of course – the minor gods sent down from Olympus to interact with mortals – but they still stand apart from, and pass judgment on, the people of the past.³²⁸

The musical soundtrack also helped to set the desired tone for the series. The shows opened without any introductory notes, but the credits rolled to a varied

³²⁶ Robert F. Horowitz, “History Comes to Life and You Are There” in by John E. O’Connor, ed., *American History/ American Television: Interpreting the Video Past* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1983), 83.

³²⁷ Eric Pace, “Winston Burdett is Dead at 79: Covered World and War for CBS,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1993. Reporter Winston Burdett confessed to being a spy for the Soviet Union in June 1955 and gave a Senate committee the names of other communists in broadcast journalism. Edward R. Murrow arranged for his reassignment to Rome, where he continued reporting for CBS into the 1970s.

³²⁸ On the subject of narration in historical film, see William Guynn, *Writing History in Film* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 60-80.

repertoire (only on television – the radio show had no music). At first the music changed each week to match the episode’s content. Then Aaron Copland’s *Fanfare for the Common Man* became the theme. Like series writer Walter Bernstein, Copland had been cited in the first *Red Channels* publication in June 1950 and could no longer score Hollywood productions. Thus, while Copland’s tribute to the “common man” may have provided precisely the sought after tone in its own right, by using it each week *You Are There* declared itself almost openly against the blacklist. Music, like history, provided cover for politics.

Radio: CBS is There (and You Are There too)

Before *You Are There* made its mark on television, the series ran fairly successfully on radio from 1947-1950 as a relatively low budget way for CBS to fill airtime.³²⁹ Though the later television writers (and still later biographers and historians) were dismissive about the radio version, many of the subversive themes celebrated by the television writers first appeared on radio. It was not, as blacklist historians Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner characterize it, “familiar facts-and-patriotism.” Nor did it deal only with personalities, and not ideas, as Walter Bernstein would later claim.³³⁰

Robert Lewis Shayon directed radio’s *CBS is There/ You Are There* and wrote many of the episodes, either solo or with a shared credit. Several months before he

³²⁹ Horowitz, 80. The radio version aired un-sponsored on Sundays. CBS News reporter Goodman Ace dreamed up the idea for the radio series and CBS President Bill Paley personally authorized it over subordinates’ objections.

³³⁰ Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner, *A Very Dangerous Citizen: Abraham Polonsky and the Hollywood Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 174.

started on the series, in the summer of 1947, Shayon received rave reviews for his CBS radio documentary, “The Eagles Brood” – an “angry, tough, and eloquent piece” that attacked public apathy toward juvenile delinquency. *The New York Times* called him the “most important ‘new’ writer on radio,” but Shayon also directed and produced, and he ran CBS’s Documentary Unit until he left this series and the unit in summer 1949.³³¹ One year later, in June 1950, *Red Channels* published Shayon’s name and secured him a spot on the blacklist. That same month, *You Are There* disappeared from radio, possibly because of the taint of association with Shayon.³³² It is surprising that the historical discussions of the television program and its blacklisted writers have ignored this earlier chapter. Perhaps it takes away from the “revolutionary” story the television writers (and their biographers) would like to remember.

In striking contrast to Du Pont/BBDO’s happy, triumphant march through American history, *You Are There* demonstrated a willingness to examine the darker

³³¹ Jack Gould, “The Eagles Brood: CBS Documentary Deals With Delinquency,” *New York Times*, Mar 9, 1947; Jack Gould, “The Honor Roll,” *New York Times*, Dec 28, 1947; “WNYC to Open ‘Masters’ Concert Series -- CBS to Offer Historical Program,” *New York Times*, Jul 7, 1947; Horowitz, 80,83; Schultheiss, 11,31.

³³² Mickelson writes that when Shayon’s name appeared in *Red Channels* he no longer worked for CBS and therefore Mickelson paid the matter little attention. However, he also says that the Documentary Unit was viewed with suspicion after *Red Channels* appeared and certain programs were cut (he does not mention specific titles). Mickelson never mentions *You Are There* in his rather odd memoir, *The Decade that Shaped Television News* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), though he alludes to that *kind* of program several times to say he objected to anything that was not straight documentary. The evidence suggests the opposite was true, as Mickelson spoke favorably on many occasions about the mix of dramatization and documentation as well as history and current events. I suspect that as he reflected on the decade and his role in pioneering network television news, he no longer considered *You Are There* to be a serious enough program and thus deleted it from his history. None of the other historical work on CBS in this period pays much attention to the series. It seems that historians of television news draw a line between real news and recreations where their historical subjects did not. The most recent of these books, published in 2008, is a biography of *You Are There* veteran Don Hollenbeck. While there are a few mentions of the series, the author clearly does not consider the reporter’s years on the show (during his first few years on television) to have been significant: Loren Ghiglione, *CBS’s Don Hollenbeck: An Honest Reporter in the Age of McCarthyism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

side of the nation's growth. In the spring of 1948 for example, in an episode about Sitting Bull's capture, *CBS is There* took listeners "back 67 years to one of the most shameful moments in American history." Just by covering a "shameful" episode – really, just by acknowledging the existence of such an event in the American past – *You Are There* departed from and challenged the unquestioning patriotism of *Cavalcade of America*.

Unlike the later television incarnation, *CBS is There* opened not with an anchor in the studio but with a reporter in the field: usually John Daly. Always, as the announcer stated at the beginning of each broadcast, the reporting was "based on authentic historical fact and quotation." To further "authenticate," sound quality could be manipulated to reproduce "real-life" lower quality connections between the news studio and reporters far afield (or could be "disrupted" during battles, shipwrecks, or natural disasters) and the script adhered as closely as possible to CBS's descriptive news-reporting style (still of course under development).³³³ Contemporary reviewers admired the show's realism; a *Washington Post* reviewer wrote, "Such a line as, 'And now over to Plato's home and Don Hollenbeck,' could easily be preposterous. It isn't preposterous because CBS has done exhaustive research, because the writers have blended solemnity and showmanship in about

³³³ During "Columbus Discovers America" we learn that Daly has been cut off for three days before Hollenbeck at CBS London reestablishes contact with him during the broadcast (whew!) after several failed "live" attempts. During the second attempt, Hollenbeck explains over the static that "the signal is not of broadcast quality. That sound of voices may be what the technicians call ghost voices – weird patterns of static that sound like people talking." Again, they fail to reach Daly, so they replay his past report before losing contact. This is another episode where substantial dialogue is delivered in a foreign language, in this case, Spanish. Unlike the voiceover method used on other episodes, here the Spanish interview is done in full before reporter Ken Roberts provides a rough translation. The same is true later, when Ferdinand and Isabella speak from Barcelona. This episode is available online at <http://www.archive.org>

equal quantities, and because the production of each of these epics is as slick a bit of business as you'll find in radio."³³⁴

In "Sitting Bull," Daly reported over a "land-line quality" connection from the Dakota Territory, on an unseasonably cold and blustery July day in 1881, when locals, as Daly related, dressed in winter overcoats and chatted about the recent attempt on President Garfield's life. The episode spotlights Sitting Bull's decision to surrender to the Army in exchange for a pardon, and then the Army's immediate betrayal; it is a highly critical interpretation of America's frontier history.

Early on, a Captain Clifford of the U.S. Army and a French trader named Jean Louis Legare converse about U.S. Indian policy. Legare insists that Sitting Bull should be considered one of the "great men of all time." White men, on the other hand, "make a treaty – they sign a piece of paper – and then they break their word – and they send soldiers to ram it down the red man's throat." The American officer replies, speciously, that the reservation system is "obviously a superior way, because we wouldn't be here if it weren't." Legare insists that the U.S. stole Sioux land and accuses America of reserving its vaunted "independence" "for the white man only." Clifford finally admits that mistakes "have been made," but "nobody – not even Sitting Bull and the whole Sioux Nation – can stop this country from pushing the frontier clean to the Pacific Ocean." How different this is from the manifest destiny approach to the history of American expansion expressed on *Cavalcade of America*. And the story only gets worse as Sitting Bull is deceived by the duplicitous American commander, then captured and chained. The pitiful episode concludes with John

³³⁴ John Crosby, "CBS is There Has Fine Balance," *The Washington Post*, Apr 25, 1948.

Daly's observation that Sitting Bull seemed to be smiling ironically to himself –
“almost as if he expected this to happen.”³³⁵

In *The End of Victory Culture*, Tom Englehardt notes that around 1950 some films in the Western genre (e.g., *Broken Arrow*) began to portray Indians more favorably and described the conflict between whites and Indians as equivalent in terms of the degree of savagery practiced by both sides. But *You Are There*'s “Sitting Bull” takes things a step further. Here, whites (excluding the non-American Legare and CBS's own reporters from the future-present) act villainously, while the Sioux behave nobly to the end.³³⁶

Perhaps the most surprising radio episode, in its revolutionary fervor and its taboo subject matter, was “The Betrayal of Toussaint l'Ouverture.” This episode was written by Shayon and Joseph Liss, who together also wrote “Sitting Bull.” CBS reported from Haiti, 1802, where twelve years of fighting have finally culminated in treaty negotiations. Haitians detail countless French atrocities for CBS listeners while the French dance and gorge themselves at a lavish party. CBS listens in on a short speech against racial prejudice from Toussaint just before his betrayal by General LeClair. As in “Sitting Bull,” the white imperialists have only pretended to make peace. But in “Toussaint,” the Haitians fight back immediately, and the show closes with violent chaos brought on by the deceitful (and racist) French: a disaster that might have been avoided.³³⁷

³³⁵ WHS, Daly Papers, Box 5, Folder 7, “The Surrender of Sitting Bull.”

³³⁶ Tom Englehardt, *The End of Victory Culture: Cold War America and the Disillusioning of a Generation* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995), 101.

³³⁷ “The Betrayal of Toussaint L'Ouverture” written by Robert Lewis Shayon and Joseph Liss, airdate May 30, 1948, available online at www.archive.org.

As the television series would do in 1953 and 1955, in 1948 Shayon's *CBS is There* presented the "Salem Witch Trials." Written by Sylvia Berger, this denunciation of state-sponsored persecution aired less than two months after the Thomas Committee's assault on the "Hollywood Ten." Immediately after those congressional hearings, executives from the major studios met in New York at the Waldorf Astoria and issued what became known as the Waldorf Statement on November 25, 1947. Declaring their resistance to intimidation, they nevertheless promised to rid Hollywood of communists. This marked the earliest stage in the development of a systemized blacklist.

Shayon's radio production aired a half-decade before the premieres of Arthur Miller's *Crucible* and Arnold Manoff's *You Are There* teleplay "The Witch Trial at Salem." And the artistic reaction in 1948 was in some ways stronger than the two later productions. While that may disturb our ingrained teleological sense of progress (which perhaps explains why historians of the blacklist prefer to describe a gradual awakening over the course of the 1950s), it reflects the vigorous defense of free speech voiced by some Americans at the very beginning of the blacklist era. For example, in Hollywood, several prominent actors formed the Committee for the First Amendment, which protested against the hearings in Washington. Quickly however, the ranks of liberals prepared to defend their leftist friends' constitutional rights began to shrink, and such militant rebuttals as Berger's no longer suited the milieu.³³⁸

³³⁸ Doherty, 23. Since many adequate histories of the blacklist are readily available, there is little reason for a detailed rehashing here. Written during the period, Murray Kempton's *Monuments of the Thirties* remains the most enjoyable read. Stefan Kanfer, *A Journal of the Plague Years* (New York: Atheneum, 1973); Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); and Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), are the classic histories of the era and everything written during the 1990s draws on their pro-blacklistee interpretations. For informative oral histories

In New York on January 4, 1948, John Daly reported from Salem, Massachusetts, June 29, 1692. The Reverend Samuel Parris, portrayed as a petty, almost base clergyman, has charged accused witch Rebecca Nurse of plotting “against the government.” Furthermore, a mysterious “they” had held suspicious meetings at which they plotted to “root out the Christian religion from this country.” When Daly presses Parris about his ongoing salary dispute with his congregation (and Nurse’s husband in particular), Parris stubbornly deflects, saying only, “Rebecca Nurse has been plotting the destruction of our government.”³³⁹ In this opening scene, Berger and Shayon not only establish the falseness of the charges, but also discredit accusers that mask their own motives by launching vague and shameful attacks on easy targets. But the next report by Daly is even more to the point:

“The excitement over the witches brings to a head the anxiety and unrest which has been disturbing the people of Salem. Dissatisfaction with a succession of governors, high taxes, a high cost of living, and lately, rumors of war – make it easy to understand why the distracted Salemites feel, as one put it to me this morning, that “Satan is loose in New England”... and why they are not surprised to learn that 150 of their own neighbors and even friends have been plotting with the Devil against them and their government.”

see Patrick McGilligan and Paul Buhle, *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1997). Buhle and Wagner’s *Hide in Plain Sight: The Hollywood Blacklistees in Film and Television, 1950-2002* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), carries the usual story forward through the end of the twentieth century to argue that blacklistees had an unrecognized impact on film both during and after McCarthyism. For a concise account, see Thomas Doherty’s *Cold War, Cool Medium*. Recent books that challenge the pro-blacklistee consensus are: David Everitt, *A Shadow of Red: Communism and the Blacklist in Radio and Television*, and Ronald Radosh and Allis Radosh, *Red Star Over Hollywood: The Film Colony’s Long Romance with the Left*. Both works question late-20th century historiography that uncritically accepted the blacklistee’s memories of the 1950s. Everitt argues that the publishers of Counterattack and Red Channels were not paranoid fanatics but rather well-meaning and fairly moderate concerned citizens (with allies that tended toward excess). The 2007 edited volume of essays, “Un-American” *Hollywood: Politics and Film in the Blacklist Era* challenges the blacklist historiography from another perspective. The contributing authors question many of the presuppositions of earlier historians of the blacklist, including the presumed ability of anyone, blacklisted or not, to effectively disseminate ideology through film or television, as well as the earlier historians’ inclinations to find anti-anticommunism in every film made by someone on the left during these years.

³³⁹ The emphasis on Parris’s financial dispute, as well as the division within the Salem community, is a prominent theme in later historical work on the trials, in particular, Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum’s *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

Substitute “United States” for “Salem/New England” and “Communism” for “Satan/Devil” (both logical substitutions, already made in other contexts) and Daly paints a disturbingly accurate picture of how contemporary American society’s fears and concerns could foster paranoia. As the trial proceeds, the judges ask confusing and unfair questions. Instead of asking *if* she hurt the girls, the judges demand Rebecca tell them *why*; her guilt is a foregone conclusion. They say that Rebecca’s only choice is full confession to the court. The seventy-one year old Nourse cannot hear well but the judges refuse to repeat questions and force her to stand throughout her trial with her hands tied behind her back. Our sympathies are clearly to lie with her. Daly reassures us she is “showing extraordinary courage!”³⁴⁰

In a final statement about the absurdity of the trial, after the jury returns a verdict of not guilty, the judges order the jurors to leave and come back only after deciding on a guilty verdict. To answer Daly’s incredulosity, Nourse’s son Sam explains:

“Because they’ve got some people in office around here, who are scared of being pushed out. There are too many people who don’t like them. So they find themselves some scapegoats. They take women like my mother. They say she’s a witch. They say they’re trying to bewitch our children, and sink the government. All they’re trying to do is save their own necks, and for that they’re going to hang my mother.”

Before sentencing, Daly found Sam’s interpretation hard to believe. Yet “everything he said was true... and if this is contempt of this court, let it be so.” Herein lies the beauty of the historical setting, which allows Daly to risk a “contempt” charge without really risking anything.

³⁴⁰ Just when things look bleakest, thirty-nine leading citizens introduce a petition declaring their belief in Rebecca’s innocence: the establishment finally intervenes in the farce. But then Harry Marble interviews the imprisoned Captain John Alden – literally a child of a *Mayflower* family and here clearly representing the old elite – who is also accused of witchcraft. The ordering of these reports establishes the moral: stand up now for those accused, or wait until they come for you.

“The Execution of Joan of Arc” made a similar statement the following month, to rave reviews from Hollywood producer Walter Wanger and from Ingrid Bergman, the star of his 1948 film, *Joan of Arc*. Both were “violently enthusiastic” about the CBS production.³⁴¹ As in *Salem*, the reporters suggest that “Joan of Arc was condemned for political reasons” and her accusers here similarly refuse comment when pressed on their “underlying motives.” The triumph for Joan comes in denying her judges the satisfaction of a confession and in preserving her own integrity. “Her refusal to sign the oath of abjuration was quiet, but unequivocal. She did not seem to waver for a moment. It seemed as if all her mental torture, her long months of struggle and doubt are over, over at last...”³⁴²

Daly describes the execution as “a kind of circus,” where bored people congregate to watch someone suffer a horrible death. Ken Roberts, reporting from the crowd, first interviews a French woman come “on vacation” to see an execution; then the English guard who only cares that he will get his dinner soon (whether she recants or burns); and the executioner, who will get paid as long as she does not recant and who thus wants her to hold fast to her beliefs. Collectively the interviews paint a very disturbing picture of how ordinary people interact with state-sponsored persecutions.

Over and over the script emphasizes the base politics behind the persecution(s). For authenticity, the actors speak French during most of the

³⁴¹ WHS, John Daly Papers, Box 5, Folder 5, “The Execution of Joan of Arc.” The German born Wanger had produced *Blockade*, Hollywood’s only Spanish Civil War movie in 1940 and would later produce *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the 1956 motion picture portrayal of a nation of mindless conformists. *Joan of Arc* was based on Maxwell Anderson’s Broadway play *Joan of Lorraine*, which had also starred Ingrid Bergman. Anderson wrote several other historical dramas, including one about Socrates and another about Washington at Valley Forge (two oft-used historical episodes in the 1940s and 1950s).

³⁴² Ibid.

broadcast, and CBS's reporters appear to translate on the fly. Some speeches get translated in full; others are left in the background. Those brought to the listeners' attention clearly carry more weight. Daly translates fully the list of offenses as read by the court, which suggests both the scope of the investigation(s) and their true nature (casting about for any non-conformist activity). In addition to witchcraft labels like "sorceress," this "disturber of the peace" is called "scandalous," "seditious," "indecent," "immodest," and "profane." Joan of course holds fast to her faith, refuses to accept the court's power over her, and burns to death accompanied by the cries of the suddenly awakened crowd calling for the execution to stop. "Even some of the men who condemned her are weeping and praying... they are overcome with guilt and horror." A happy ending then – in a way.³⁴³

Happier endings followed "The Impeachment of Andrew Johnson" and "The Impeachment Trial of Supreme Court Justice Samuel Chase," both presented as fables against overreaching congressional committees.³⁴⁴ In the former, an unwitting Thaddeus Stevens gives the game away, saying, "We don't need criminal evidence to warrant conviction... This isn't a criminal proceeding. This is a political action! I repeat – a political action." The congressional committees investigating the entertainment industry at the time also made this same distinction, and justified their

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Prolific radio and television writer Irve Tunick wrote both of these impeachment episodes. In January 1954 Tunick resigned as president of the Eastern Region of the Television Writers of America because the Western region (Hollywood) continued to retain Joan LaCour as executive secretary after she invoked the 5th Amendment in a closed HUAC hearing in Los Angeles. It is thus tempting to refer to a change in politics (becoming more conservative, or at least safer) from his scripts of 1948 to this decision to resign. NYPL, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Card Catalog File for Irve Tunick, clipping from *The New York Times*, January 14, 1954.

oversight and their procedures, as well as the lack of due process for “witnesses,” by denying they had created a criminal court in the legislative branch.³⁴⁵

A different interpretation of this period might have emphasized the good that radical Republicans hoped to achieve for ex–slaves in the South. That story would have to wait; in 1948 popular history from the left had a different and more immediate purpose – to fight for the right to exist. Similarly, “The Sentencing of Charles I” might have condemned the monarch’s claim of a divine right to rule, but it did not. Instead, the sentencing hearing became another parable about unjust anticommunist hearings. As in several of the other trial histories, the court (which Charles refused to recognize) offers him a choice of repentance or death. And again, the judges – “not judges in the strict sense of the word,” yet granted broad extrajudicial authority by parliament – will not let the accused read his statement, just as the Thomas committee refused such statements from the Hollywood Ten.³⁴⁶ John Roberts has meanwhile wandered into the marketplace to interview a fishmonger and his wife, Mary. They both object to the prosecution, but the husband is reluctant to speak up lest his business suffer. “He’s got less spine than the fish he sells,” says Mary. “Aye, if you were a man you would have been speaking your mind...”³⁴⁷

Several other episodes focused on historic trials, all of which contained similar thinly veiled references to the American political scene. At her 1637 trial, Ann Hutchinson, the “first American feminist,” boldly challenges the attempts of “the

³⁴⁵ Navasky, 284; WHS, John Daly Papers, Box 5, Folder 8, “The Impeachment of Andrew Jackson” and “The Impeachment Trial of Supreme Court Justice Samuel Chase.”

³⁴⁶ Navasky, 82; Only Albert Maltz was permitted to read his prepared statement into the record.

³⁴⁷ WHS, John Daly Papers, Box 6, Folder 8, “The Sentencing of Charles I, King of England.” The lesson seems clear enough at this point, but later in the episode the listener is made to appreciate the Puritan position. In the end, CBS reporters hail Charles’s principled stand, even while they explain how his opponents, foul though their means may have been, ushered in a new and eventually more democratic era.

few to rule the minds of the many.” As at Salem, CBS’s reporters challenge the judges’ right to preside in this matter as well as their decision to disallow legal counsel for the accused. It is also noteworthy that several times in the episode Ann’s husband is referred to (not at all disparagingly) as a man willing to live in the shadow of his brilliant wife. The reporters praise her husband for his willingness to support her career.³⁴⁸

You Are There featured subjects relating to equal rights for women several times over the three-year run on radio. Somewhat fittingly then, the series finale on June 11, 1950 was “The Women’s Rights Convention.” This broadcast centered on the 1853 convention at Broadway Tabernacle in New York, where former slave Sojourner Truth speaks and quiets an unruly and chaotic crowd, allowing the delegates to pass their equal rights resolution. Over the course of the episode, the reporters ridicule those who argue that women must only bear children and keep house – an uncommon dissent at the dawn of the 1950s.³⁴⁹

CBS News Documents History

Television brought images of congressional hearings, nuclear tests, and other momentous happenings into the home for the first time in the 1950s, but the idea of, and ideology behind, giving the public nearly immediate facsimiles of major events

³⁴⁸ “The Trial of Ann Hutchinson,” written by Henry Walsh and Robert Lewis Shayon. Another episode of this type, “The Trial of John Peter Zenger” covers much the same ground as the previously mentioned shows, with a bit more emphasis on the brave citizens on the jury. Both episodes are online at www.archive.org.

³⁴⁹ “The Women’s Rights Convention,” directed by Mitchell Grayson and produced by Sam Abelo. Irving Gitlin was script editor, and it was produced under the direction of the CBS Documentary Unit. Online at www.archive.org.

dates to the earliest newsreels. Beginning with the Spanish American War, newsreel companies combined staged cinema and documentary footage into a genre that blurred the line between fact and fiction.³⁵⁰ In the 1910s, labor unions produced feature-length docudramas that presented their side of the struggle against capital to the mainstream movie audience.³⁵¹ With this legacy of “realist dramatization,” *You Are There* also inherited the idea of fostering a more democratic political system that functioned through the re-presentation of events directly to the public.³⁵² This dogma of direct appeals to the people strengthened during the 1930s, manifest in both politics and culture. In that decade, the “documentary style” of theatre, film, literature, art and music presented descriptive evidence to a broad audience with the aim of affecting political behavior.³⁵³

The “documentary-style” realism of CBS’s radio series, particularly Daly’s reporting, was never more apparent than during battle scenes. Many listeners in the late 1940s would have remembered Daly’s war reports of just a few years before (soon to come again with the Korean War). The fictional scripts and Daly’s style bore an eerie resemblance to his and other reporters’ wartime broadcasts. During “The Battle of Gettysburg,” Daly interviewed soldiers in the midst of war:

Daly: How old are you, Private McGaw?

³⁵⁰ Saverio Giovacchini, “Did Private Nolan Get His Glory? Movies, Press and Audience During the Spanish-American War,” *Columbia Journal of American Studies* 3, no.1 (1998): 141-158.

³⁵¹ Stephen J. Ross, “Struggles for the Screen: Workers, Radicals, and the Political Uses of Silent Film,” *American Historical Review* 96, no. 2 (Apr 1991): 342-345.

³⁵² Bill Nichols, “Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject,” *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (Autumn 2008), 72-89: 84. “Realist dramatization” attempts to erase distinctions between the real events it reenacts and follows conventional dramatic format. Nichols refers to the opposite approach as “Brechtian distancing.” *You Are There* did give listeners and viewers the sense of looking in on a play (or participating in it), but every attempt was made to conceal the staging and make the audience believe the play is real.

³⁵³ Richard Pells, “Documentaries, Fiction, and the Depression,” in *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 194-251.

McGaw: Eighteen.

Daly: Will you speak a little louder, please?

McGaw: Eighteen.

Daly: Eighteen. I understand that's the average age of half the Union Army here today, Tom. Seems awfully young, doesn't it?

McGaw: I don't know.

Daly: Well, why are there so many young ones like you here?

McGaw: Well, after the Battle of Chancellorsville, most of the older fellows time was up, so they went home.

Daly: I see. Then youngsters like you volunteered to fill the ranks?

McGaw: No sir. I was drafted.

Daly: Where are you from, Tom?

McGaw: Illinois country.

Daly: What were you doing when you were drafted?

McGaw: Working in my Dad's store.

Daly: (SYMPATHETIC – BUT NO KIDDING – STILL KEEPING TENSION) Are you married? (PAUSE) Well, what are you blushing about? Have you got a sweetheart?

McGaw: I guess so.

Daly: Does she write you?

McGaw: About every two weeks.

Daly: Who do you miss most, your mother or your sweetheart? (QUIETLY, AFTER A PAUSE) You miss 'em both, don't you?

McGaw: Yes sir.

Daly: How do you like the army, Tom? Do they... [Interrupted by battle]."

During the battle, Daly's position is shelled and they lose contact with him.

Don Hollenbeck takes over, reporting from Union headquarters. The action is intense, fast-paced, and frighteningly realistic. *You Are There's* aesthetic qualities derived mostly from radio journalism, but Daly and the other reporters also likely internalized the *You Are There* interview style and brought it with them to their news

assignments. Later CBS News reports from Korea for example, including Morrow's legendary *See it Now* broadcasts, bear similarities to the above Gettysburg interview.³⁵⁴

Werner Michel replaced Shayon as head of the Documentary Unit and as director and producer of *You Are There* in the autumn of 1949. In the spring of 1950, Michel proposed to CBS News director Sig Mickelson a television version of *You Are There*. Costs would be much higher than on radio since television required costumes, sets, and crowds of extras, but the impact of seeing history happen "live" promised to be much greater. Talent expenses would at least be moderated by the continued use of CBS newsmen, a cheaper talent pool than Hollywood actors. *You Are There* would now have to be "authentic" both "orally and pictorially," though from the first proposals the assumption was that reporters would appear in modern dress or not at all.

The arguments for producing this difficult program bore a striking similarity to those made on behalf of *Cavalcade of America*. First, the news directors assumed that viewing history on the television screen would have a much greater impact than listening to it over the radio, and by the time production began in late 1952 the television audience (and CBS's broadcasting responsibilities to affiliates) was rapidly growing. Second, such a high-class program would give CBS, "for the first time, a great institutional program which will silence the numerous critics of present-day

³⁵⁴ WHS, Daly Papers, Box 5, Folder 4, "The Battle of Gettysburg." Murrow's *See it Now* interviews with U.S. soldiers in Korea, particularly in "This is Korea," closely resemble these *You Are There* interviews with soldiers. They also look a lot like the interviews in later televised *You Are There* scripts written by Walter Bernstein. Rather than suggesting that Murrow directly copied from the historical drama series, it seems more likely that both *You Are There* and *See it Now* (both produced by the News Division) followed the accepted and expected style of reporting from the front, making *You Are There* all the more believable to listeners.

television.” Sensitive to such attacks, and conscious of its standing as the second place network to NBC, CBS looked to this pseudo-documentary program for prestige and status.³⁵⁵

A few years later, in words that help explain the part *You Are There* played at CBS News, Mickelson spoke to his department about the “new meaning of news”:

“News now embraces not only ‘the earthquake, fire and sword’ – the hard news of the day’s events. It also embraces the small, and, to the unaided eye or ear, often imperceptible changes in long-running and slowly-unfolding stories of social and political and economic change. More than ever before in peacetime *Americans are now seeing and hearing the real stuff of history*. This is true for all of our news media. All of our channels of communication are carrying a heavier share of what I will call, for the present, the more meaningful news. *This news is the so-called soft news, news that may have meaning only when it is shown to be a part of historical trend or development* [italics added].”

Mickelson thought *You Are There* (and its successor, *The Twentieth Century*, as well as the closely related *Eyewitness to History*) demonstrated CBS’s commitment to connecting current events with the past and thus giving them “meaning.” Time-traveling reporters and interviews with people long dead comprised a sincere attempt to give the public the news, which, according to Mickelson, could be the “real stuff of history” as much as the day’s events. But more than that, CBS News engaged in and to some degree succeeded at the “essential process of historical review and reappraisal in meaningful terms for their very large audiences.” Mickelson called this “news-in-depth,” by which he meant it had depth in time. His first program to attempt this was *You Are There*.³⁵⁶

Mickelson summed up his vision with the observation that “television’s greatest value lies in its ability to bring to the public an *exact portrayal of significant*

³⁵⁵ WHS, Sig Mickelson Papers, Box 1, Folder “Programs: You Are There,” Office Communication from Michel to Mickelson, May 8, 1950.

³⁵⁶ WHS, Sig Mickelson Papers, Box 1, Folder “CBS News – Miscellaneous Data – 1955-1960,” Draft of Speech given as President of CBS News entitled, “The New Meaning of News,” undated.

public events as they occur and providing for the public the sense of intimate participation in these events [italics added].”³⁵⁷ Then and since, many others have argued the significance of television’s promise to deliver to the viewer the event itself, rather than, as in print, an indirect reporting of the event. At the dawn of the television age, CBS News offered an “exact portrayal” of the past as well as the present.

Mickelson imagined these programs would position the present in the past – in the grand scheme of things, so to speak. That might have worked if the series had some order, some sense of development over the ages. But it never did. Instead the history came in assorted small packages, sent out each week from radically different places and times, with nothing (except perhaps ideology) connecting the dots from one week to the next. Rather than situating the present in the great saga of human history, the series selected stories from the past that would – it was hoped – “alter and illuminate our time.”

At a 1955 CBS conference, Irving Gitlin, head of the Public Affairs sub-division, suggested that viewers did not really distinguish between dramatic series and news or public affairs programming, and the department should not do so either. He proposed moving the division toward a narrative style of news that would deliver to the audience a complete storyline. Gitlin’s new show, *Face the Nation*, borrowed some of *You Are There*’s techniques, particularly the innovation of shooting

³⁵⁷ WHS, Sig Mickelson Papers, Box 1, Folder: Educational Television (1952), Mickelson to Siepmann, draft reply to letter of March 13, 1952. This kind of “news,” however, could be more artistically produced. CBS reached and influenced many more Americans with its mix of education and entertainment during prime time (“aimed at a mass audience”) than it would with a “purely educational” program (though the network’s more intellectual shows – *You Are There*, *Omnibus*, *See It Now* – generally aired on Sunday evenings just before primetime).

interviewees from just behind their interviewer. This brought the viewer directly into the conversation. CBS executives credited this innovation and the use of remote locations (another *You Are There* feature) with helping the new program beat NBC's entrenched *Meet the Press* in ratings. During a presentation of promising new special effects to the News Division, Gitlin showed a clip from *You Are There* in which rear projection was used to create the illusion of an on-location shot from Mount Everest. This was from "Mallory's Tragedy on Mt. Everest," written by Abraham Polonsky as a tale of man's "assault on the unknown," which Mallory himself tells us was really about "every man or woman who has struggled or perished for an ideal."³⁵⁸ Whether or not CBS utilized this staging technique to enhance its straight news broadcasts, it is clear that CBS News executives understood their diverse programs as not necessarily confined to any one category; rather, they believed the new medium demanded a more flexible approach to news reporting. This, then, is the context in which *You Are There* flourished as an educational, historical dramatization reported to viewers by CBS News.³⁵⁹

The Writers and the Blacklist

CBS green-lighted the television series in 1952 and the first episode aired on February 1, 1953. The network turned to its already successful team of producer Charles Russell and director Sidney Lumet. Lumet and Russell had been making

³⁵⁸ "Mallory's Tragedy on Mt. Everest," written by Abraham Polonsky (as "Jeremy Daniel"), in Polonsky, *Teleplays*, 227.

³⁵⁹ WHS, Sig Mickelson Papers, Box 1, Folder "CBS News – CBS News Clinic 1955," CBS News Clinic, January 3-4, 1955, 91-101.

another CBS show, *Danger* (1951-1954), where they had replaced director Yul Brynner and producer Martin Ritt after Ritt went to direct on Broadway and Brynner decided to try his hand at acting in *The King and I*. Before he left, Ritt hired Walter Bernstein to write for *Danger*, and Bernstein continued on with Lumet and Russell.

As CBS planned for the bigger budget television version of *You Are There*, Hollywood remained covered by a blacklist (still growing in 1952) that kept hundreds of actors, writers, directors, and other industry workers unemployed. In 1950, CBS had instituted a loyalty oath and an internal security system for clearing writers and actors after J. Edgar Hoover dubbed the network the “communist broadcasting system.”³⁶⁰ Bernstein found himself blacklisted from television while working at CBS on *Danger*, but in Russell and Lumet he had allies.

Lumet would later become famous as the director of *Twelve Angry Men* (1957) and then a catalog of other heralded motion pictures, but at that point he was known only as a former child stage actor (Broadway and Yiddish theater) who had also appeared in a few movies (including 1939’s *One Third of a Nation*). Lumet’s talent was complimented by Russell’s “taste”; they made a “happy, successful team.”³⁶¹ Russell not only allowed Bernstein to continue writing under a pseudonym, but he also hired two of his blacklisted friends, Abraham Polonsky and Arnold Manoff.

The writers’ backgrounds elucidate the historical series they would soon begin to write and thus require some brief mention. The three met in Hollywood, but for

³⁶⁰ Horowitz, 84. The reputation of CBS and CBS personnel as left-wing led, ironically, to the most draconian security program in television. NBC, which remained above suspicion, never instituted a mandatory oath or security system.

³⁶¹ Walter Bernstein, *Inside Out: A Memoir of the Blacklist* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 22.

years Manoff maintained separate friendships with the other two. Manoff and Bernstein met for dinners and watched prizefights at Olympic Auditorium. Polonsky and Manoff connected through the Hollywood branch of the Communist Party and Manoff helped Polonsky get his breakthrough job as the writer for the film *Body and Soul* (1947).

A key moment for the future writing team occurred in 1946, when Albert Maltz –CP member, screenwriter, and soon to be distinguished as one of the Hollywood Ten –wrote an article for *New Masses* that critiqued the postwar Party’s hard-line interpretation of the art as weapon dogma. Instead, he wrote, critical judgments should focus on a work’s artistic value rather than the politics of the artist. This essay followed the critiques of others on the anti-Stalinist left, especially the group centered around *Partisan Review*, but coming from a Hollywood insider and party member, Maltz’s criticism forced the issue for his comrades in the industry. The Party leadership in New York attacked Maltz – in *New Masses*, in an official statement, and at branch meetings. There was, however, significant debate, even in the pages of *New Masses*, but more so within the west coast wing of the Party. Maltz eventually submitted a self-criticism that acknowledged his “error” and ended the immediate crisis, but deep divisions within the party remained.³⁶²

The future *You Are There* writers spoke on Maltz’s behalf at branch meetings called to discuss the subject.³⁶³ Polonsky was serving on the board of *Hollywood Quarterly*, a left-leaning journal then under investigation by State Senator Jack B.

³⁶² Saverio Giovacchini, *Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 179-181; Radosh and Radosh, 130; Buhle and Wagner, *Dangerous Citizen*, 92.

³⁶³ Buhle and Wagner, *Dangerous Citizen*, 92; Bernstein, *Inside Out*, 138-139.

Tenney's committee because of the presence of Communists among its editors.³⁶⁴

Though not technically in the Party at this point – never having rejoined after leaving for the war – Polonsky was a rising leadership figure in party circles and had just hosted his first CP meeting at his house in Hollywood. He, along with Arnold Manoff, John Weber, and Maltz, were the only four dissenters at a special Hollywood branch meeting that condemned Maltz's heresy. In New York, Walter Bernstein also spoke up for Maltz and the liberation of art from party dictates. The episode created yet another reason for intellectual dissatisfaction with the party after Stalin's purges and trials, his pact with Hitler, and postwar Russian expansion. It left Polonsky, Manoff, and Bernstein, among others, alienated from what had been their political home.

Party writers in Hollywood thought of themselves as, in Polonsky's words, "more radical in the human sense" than the party leadership in New York, and many could not or would not force their work to conform to rigid conventions. Besides, as those who earned their bread within the studio system realized, a directive to use art as a weapon faced considerable obstacles in Hollywood.³⁶⁵ Having made their stand, against Party hardliners and for freedom of expression, Polonsky, Manoff and Bernstein had unknowingly prepared themselves for later stands against HUAC. In contrast, a few friendly witnesses later justified their testimonies against the CP by

³⁶⁴ Buhle and Wagner, *Dangerous Citizen*, 88. Polonsky replaced CP Hollywood branch leader John Howard Lawson, the director of Hollywood's only Spanish Civil War film, *Blockade* (1938), as well as the classic World War II film, *Sahara* (1943), who was an easy and prominent target for Tenney. Tenney was a former Popular Front member himself before losing his bid to become a union president and then changing his politics in order to seek revenge.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 90-94. In *Inside Out* (7), Bernstein relates how Harry Cohn, head of Columbia Pictures, laughed at the idea of communists subversion in Hollywood: "He knew who was boss, and nothing got into his pictures that he didn't want in. Rossen knew that, too. We would discuss some leftist point to be made in a scene and then he would go upstairs and present the scene to Cohn. He would return with the radicalism either deleted or softened to an acceptable liberalism."

referring to the criticism of Maltz – even though they had been “among the strongest attackers of Maltz and the most faithful to the Party line.”³⁶⁶ Some of the trio’s *You Are There* episodes that focused on the political power of art also drew on Maltz’s question and the ensuing controversy.³⁶⁷

Because of the blacklist, Polonsky’s film career consists of two separate eras, his brief *film noir* period following his departure from the Office of Strategic Services at the end of the war, and his reemergence as a major director in the latter half of the 1960s. In 1947, Polonsky wrote *Body and Soul*, which starred John Garfield as a pugilist who fights his way out of the slums and into great personal wealth only to find that contentment lies in reestablishing his connection to his own working class and fighting for them rather than for himself.³⁶⁸ *Body and Soul*, like most of Polonsky’s writing, explored the conflicts that raged within an individual at a moment of existential crisis.³⁶⁹ Garfield and Polonsky both received Oscar nominations for the picture. For the two friends it must have seemed like their stars were on the rise, when in fact both would very soon see their careers (and in Garfield’s case, his life) destroyed. Following the critical and commercial success of the film, Polonsky

³⁶⁶ McGilligan and Buhle, *Tender Comrades*, 46.

³⁶⁷ Bernstein, *Inside Out*, 93. According to Bernstein, many of the writers who stood resolutely with the Party in 1946 became friendly witnesses a few years later.

³⁶⁸ WHS, David Susskind Papers, Box 11, Folder “DuPont Show of the Month,” memo to Harold Blackburn at DuPont from Herb West at BBDO mentioning that Polonsky’s *Body and Soul* is being made into a *DuPont Show of the Month*. Elliott Asinoff is writing the script and they expect Sidney Lumet to direct. Susskind is trying to get Paul Newman for the lead, Lee Remick for the girl, Rod Steiger for the “heavy” and Sidney Poitier for the Negro. “Their idea is to take out the money drive and portray the lead as a man who simply wants to fight for power and glory.” The film was made, but not with any of the talent mentioned in this memo. See the discussion of the film in Buhle and Wagner (2001), 112.

³⁶⁹ Schultheiss, Preface to “The Fate of Nathan Hale,” in Polonsky, *Teleplays*, 101. While Schultheiss here is referring specifically to the Nathan Hale episode, he also makes the point that this is the main theme of most of Polonsky’s work. That is certainly true of many of his *You Are There* episodes and it is also true of his most successful novel, *The World Above* (1951), which follows its protagonist on his transformation from isolated researcher to socially and politically engaged psychologist, who refuses to surrender his scientific truths to reactionaries.

stepped up to direct his next project, *Force of Evil* (1948). Hailed by contemporary and later critics, both foreign and domestic, as one of the great postwar Hollywood *films noir*, this film intertwined Wall Street with the numbers racket in a parable about the corruptions of capitalism. The Breen Office made him rewrite the script to improve the image of law enforcement, but the picture Polonsky paints is still bleak. Had his Hollywood career not been so abruptly terminated, Polonsky's use of *film noir* for social commentary might have taken the genre in interesting directions.³⁷⁰

Having just started writing for the *New Yorker* prior to World War II, Walter Bernstein spent his war years writing for *Yank*. He jumped with paratroopers and reported from well ahead of the front lines, especially in Yugoslavia, where he became the first western journalist to interview Marshall Tito.³⁷¹ The *New Yorker* took him back at war's end, but Bernstein had always wanted to make movies. He moved to Hollywood in 1947 to write for Robert Rossen, who had just directed Polonsky's *Body and Soul* and was working on adapting Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*. Bernstein wrote a little for the film; he befriended Manoff, Polonsky, and other Hollywood communists; then, after just six months, he moved back to New York and resumed writing for the *New Yorker* and a few other magazines until Marty Ritt brought him to CBS and *Danger*.³⁷²

Although he had been politically active for some time, even writing speeches for Henry Wallace in 1948, Bernstein pinpoints the moment he became aware of the threat to his career, his liberty, and the American way of life as he conceived of it,

³⁷⁰ Buhle and Wagner, *Dangerous Citizen*, 109, 118-122.

³⁷¹ Bernstein relates many of his wartime reporting adventures in *Keep Your Head Down* (New York: Book Find Club, 1945). The daring excursion into Yugoslavia is described in the last chapter, "Walk Through Yugoslavia."

³⁷² Bernstein, *Inside Out*, 8-21.

only in 1949, at Paul Robeson's famous Peekskill concert. Like many left-wingers, Bernstein adored Robeson and was excited to hear him perform. Instead, Bernstein found himself locked arm in arm with friends to form a defensive barricade around the concert, blocking out his fellow veterans from the American Legion (which had recently expelled Bernstein's short-lived writer's post because it contained suspected communists) and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, who "cursed the nigger bastards and the Jew bastards," burned a cross on an overlook, and beat up Robeson's supporters. He later recalled,

"I wondered how many of them had read what I had written about in *Yank*, how many like them I had admired and written about, what we had in common now. They looked familiar, some even wore their old uniforms, but which ones had burned the cross? What had it taken to get them to beat up women and children, a few drinks fueling the menace of Reds? They had fought and won a war against hatred and bigotry – to become this? I watched them parade, trying to match these hate-filled faces with those I had known."³⁷³

The Peekskill concert invigorated Bernstein's resolve to again defend his country from threatening ideological forces (in that sense, a stance quite similar to that taken by the less violent of his adversaries). While engaged in his anonymous work at CBS, Bernstein fought the blacklist openly as well. With his friend Sam Moore, president of the Radio Writers Guild before the blacklist, he published *Facts About the Blacklist*. Through this newsletter they attempted to reveal to the public the machinery of the thing and rally Americans to a defense of constitutional rights.³⁷⁴

³⁷³ Ibid., 146-148. After Robeson sang, the police forced exiting concertgoers onto a narrow road lined with rock-throwing reactionaries. The police only banged the cars with their clubs, yelling at the frightened occupants to "move!" The police "were there for the assault. They were the infantry in this attack, guarding the front line so that the artillery behind them was free to fire."

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 202.

After CBS declared Bernstein unemployable, “Paul Bauman,” Bernstein’s original pseudonym, submitted his first *Danger* script.³⁷⁵ Though it was accepted, “Bauman” had just one writing credit and *Danger* could use him only sparingly without drawing attention. Russell had to lie to deflect others at the network that wanted to meet Bauman (Bauman had a rare tropical disease and was seeking treatment in Switzerland) and was under increasing pressure to present him after CBS decreed that writers must show their faces at the network’s studios in order to be employed.³⁷⁶ Paul Bauman’s career ended (as did his fictitious life – he succumbed to that tropical disease in his Swiss hospital, though Russell had wanted him to commit suicide by “jumping off an Alp”) and Bernstein had to find a front if he was to continue writing for CBS.

In his memoir, Bernstein describes the surprisingly difficult task of finding someone willing to do the job. A front had to be able to act as if he or she had actually written the script, when in conference or on the set, and might have to answer questions about plot or character. Getting caught could damage the front’s real career.³⁷⁷ For some fronts, the “false happiness” and undeserved respect from others

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 24-26, 151. Problems immediately surfaced. The producers wanted to talk to Bauman about some changes. Bernstein’s agent tried to cover by offering Walter Bernstein’s services for rewrites of the uncooperative Bauman. Much to his surprise, Bernstein was brought in for the rewrites. Thinking his blacklisting had been in error, he submitted a new script, under his own name. A sympathetic Charles Russell broke the news that he had been told unequivocally to refrain from hiring Bernstein ever again (he had also been directed by William Dozier to tell Bernstein that CBS was changing the style of the show and wanted a different kind of writer, but Russell told him the truth instead). Russell offered to continue employing Paul Bauman despite the risk to himself.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 156. “Suddenly the blacklist had achieved for the writer what he had previously only aspired to: He was considered necessary. (...) Now the writer was needed: for conferences, rehearsals, publicity, even the shooting itself...”

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 157-58, 168. While waiting for “this elusive individual,” Bernstein got jobs under his real name at *Life*, *Argosy*, and *Sports Illustrated*, then did a three-part piece for *Collier’s* on Rocky Graziano. The *Collier’s* articles helped Graziano get reinstated and he and Bernstein became friends. The two of them plus Jake La Motta would “drink and talk away the afternoons” at Fox’s Corners on Second Avenue in New York.

proved too much to bear. In Bernstein's 1976 film, *The Front*, Woody Allen plays an amalgam of the trio's *You Are There* fronts, sharing with the world the absurdity and humor of an otherwise despicable situation. While revealing of their own emotions, the film (and their memoirs) distorts some of the writers who fronted for the trio, particularly Howard Rodman, who fronted for Bernstein but also wrote his own scripts for *You Are There*. In the film, the writers also have far fewer friends at the network than they did in real life. Without Russell and Lumet (and probably many others), the scheme would certainly have failed.³⁷⁸

Director Sidney Lumet faced his own trouble from red baiters. *Counterattack* accused him of associating with known Communists and performing with the Group Theatre (he did – when he was twelve). It also claimed that Lumet was a Party member. The “evidence” jeopardizing Lumet's career turned out to be a photograph of somebody else, and the magazine cleared him for work at CBS after a face-to-face meeting.³⁷⁹

Arnold Manoff had meanwhile left Hollywood and returned to New York, bringing his play, *All You Need is One Good Break*, to Broadway. It had been a successful one-act play, and “caused something of a furor in its Hollywood tryout [at the Actor's Laboratory Theatre] because of the application of film and theatre techniques in the staging,” but it failed as a full-length production. It quickly opened and closed twice in early 1950. While working on it, Manoff was blacklisted by

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 154-55.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 213.

Hollywood (where, at any rate, he had been only very modestly successful as a screenplay writer), so he chose to stay in New York.³⁸⁰

Polonsky returned to New York by way of France, where he had gone with his family to work on a novel after finishing *Force of Evil*. While in France, HUAC subpoenaed him, and he chose to return and testify. Darryl Zanuck, head of Twentieth Century Fox, where Polonsky was under contract, had told him just to work from home and wait it out. But after Polonsky testified and the committee classified him as “a very dangerous citizen,” Zanuck fired him, leaving him both unemployed and unemployable.³⁸¹

After Bernstein had persuaded Russell to employ all three writers, the trio came up with guidelines to share the work and the pay. “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need,” recalled Bernstein. Both need and ability were pretty equally distributed, which allowed the trio to enjoy the “pleasure of cooperation” – pooling money, talent, and whatever reserves of fortitude remained, then providing for each other whenever one of them faced a particularly bad time.³⁸² Eventually they all found fronts, and when CBS offered Russell and Lumet the *You Are There* television series, Manoff suggested that they not only write scripts, but do *all* of the writing for it. Bernstein thought the idea “had the arrogance of genius”; Russell and Lumet agreed.³⁸³

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 208; NYPL, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, Card Catalog File for Walter Bernstein, clippings from *The New York Times*, February 11, 1950 and March 18, 1950.

³⁸¹ Buhle and Wagner, *Dangerous Citizen*, 145.

³⁸² Bernstein, *Inside Out*, 173, 215.

³⁸³ Ibid., 216. When Michel first sent the proposal for the television series to Mickelson in 1950, he suggested thirteen titles. Several of these titles were realized, including a few that have been characterized by historians as specifically leftist in subject matter. The fact that Michel came up with these ideas and not Polonsky, Bernstein, or Manoff, complicates the interpretation somewhat. So does the fact that several of them had been done on the radio series. Did Michel have the same things in

The first few episodes lacked bite while the show refrained from real political material. As the review in *Time* magazine bluntly put it, the series “flunked its first two assignments.”³⁸⁴ Polonsky wrote the opener, “The Landing of the *Hindenburg*,” and managed to work in a little anti-fascism at least, if no real drama or deep meaning. Cronkite’s opening lines reminded viewers of the Spanish Civil War and the persecution of Catholic priests in Nazi Germany. He also mentioned that the Hollywood studios have “again refused to agree to a closed shop.”³⁸⁵ After “The Death of Jesse James” and “The Capture of John Dillinger,” both penned by Bernstein, Polonsky’s “The Execution of Joan of Arc” made it onto the small screen.

As one of the earliest *You Are There* episodes for television, “Joan” looks very different from the later, more news-like broadcasts. The short takes and rapid-fire questions from reporters on both the radio series and subsequent television episodes are conspicuously absent. Instead, it looks like many other 1950s television plays. The long scenes contain extensive dialogue, with hardly any interruption from Don Hollenbeck and Harry Marble, the only two reporters covering the execution. The shots are filled with many actors, coming and going in a confusing mass of people that is too great for the small screen. Compared with the later crisper and newsier broadcasts, the action drags.

The dramatic format of this and other early television episodes, such as “The First Salem Witch Trials,” made candid communication of political ideas difficult.

mind as the three writers when he proposed “The Salem Witch Trial” or “The Death of Socrates?” In his memoir, Bernstein delights in the titles the writers proposed but it seems that they were *assigned* many of these subjects.

³⁸⁴ “The New Shows,” *Time*, February 23, 1953,

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,936389,00.html>. These two episodes were similarly “far from satisfactory” for the *Washington Post*. See John Crosby, “Here’s a Show Taking That Long Step Backward,” *The Washington Post*, Feb 10, 1953, 29.

³⁸⁵ Buhle and Wagner, *Dangerous Citizen*, 175.

Without direct conversation between historical actors and the audience, which allowed for important points to be made with clarity, the audience had to look deeper to find the writers' message. In the 1948 radio "Joan," the reportage and interviews make the case against her executioners, but in this teleplay many of the cues are visual. In 1953 the first shot of the pitiable heroine shows her lying chained and semi-conscious on the ground. Polonsky and Lumet build sympathy for her with the cruel Bishop de Beauvais who enters the chamber and yells down at the prostrate Joan for several minutes. He plays the figure, so common in the series, of the man in power who both judges and must absolutely destroy any and all opposition. To Joan he says, "You must throw yourself on the mercy of the court and the church, and you must tell who aided and abetted you in these... this filth of heresy, and renounce all that you have done and all that you have said and you must make yourself small and nothing..."

Increasingly, toward the end of the half hour teleplay, the camera stays close on Joan's tear-streaked face to help viewers to connect emotionally. The focus becomes her suffering, but also, though only implicitly, her iron-willed refusal to recant or to name those who aided her. As in the radio version, the crowd is eager to see her burn, until it actually happens and they turn away in disgust at their own bloodlust. The story continues though, as Hollenbeck reports on the quick spread of the legend of Joan's death at the stake and how her courage appears to be inspiring the people. At the anchor desk, Cronkite confirms that the legend began as soon as the deed was done, and soon blended with history to create for the entire world a

living memory of Joan of Arc.³⁸⁶ This statement seems to acknowledge that, despite the series' intention of depicting history (as it actually happened), some contamination from myth or memory was bound to occur.

Later in the first season, the trio wrote several episodes that got to the heart of their interest in individual character at moments of moral crisis – understandably important to men asked by their country to conform, to recant, and to inform on their friends. The first of these was Polonsky's "The Crisis of Galileo." The script indicted McCarthyism, but CBS worried more about its negative portrayal of the Catholic Church. The Madison Avenue Archdiocese reviewed the script and censored lines that referred to Church torture and other morally questionable acts. However, Cardinal Barberini still demands Galileo's recantation in the Vatican's dungeon, with instruments of torture in full view. The episode thus implied that the Church threatened Galileo with torture.³⁸⁷

Polonsky used the Galileo episode to make several important arguments. First, he attacks the climate of fear and secrecy surrounding the anti-communist witch-hunt and blacklisting. Galileo's daughter, Maria, tells Bill Leonard that the charges against her father are secret and "no one is supposed to say" what the case is about. Second, Polonsky illustrates in several scenes the impossibility of the situation for Galileo and others accused by irregular courts of subversive beliefs. Galileo's plan – to "[submit] himself to the discipline but [make] his explanations" – ends in failure. Submitting to the discipline, recognizing another's right to interrogate one's beliefs, worked no better for witnesses in the 1950s who thought they could appear

³⁸⁶ "Joan of Arc" is available at the Paley Center for Media, New York.

³⁸⁷ Polonsky, *Teleplays*, 72-73.

before a committee but somehow answer the questions without really answering.³⁸⁸ Galileo's compromise ends with his own solitary weeping. Thus Polonsky's third point, that acquiescence brings no salvation.

More concerned about himself than any principle, Galileo is no saint in Polonsky's teleplay. To a question from Harry Marble about the effect of the trial on the "doctrines of Copernicus," Galileo responds that his only concern is with the effect on himself. Before the denouement, a contemporary of Galileo's, the English physiologist William Harvey, tells Edward P. Morgan that should Galileo recant he will "look like a fool and a coward." He further suggests that Galileo should have emigrated in order to work in a free intellectual environment – a choice taken by some Americans in the anticommunist era. As elsewhere, Polonsky explores the various issues and questions without suggesting (too strongly at least) a clear answer.

Galileo himself bitterly complains, both about presumptive authorities who formerly heralded his work and yet now "branded [it] as criminal," and the absurdity of their accusations: "the design engraved on the title page of my book was heretical, that the type in some places was different, and that no matter what I said, I actually meant the opposite." These lines echo the attacks made on the Hollywood Left, accused of never saying what they actually mean and yet somehow sending pro-communist messages to the public through motion pictures.³⁸⁹ However, there is truth to these charges, as Galileo's *Dialogues* certainly did support the Copernican

³⁸⁸ Bernstein also ridicules this position (though with similar sympathy) in *The Front* when Woody Allen's character thinks he can answer his subpoena, go to Washington and testify, but talk around the questions to avoid naming names or invoking the Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination.

³⁸⁹ This accusation was made in the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals' "Screen Guide for Americans," written in 1947, purportedly by Ayn Rand.

theory, even if he tried to conceal (superficially at least) his position on the issue by using the dialogic format.³⁹⁰

Polonsky delves into the mind of the inquisitor in the dungeon scene, where Cardinal Barberini “reminds” Galileo of his case’s severity through a tour of the Vatican’s torture chambers. The Cardinal explains the direness of the situation as “heresy has gathered millions to itself” in Europe and threatens to spread still further. For such men, who are threatened by any doctrine antithetical to their own, even torture is justified. As Polonsky wrote in his diary, “they must be right from one side of eternity to another.” This meant the opposition must be “rooted out” – “a clear sign of doubt,” thought the writer.³⁹¹ His Galileo calls the Cardinal and his ilk “cowards, prevaricators, who will not even let a little light in for fear that it disagrees with [their own ideas].”

But Galileo is destined to lose this battle, and must not only renounce his past and present but also convince the Church of his “willingness to submit.” Again, the “guilt” of the accused is not in question. The issue is whether authority can coerce confession, submission, and humiliation. Polonsky clarifies his position through Galileo’s student, Filippo, who says, “the world will laugh at the Italians if they do not live and die for their truths.” But, like the friendly witnesses of the 1950s, Galileo recants and blames his own “ambition,” “ignorance,” and “inadvertence” for his errors. The confession comes at great cost to the man – he says these things while “choking on his own words,” and still must read a “repudiation of his whole life”

³⁹⁰ J.J. Fahie, *Galileo: His Life and Work* (London: J. Murray, 1903), 245. In the Dialogues, Simplicio makes the scientific arguments against the Copernican doctrine, Sagredo is ostensibly impartial, and Salviati advocates for Copernicus. The Pope (the former Cardinal Barberini) evidently thought that he was Galileo’s Simplicio, and was outraged.

³⁹¹ WHS, Polonsky Collection, Box 10, Diaries, April 12, 1953.

prepared for him by the committee. Finally – tragically – he promises to “denounce” any “heretic” to the authorities in “any place where I may be.” He remains “free,” yet weeps for what he has become.

For the script, Polonsky studied several historical works on Galileo, mostly from the nineteenth century and overall somewhat forgiving of the Inquisition.³⁹² From his research he concluded that surprisingly little historical work had been done on Galileo, given his significance: “Everyone takes it for granted that all is known; but all is not known.” He thought that the existing historiography indulged the Church’s position too much and the historians “obviously just select what they want to from the books before them.” But, “anyone with a reasonable amount of intelligence who reads the original (in trans[lation] even) can discern a piece of truth.” *You Are There* gave Polonsky the opportunity to present the “original” to the viewing audience.

When he watched his Galileo on television, Polonsky recorded that it was “not bad,” adding, “So minds are reached with some truth after all.” More introspectively, he then tried to write down just what it was he was trying to do with the episode, and mused about whether he really sought to change people’s minds. He eventually concluded, “Anything I write is always an effort to communicate some truth. I know nothing else.”³⁹³

³⁹² These included Mary Allan-Olney, *The Private Life of Galileo* (London: Macmillan & Company, 1870); F.R. Wegg-Prosser, *Galileo and His Judges* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1889); J.J. Fahie, *Galileo: His Life and Work* (London: J. Murray, 1903); David Brewster, *Martyrs of Science: Galileo, Tycho Brahe, and Kepler* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1874); and Peter Cooper, *Galileo’s Roman Inquisition* (Cincinnati: Montfort and Conahans, 1844). Polonsky’s script mostly followed Fahie’s work, which treated the Church unsympathetically. It also contained long translated passages from the inquisition and from correspondence, which seem to have been the basis for Polonsky’s work. The words from his diary are very similar to the text of Fahie, *Galileo*, 265.

³⁹³ WHS, Polonsky Collection, Box 11, Diaries, Diary 29, April 22, 1953.

Many of Polonsky's diary entries from this period of April to May 1953 referred to the decline in his mental and physical health caused by "that damned committee." Two days after the Galileo episode aired he wrote, "This is what they want, even if they don't think of it, for it enslaves our consciousness, which we are trying to free." He saw the United States transforming itself into the "Land of the Frightened Giant," persecuting dissent for essentially the same reasons as the Catholic Church of 300 years before. Despite the trouble, he seems to have relished the feeling of camaraderie with his ancient heroes. After a visit by the FBI he noted, "I like this. In this way I join the hunted and persecuted of history, for having ideas that I really don't thoroughly accept."³⁹⁴

The better remembered treatment of Galileo from this period is Bertolt Brecht's play, *Galileo*, the American version of which premiered in Hollywood in July 1947. Brecht's earlier "Danish" version was modeled on Neils Bohr's persecution by the Nazis, but the Hollywood story used Galileo to condemn contemporary nuclear scientists' capitulation to power. In the play, not only will science be "crippled" if Galileo submits, but "if you yield to coercion your progress must be a progress away from the bulk of humanity. The gulf between you and humanity might even grow so wide that the sound of your cheering at some new achievement could be echoed by a universal howl of horror." Galileo's surrender (the

³⁹⁴ WHS, Polonsky Collection, Box 11, Diaries, Diary 30, October 21, 1953. The remark that he is being persecuted for ideas he does not "thoroughly accept" probably meant nothing more than that he did not always follow the Party line.

surrender of science to power) was significant for Brecht because it led, in his mind, directly to the bomb.³⁹⁵

About 4,500 people attended the play in Los Angeles and perhaps 5,000 more saw it when it played in New York for a week in early December (small numbers compared to the *You Are There* audience of several million). The New York run began just weeks after Brecht had testified before HUAC and then departed for East Germany. In that context, the subtleties of Brecht's exploration of the social responsibilities of science may have been lost or at least subsumed by the more obvious parallel with what many on the left were already calling an "inquisition." In fact, Fritz Lang referenced Galileo in this latter sense in the concurrent, December 1947 issue of *Theatre Arts*.³⁹⁶ Polonsky, at any rate, does not seem to have been particularly interested in the atomic aspect of Brecht's Galileo; his teleplay resembles the earlier anti-Nazi Danish version, with its emphasis on fascist persecution, more than it does the postwar American version.³⁹⁷

Manoff's "The Death of Socrates" followed two weeks after "Galileo," airing on May 3, 1953. Again, man's integrity is put to the ultimate test, but this time the man chooses to die rather than retract truth. The philosopher's demise had long been a popular subject for both artistic and philosophic exploration, as well as political

³⁹⁵ Ehrhard Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 115-118.

³⁹⁶ Giovacchini, *Hollywood Modernism*, 207. Lang wrote, "We have watched them gag Milton; we have watched them while they denounced Copernicus and jailed Galileo; We have watched all the bigots from Savonarola down to Hitler while they defaced and mutilated and made bonfires of books. The stench of those fires lingers in our nostrils."

³⁹⁷ Schultheiss, "The Crisis of Galileo," 69-71, in Polonsky, *Teleplays*, 67-73. Brecht's Galileo confesses that his recantation followed from fear and weakness rather than rational strategy. Both Brecht and Polonsky emphasize that Galileo himself viewed his decision as a personal and professional failure, yet both also seem to accept that preserving one's freedom to continue important work has a certain benefit. Of course Brecht suggests that ultimately this leads to an even greater defeat both for science and humankind.

comment. The episode contrasts with a 1948 *You Are There* radio broadcast and with other contemporary settings such as Maxwell Anderson's 1951 play, *Barefoot in Athens*, and Karl Popper's 1945 argument that totalitarianism descends from Plato, and democracy, equality, and reason from Socrates. Popper held up Socrates – and the “freedom of critical thought” – as a model for the postwar world. Manoff's *Socrates* and Anderson's play share that analysis and the *You Are There* teleplay at times bears some close resemblances to Anderson's play. Both are set, as literary scholar Emily Wilson writes of Anderson specifically, “firmly in the context of the Cold War.”

In *Barefoot*, Anderson elaborates on the threat to democracy from totalitarian Sparta before focusing on the contradictions within democratic society. Perhaps Manoff would have done the same if *You Are There* lasted more than twenty-eight minutes. Instead, Manoff skips lightly over the alternative to the democratic state (Socrates dismisses the suggestion of exile to any other, un-democratic state) and focuses on the second part of this analysis: the ironic conclusion that such a trial could occur only in a democracy, since only in a free society would Socrates have first spoken out.³⁹⁸

In Manoff's teleplay, the playwright Aristophanes, played with ferocious intensity by E.G. Marshall, speaks to CBS first. Though critical of Socrates, famously satirizing the scholar in his play *The Clouds*, Aristophanes angrily attacks

³⁹⁸ Emily Wilson, *The Death of Socrates* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 18, 202. Wilson's engaging book traces the story of Socrates' final moments from the first contemporary accounts through the present. She finds the most dramatic change occurred with the Enlightenment, when the story shifted from a representation of the “pleasures of intellectual friendship” to the “solitude of the intellectual who resists social conformity.” This interpretation becomes even clearer during the twentieth century. The irony is that this understanding of Socrates comes from Plato's work.

his persecutors. In response to Harry Marble's feigned confusion, Aristophanes explains that his criticism "was in a *play* [the appropriate place for such intellectual challenges], not a public trial." He continues, briskly, "[Socrates] has committed no crimes. Socrates has strong beliefs and opinions but so have I. So has any man of intellect. Anytus and his ignorant mob cannot silence criticism of themselves by silencing Socrates. Only stupid men would get Athens into such a monstrous predicament..." Revealing an elitism born of the frustrations of the blacklist, Manoff's Aristophanes mocks "this democracy by alphabetical rotation" that gives below average men the power to judge men of far greater intellect.

We hear next from Melitus, the man who accused Socrates (at the behest of more powerful men). The scene offers an exposition of the informer archetype. Now visibly frightened by the consequences of his actions, Melitus has discovered that Athens has not embraced him as he believed (or was told) it would. He complains to a small crowd that he has been used, and begs Aristophanes and Critus to confirm his status as pawn. They do, noting that Socrates himself thought of Melitus as "an earnest but unhappy and misled young man" – a sort of Whitaker Chambers of the ancient world.

Finally, Manoff and Lumet use Socrates' famous pedagogical method to explain why exile is no solution, why he will not recant in exchange for "freedom," and why he must die. The "first master of the dialectic" questions his grieving students until they understand that his beliefs are his being. If he renounces his beliefs in exchange for life, he still dies, but he also loses his claim to truth. One cannot survive self-abnegation.

All Athens mourns the loss of this mighty “intellect” – even his accusers who belatedly realize that men like Socrates bestow glory on their city through their patriotic critiques. As Cronkite says, he “never let them rest in their comfort and vanity and ignorance,” instead forcing his fellow citizens to recognize pursuits beyond “luxury, wealth and power.” This *You Are There* concludes with a quick but sharp jab at the acquisitive consumer culture of abundance for its ignorance of higher pursuits, a theme the writers would return to often.³⁹⁹

The March 1948 radio version of “The Death of Socrates” similarly portrayed Socrates as a “gadfly on the backs of men.” No threat to the republic (merely a gadfly, not at all dangerous, yet essential for keeping society awake), it was his accusers who threatened democracy by stifling dissent and new ideas.⁴⁰⁰ Shayon and Joseph Liss wrote the episode, which starred Walter Hampden as Socrates and Karl Swenson as Plato. Interviewed by Don Hollenbeck, a bed-ridden Plato blames the constant state of war, exhausting to “body and soul,” for the breakdown in society that has led to the persecution of men’s beliefs (an explanation quite similar to that expressed in “The Salem Witch Trials”). “And a fever of fear runs high among us. We’re confused, desperate and so we seek someone to blame and sacrifice – Socrates – on the altar of our dying faith.”

You Are There played “previously recorded” excerpts of Socrates’s trial for its listeners. At that trial, Socrates challenged his accusers to name the positive

³⁹⁹ “The Death of Socrates,” 1953, available at the Museum of Broadcast Communications, Chicago, and online at www.museum.tv. Others have claimed some additional historical significance for this episode as Paul Newman’s first appearance on television, but he does not appear in any scene and is not listed in the credits. The claim about Newman is made by John Schultheiss in Polonsky, *Teleplays*, 101, and by Frank R. Cunningham in *Sidney Lumet: Film and Literary Vision* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 19-20. Neither author cites a source unfortunately.

⁴⁰⁰ “The Death of Socrates,” March 1948, available at the Museum of Broadcast Communication, Chicago, and online at www.museum.tv; Wilson, 3, 99-103.

influences on youth, if he was the negative. After Melitus confirms that all the rest of society acts as a positive influence on the young, Socrates points out the absurdity of the charge that he has the power to corrupt anyone that all others are busy improving. He challenges Melitus to call forth the youth as his witnesses and let them accuse him. No one comes forward of course. This mocking commentary on the persecution of communist writers (and the entertainment industry) precedes Socrates' final declaration that he shall not recant, "even if I have to die *many* times." "Truth" means more than "money" or "reputation." A friend later adds, "A man should be guided only by the knowledge that he is doing right," even if it means sacrificing his family's comfort.

John Daly describes for us the final moments as Socrates drinks the hemlock, reporting, "I can almost taste the poison on my own lips. And it's on the lips of all who are here... *and all who are listening*. It is Greece that dies, Greece that *is dying*...[italics added]." If some of the other anti-persecution episodes could be interpreted as anti-fascist (or anti-Soviet), the Socrates episodes, on radio and on television, make it very clear that the setting is a democratic state – specifically, the world's leading democracy.

You Are There covered the Salem witch trials on television in 1953 and 1956 (on radio in 1948). Arthur Miller's *Crucible* opened on Broadway less than two months before the first of these teleplays. Miller's play centers on the adolescent girls who accused adults in their community of witchcraft. Their accusations grew out of immature feelings of rejection and jealousy. Despite the reputation of the play as anti-anticommunist, the narrow focus on the girls and their repressed sexuality

actually obscures the connections with McCarthyism. Unlike *Crucible*, which contains no courtroom scene, the *You Are There* radio and television plays remain in court for almost all of the half hour broadcasts and focus more on the trial proceedings than on the girls.

In Lumet's 1953 staging of Bernstein's teleplay, the action takes place on June 2, 1692, in a rather ornate courtroom replete with whigged judges and prosecutors. As in "Joan of Arc," Lumet often keeps the camera close in on the face of the accused, Bridget Bishop, and he comes back to her tear-filled eyes for the distressing final shot of the episode. In court the girls frequently scream and writhe in apparent pain, terrifying the spectators as well as the accused. Each time their status as witch hunters is threatened by some suggestion of doubt, they launch a new attack and accuse more people. The end of the episode brings no solace as the credits roll to the eerie sounds of Mussorgsky's "Night on Bald Mountain." The real evil – the unchecked witch hunt – continued.⁴⁰¹

Early in the episode, CBS interviews Cotton Mather and suggests that he has provided the intellectual and judicial basis for this trial. He accepts credit and recommends further prosecutions. The trials continued of course, and a 1956 *You Are There* returned to the subject. Reporting picks up from a later point in the story than that treated by the radio and earlier television episodes. The focus also changed, from attacking the idea of the trials to ridiculing their methods and their expanding reach. Broadcasting from Salem in August 1692, Cronkite introduces the audience to the world they live in: "Nobody can guess how far it will go... while everybody stands in growing fear of the pointing fingers." Anne Putnam scowls directly into the camera

⁴⁰¹ "The First Salem Witch Trials" (1953), available at the Paley Center for Media, New York.

as if on the verge of accusing the viewer. This time reporters interview Increase Mather, who weakly asserts that the court is “exercising the most exquisite precautions” and “deserves prayers and pity, not censure.”⁴⁰²

One of the more remarkable results of the blacklistees’ use of the witch trials is that Americans have mostly accepted that historical allegory, more or less equating McCarthyism and the witch-hunt at Salem. This post-purge episode from 1956 reveals the early success of that metaphor, as the same producers that rid the program of its left-leaning talent felt comfortable using the former writers’ analogical-historical setting.

Back in 1953, the *You Are There* writers had other ideas to explicate, often focusing on historical personages who faced a terrible moral decision. Nathan Hale, one of Paul Newman’s first television roles, like Socrates also chose to die rather than forfeit his principles. British Captain John Montessor holds the captured American spy in his tent while preparations for the hanging are made, which gives them time to talk about the existential issues of importance to Polonsky. Hale affirms his love of life, recounting memories of playing football and other “foolish things,” but though “quite young,” he is “too old to betray what I believe is just.” Meanwhile, Ed Morgan and Harry Marble trace Samuel Hale, Nathan’s cousin, to General Howe’s headquarters, where the two reporters jointly interrogate him about the rumor that he betrayed his own cousin to the British. Though Samuel at first responds “indignantly,” the two reporters eventually get him to admit to “naming names.” Nathan is hanged of course, but not before delivering his line: “I only regret that I

⁴⁰² “The Salem Witch Trials” (1956), written by Milton Geiger, directed by William D. Russell, and produced by James Fonda, available at the Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division.

have but one life to lose for my country.” In Polonsky’s version, Hale takes this from Joseph Addison’s play *Cato* (1713), which he reads while waiting for death – a case of life imitating art.⁴⁰³

The relationship between art and politics was explored by Polonsky in several works, including “The Recognition of Michelangelo” and “The Vindication of Savonarola,” both of which aired in late fall, 1953. The Michelangelo story centers on the political battle over whether *David* should be displayed, and if so, where. The debate recalls the 1946 Maltz controversy over art’s service to politics as much as it references the blacklist. An “art committee” must make the decision, which has nothing to do with aesthetics and everything to do with politics. There is significant political pressure to suppress Michelangelo’s figure, perceived by some to symbolize the Florentines’ republican challenge to the Medici, but seen as politically ambiguous by others. In the end, the committee leaves the decision to the artist, who declares without equivocation that David will stand in the most prominent position in Florence. The work might yet “awaken us”: such is the power of great art. Michelangelo adds, “I care not for this republic or the Medici, but only for the spirit of man...” The words flow from Polonsky’s feelings about the failure of the Party to be truly “radical in the human sense” at least as much as they refer to the censorship of “this republic.”

“The Vindication of Savonarola” (1953) continued the story of the Italian Renaissance monk who ruled Florence after the fall of the Medici, first heard on the

⁴⁰³ John Schultheiss, Preface to “The Fate of Nathan Hale,” in Polonsky, *Teleplays*, 100.

radio series in 1949.⁴⁰⁴ In that earlier version, an idealistic Girolamo Savonarola is disparaged by Machiavelli and defeated by the autocratic Medici. The latter conceive of an Ordeal by Fire, which John Daly describes as “a hoax, a plot, hatched by his enemies to discredit him.” In Polonsky’s treatment, Savonarola is a more complicated figure; the viewer never feels very sure about rooting for him in the story. Even at the end, Cronkite can only say that Savonarola has been “puzzling” to historians: “Did he look backward toward the intense spirituality of the medieval era, or did he look forward to the age of reform, an age which unloosed personal freedom and political democracy...?” CBS reported from Florence, February 7, 1497, the date of the infamous *falò delle vanità*, or bonfire of the vanities. Young children, Cronkite tells us, “bearing olive branches and singing hymns, went from door to door collecting works of art, dresses, wigs, articles of pleasure and joy, and these are to be burnt in the great square along with books and manuscripts...” These innocents are the followers of Savonarola.

What makes this episode much more complex and interesting than the radio version is the presentation of three sides rather than two. This reminds us that Polonsky’s use of the past really was artistic before it was political. He frequently sought out challenging historical episodes rather than easy, binary oppositions with

⁴⁰⁴ WHS, Daly Papers, Box 5, Folder 9, “The Fall of Savonarola,” Sunday, February 20, 1949, written by Robert Lewis Shayon and Henry Walsh. John Daly, Clete Roberts, and Quincy Howe reported from Florence, Italy, April 7, 1498. Roberts “translated” from the Italian dialogue and speeches heard in the background. The play centers on the “bizarre moment that climaxed the struggle for power between the great Christian apostle of popular government – and his bitter enemies – the Medici – symbol of medieval autocracy.” Howe interviews Niccolo Machiavelli, aged 29, who complains that when Savonarola “insists upon applying his Christian idealism to statecraft, he becomes an impractical dreamer – a visionary... Man, by his very nature, is evil, fickle, false, cowardly and covetous. In his relations with his fellow men, he is not guided by Christian love. Fear – fear is all that controls his evil passions.” Sadly, Machiavelli seems to be right in this case at least, as Savonarola is deposed by his enemies’ tricks and the crowd stones our hero.

all-too-obvious contemporary parallels. Three factions vie for control of Florence: Savonarola's followers, known as the *Piagnoni*, Rudolfo ("Doffo") Spini's *Compagnacci* ("bad companions"), and the *Bigi*, who want to restore the Medici. The latter seek "laughter and gaiety" and an age without political responsibility, surely the least possible scenario for citizens of the republic.

"Doffo" tells Harry Marble that though Savonarola "speaks against tyranny he wishes to play the tyrant." As Spini's graffiti poem says to the people of Florence, "*Tu ne vai preso alle grida, E Dietro a una guida Piena d'ipocrisia*" ("You are caught up by a cry and follow a guide all full of hypocrisy"). From Savonarola's side, his follower, Fra Domenico da Pescia, defends the use of children to enforce cultural censorship by declaring, "They will lead us to virtue and grace this way and grow up to be lovers of republican liberty instead of libertines" (it is the sort of lesson one might hear on *Cavalcade of America* – recall the fan letters thanking Du Pont for indoctrinating children in just this way, but here it clearly is meant to be dismissed). The children stop adults and chastise them for their sins, then rob them of their possessions so that they may add to the bonfire.⁴⁰⁵

The scene seems to presage the Chinese Cultural Revolution, though of course viewers would have associated the bonfire of books with Nazis. And while Polonsky undoubtedly has the 1950s in mind too, really this is his dystopian vision of where things may be headed in the future. With Savonarola and his allies "attacking the good name and reputation of citizens" and "the word traitor on everyone's mouth," Don Hollenbeck asks if any society can long survive such modes of behavior.

⁴⁰⁵ Polonsky, *Teleplays*, 192.

In the radio version, Machiavelli is held up as the cynical antithesis to Savonarola. In the teleplay, Cesare Borgia reveals the truth about power as he sees it:

“Force, courage, violence are the weapons by which quiet is imposed on states. They do not always suffice, for we cannot kill everyone. Therefore, fraud and stratagem are necessary. If the citizens are used to the words of liberty, then we embrace the word; if they despise war, we oppose war; if they like ease and contentment, we promise them both; if they cherish independence, we extol it. By such means we gain power, and although they will have lost liberty, be at war, have neither ease nor contentment, and be slaves, the citizens will think they have all.”

In a 1989 interview with John Schultheiss, Polonsky clarified the link to American politics, saying, “Cesare Borgia is expressing from the most practical point of view the attitude of a true politician and how you achieve and hold power... Huey Long said fascism will come to America and call itself democracy. He knew that. Savonarola knew that. And every politician knows that.”⁴⁰⁶

When we finally meet Savonarola, Hollenbeck asks why he has the right to judge and destroy art and whether he would “reduce all men to simple obedient creatures.” To Savonarola’s objection that he and his followers brought the great Medici library to Florence for the people, Hollenbeck counters that he has merely preserved the classics while condemning the “artists of the present” whose works make him uncomfortable. Again Polonsky puts the issue of political censorship of contemporary art and artists on the television screen. But Polonsky has a few words against the artists too, and the ambiguity of the episode comes forth as he condemns “those men who are bought and sold in the marketplace like sheep and goats” and whose works help to prop up whatever rulers pay them.

The monk’s “vindication” comes later, after “Italian freedom perished in tyranny.” For “artists and the ordinary man” living in an age of “plenty and the soft

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 186.

luxury of decay” the memory of Savonarola recalled the “hard days when life was dangerous but every man was free.” So the episode concludes not with a denunciation of the philistines who would destroy art, but of the “soft luxury” that ultimately may be even more destructive, as it drains citizens of their innate desire to be free.⁴⁰⁷

You Are There’s high intellectual caliber and willingness to embrace taboo subjects shone strongest in the episode on Freud. The episode opens with Freud, on the second day of the year 1900, speaking in Vienna on human sexuality. He speaks uninterrupted for several minutes, explaining that “sexual impulses play a tremendous part” both in bringing about mental disorders and contributing “invaluably” to the greatest cultural achievements. Consequently:

“Society can think of no more powerful menace to its existence than the liberation of sexual impulses. It looks upon sex with horror, with loathing, and with concealed passionate disinterest. As a result, the scientific laws I have discovered are branded by society as morally reprehensible, aesthetically offensive and politically dangerous. We all know it is a characteristic of human nature to regard anything disagreeable as untrue, anything critical of accepted beliefs as dangerous, and anything that violates the common prejudices as immoral. So be it. We can only follow the truth where it leads us and suffer the consequences thereof.”

After interviews with some of Freud’s detractors (and a typical, faked time management problem where an “unscheduled” encounter seems to force Harry Marble to abandon another interview), CBS News takes us into Freud’s examination room. “By arrangement with Dr. Freud and with the consent of the patient,” we get to see the doctor’s famous psychoanalytic treatment in action. Maintaining the false authenticity, the patient’s face is obscured to protect her privacy. Even so, “Miss X” becomes reluctant to talk about certain things once the camera is present, but we still

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 188-209.

hear a little about her recently recurring dream, which followed from a disturbing incident in which a friend of her father's tried to seduce her.

Robert Northshield conducts the closing interview with Freud, which brings psychology into conflict with social consciousness. Polonsky centers the discussion on a subject he deals with at greater length in his novel *The World Above* – the question of individual versus societal ills. When Freud explains that he helps his patients adjust to the world they live in, Northshield asks, “Suppose the world around them isn't worth adjusting to? Suppose it's unfit to live in, as in so many of the cases which you have described?” This is precisely the question that Polonsky's psychologist-protagonist, Dr. Carl Myers, must grapple with in *The World Above*. In the novel, Myers must not only defend to his profession his conclusion that psychology has to on some level consider social problems, he also is forced to defend it to an anticommunist congressional committee. The writer did not doubt the fundamental soundness of Freud's methods (that is clear enough in this episode, not to mention in the novel), but both the novel and teleplay questioned the contemporary emphasis on psychoanalysis as substitute for social reform.

You Are There treated scientists far less frequently than did *Cavalcade of America*, but occasionally a persecuted revolutionary doctor or researcher gained notoriety on CBS. In addition to Polonsky's “Freud,” Bernstein (“Howard Rodman”) penned “The Tragic Hour of Dr. Semmelweis.” The Hungarian “savior of mothers” theorized that obstetricians' unwashed hands caused the high number of Puerperal fever (or “childbed fever”) cases at the Vienna hospital where he practiced. For his

trouble, Semmelweis was ridiculed, charged, committed, and dead at age forty-seven in an asylum.

In Bernstein's hands, Semmelweis incarnates independence of thought, pure reason, and humanism. His superiors, shown to be willful murderers of women in labor, stand for all reactionary authority. As his friend and colleague, Dr. Skoda, puts it, "The men who run medicine are brothers to those who run everything else.... When a new idea comes along, it shakes and threatens them and they want not to examine, but to kill it, quickly, before it kills them." In this climate, the two researchers "cannot even discuss without fear." Worse, as a nation, "we attack only the best minds. And if we cannot refute [them], we can always persecute them through their politics."

Bernstein lays out the possibilities for his protagonist: he can flee and hope for better luck in exile, he can capitulate and accept condemnation in exchange for the privilege of continuing his work, or he can fight. Like Galileo, Semmelweis disappoints us in the end, leading to yet another unhappy ending on *You Are There* (a sign again of the lack of sponsor oversight). He lives in exile in Hungary for the remainder of his short life, before dying – "ironically," concluded Cronkite, "of the same infection suffered by the friend whose death had given Semmelweis [his theory]." His failure to stand for truth led directly to his tragic ending.

Here again *You Are There* transmits on two frequencies. Those cooling their heels on the blacklist would have had no difficulty reading the persecution subtexts of "Semmelweis," but the play also spoke to the mainstream television audience. For this larger group, Bernstein demonstrates, in the most practical and emotional terms

(truth is repressed, so mothers die), why democracy is incompatible with intellectual persecution and restrictions on free speech and thought.

Besides the progressive politics, *You Are There* as written by the Bernstein-Manoff-Polonsky team practiced history in ways that seem admirable from our vantage point of five decades into the future. This is especially impressive given the medium and its restrictions. In its subject matter, its complexity, its focus on social and cultural history, and the “bottom-up” interpretation of major events (even while key historical figures remain in the story), *You Are There* challenges other “history television” to treat subjects of the past with such care and perceptiveness.

It would be naïve to suggest that romantic history had no place on *You Are There*, but the series certainly tended to de-romanticize history. One of the titles suggested by CBS was the “Hatfield-McCoy Feud.” Polonsky’s approach to the subject is suggested by Cronkite’s opening statement, “We are going to find out just how much is fact and how much folklore.” The episode attempts to de-romanticize the legendary feud and portray its base violence as starkly as possible. We watch as two depressed, impoverished families fight and kill each other and destruction overwhelms Appalachia. As Cronkite concludes, “there was no romance in it.”⁴⁰⁸ This contrasts with the *Cavalcade of America* approach to history, which not only sought out the romance, but cranked it up a notch or two. *You Are There* more often than not covered the less-than-cheery side of history; when myths were addressed, as in the “Hatfield-McCoy Feud,” they were deconstructed rather than celebrated (or exploited).

⁴⁰⁸ LC, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division, “The Hatfield McCoy Feud” (1955).

Several episodes covered the same historical moment as *Cavalcade* episodes. Of these, several offer fairly dramatic contrasts to the Du Pont presentations. Not surprisingly, Bernstein's "The Louisiana Purchase" (1953) lacked a du Pont hero. Bernstein also wrote 1953's "Grant and Lee at Appomattox," which would be done on *Cavalcade* as "Sunset at Appomattox" two years later (and had aired on the radio *You Are There* in 1948). The two versions of the day's events cannot be easily distinguished; both plead for tolerance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. If one really deconstructs the two episodes, it might be possible to argue that the *You Are There* story is a suggestion for peaceful coexistence (either between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. or within the U.S.), while the *Cavalcade* version favors the South, but it seems extremely unlikely that the casual viewer – not to mention schoolchildren – would have seen much difference between the two, or drawn such conclusions. Both series covered the death of Stonewall Jackson as well, and here a greater contrast can be made. Lying on his deathbed following the battle at Chancellorsville, *Cavalcade*'s Jackson exemplifies a righteous Christian soldier, suffering for the sins of others. Howard Rodman, who sometimes fronted for Bernstein, wrote or fronted (it is not clear which) the *You Are There* treatment of Jackson's demise. The 1955 episode opens with Cronkite reporting on the "war of the Southern Confederacy against the United States of America" (no "war between the states" or "northern aggression" here). The focus on the ordinary soldier, which in this episode consists of interviews with disheartened and starving rebels from the unit that may have accidentally shot Jackson, is vintage Bernstein – the only clue that this script did come from him. The men trade their cheap whiskey for Union soldiers' coffee and sugar, Lou Chioffi asks

them about their rations, or lack thereof, and we get the standard *You Are There* look at the hard lives led by young men sent to war.⁴⁰⁹

Bernstein's war experience and his abiding interest in veterans' well-being permeates the somber story of "Washington's Farewell to his Officers." Writing as "Kate Nickerson," Bernstein focused on a reflective moment in the lives of the General and his top commanders. No battles, no action, no tension at all except the anxiety of wondering what Washington will say. Then he speaks and his men begin to cry as he leads them in remembrance of the sacrifices, the pain and suffering and loss of war, and convinces them of their obligation to assist fellow veterans.⁴¹⁰

Signing his script as Leslie Slote, Bernstein wrote again of the soldier's plight in "The Gettysburg Address." As in all of his scripts, every effort is made to introduce as many issues and as much complexity as possible to an already famous historical moment. Like many *You Are There* episodes, the supposed subject – Lincoln, in this case – remains completely absent until the end. Instead, CBS reporters (Marble, Leonard, Hollenbeck, Morgan, and Burdett) ask representative types what they would like to hear from the President. Hostile New Yorker John O'Connell complains that his son died fighting for the rich. He believes the government ought to worry more about his own working class "slavery." Standing by at his army's encampment, Ray Walston's William Tecumseh Sherman hopes Lincoln will tell the South that the Union Army will show them no mercy (the reporter mentions Sherman's recent letter to Lincoln – a "footnote" which subtly and deftly reminds attentive viewers that this interview is based on a historical document).

⁴⁰⁹ WHS, Howard Rodman Papers, Script for "The Death of Stonewall Jackson" (1955).

⁴¹⁰ "Washington's farewell to his Officers" (1955), available on DVD.

For the Southern point of view, Governor Vance of North Carolina and Jefferson Davis both insist that peace depends on Lincoln.

In the longest and most important scene, CBS interviews John Muncie Forbes, Samuel May, and William Lloyd Garrison as they plan for an anti-slavery convention. Forbes wants Lincoln to reveal to the American people the true nature of the conflict: class warfare. Garrison explains that political leaders respond to pressure. “If we want him to move in our direction, in the direction of justice, we must exert the greatest pressure.” As Garrison finishes making this point about political engagement, Frederick Douglass arrives and quickly dismisses Lincoln’s speech as irrelevant. “If the country is to be saved, it will not be by the captain, but by the crew.” At this the four men set to work at finding ways to demonstrate the “power of the people.”

The call to political participation has been seen before. This episode demonstrates how diverse that participation could be, ranging from the self-sacrifice of wartime service, to unquestioning patriotism, to popular movements. *You Are There*, whether in World War II Paris or Civil War New England, ancient Greece or revolutionary Boston, often argued the necessity of an active and demanding citizenry. Back at Gettysburg, Lincoln’s first words of the show are the enduring “Four score and seven years ago...” As he reads the address in its entirety, in a voice much softer than any other in the episode thus far, the camera never moves from a close-up of the president’s head and shoulders, forcing the viewer to pay attention to

the text. Would those watching answer Lincoln's call for a "new birth of freedom" in America?⁴¹¹

"The Emancipation Proclamation" (1955), credited to Howard Rodman, positioned the issue of slavery at the center of the Civil War and argued, following contemporary leftist historiography, that the slaves freed themselves.⁴¹² Rodman, both a writer and a front for Walter Bernstein, was certainly left-of-center politically – his *Variety* obituary even states he was blacklisted during this time (which is plausible, but that would have made fronting for Bernstein difficult).⁴¹³ The script for "Emancipation" resembles Bernstein's style, especially to his "Gettysburg Address," but there is no evidence suggesting that Rodman was the front rather than the author of this particular script. As at Gettysburg, CBS reporters scatter in order to interview people with contrasting points of view on the subject, and again we hear from all sides before returning to Lincoln. The interviews downplay the significance of Lincoln's decision, and in the end he is a figure of surprisingly little consequence. In the opening Oval Office scene, Lincoln struggles with his choice, wondering if the middle states – and England – would openly support the Confederacy if he signs. Yet morally, "if slavery's not wrong, then nothing's wrong." In the Union Army, a Captain Canfield shares this view. Canfield addresses us while under arrest for freeing escaped slaves that had been seized by his superior officer, Colonel Neebling, for the purpose of selling them south to men who claimed, without proof, to be their

⁴¹¹ "The Gettysburg Address" (1953), available on DVD.

⁴¹² In particular, Herbert Aptheker's works, *The Negro in the Civil War* (New York: International Publishers, 1938), and *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: Columbia, 1943).

⁴¹³ *Variety*, December 11, 1985: 150. "Union activist, board member of the Authors' League, Radio Writers Guild, and WGA, Rodman was blacklisted during the 1950s. During that period he worked as a bricklayer."

owners. Most outrageous to the Captain is that these fugitives provide invaluable military intelligence, yet they receive nothing but hostility and abuse from many officers. A supportive sergeant agrees and adds, “Either we free the slaves or the slaves free the rebels. Every time we send a slave home he goes back to rebel territory and he goes back to work. Every time a slave goes to work he sets a rebel free to shoot at us.”

You Are There being what it was, next we hear from slaves themselves. In this amazing scene, we watch as slaves transform themselves into full citizens. At one of several “Negro gatherings” being held in Washington to discuss and pray for Lincoln’s signature, we look in on weary men and women wearing straw hats and spare clothing more suitable for harvesting cotton in the Deep South than for winter in the nation’s capital. After they finish a somber rendition of “Let My People Go,” an older man stands up to say a few words about their painful past and the promise of the future, building up to and concluding with a rousing repetition of “no more of *that!*” A reporter next interviews Private Long, of the South Carolina Volunteers, a reminder (or perhaps a surprising fact to many viewers) that African Americans fought in uniform during the Civil War. Private Long happily relates how ex-slaves like him volunteer to serve and work their way toward full citizenship and voting rights. Then he shrugs off the question of whether Lincoln will sign the proclamation: “Sign or no sign, sir, for me, no more of *that!*” The scene comes to a close as the motley chorus begins anew, now standing tall and singing proudly, “My Country ‘tis of Thee.” The people have seized the initiative and made the words and

actions of the leader – the nominal focus of the episode – almost irrelevant. The “power of the people” is again the real lesson.⁴¹⁴

African Americans also featured prominently in 1954’s “The Emergence of Jazz,” essentially a condensed history of how white musicians co-opted the musical form from black musicians in New Orleans. Polonsky’s lines for Walter Cronkite take us back to November 12, 1917, coincidentally the same day that “Premier Kerensky announced the near collapse of the Bolshevik Revolution,” “Trotsky was greeted with taunts and laughter when he came to take over the Reds,” and suffragettes were arrested for picketing outside the White House (the references are again a kind of tip-of-the-hat to Polonsky’s dispersed comrades rather than a serious attempt at persuasion – or some complicated Soviet method of communicating with spies!). The script focused on early jazz legends King Oliver and Jelly Roll Morton, played by two younger legends, Louis Armstrong and Billy Taylor, respectively. The first scene takes place in a New York recording studio, where the successful all-white Original Dixieland Jazz Band is recording one of their hits. A black porter who happens by says, “If you like this, mister, you should hear it when it’s real.” The white musicians later confirm that they learned the music from “the colored,” “down in Storyville,” a section of New Orleans. The success of the white band contrasts with the situation in New Orleans, where the federal government has demanded the city raze Storyville to protect young (white) soldiers and sailors from vice. Literally then, and right before our eyes, the African American roots of jazz are destroyed, while white practitioners continue their commercial successes. Later, Armstrong’s King Oliver interrupts his interview with Harry Marble with one last performance of

⁴¹⁴ “The Emancipation Proclamation” (1955), written by Howard Rodman, online at www.museum.tv.

“Saints.” He marches out the door and onto the streets, and the customers go with him. Real jazz went with them too, suggests Cronkite, for the music was “merged with the popular songs and ballads, what the musicians call ‘sweet and commercial’.”⁴¹⁵

In Polonsky’s hands, this story is transnational. Ned Calmer reports from a Paris café, where war-weary Europeans embrace jazz as a message of hope. Belgian poet Robert Goffin explains that white Americans fear jazz as a “free creation of the Negro people whom they still don’t recognize as free and equal” (his use of “Negro” contrasts with the white American’s derogatory “colored”). “That is an irony isn’t it, that from the slaves and the oppressed comes the only original contribution to art made by the American nation. All else is imitation.” These few lines summarize Goffin’s landmark work of jazz criticism, *Aux frontières du jazz*. Polonsky, who not only had lived in France but also wrote during the later 1950s about intellectuals of the French left, had undoubtedly read Goffin, and probably later French jazz critics like Boris Vian as well.⁴¹⁶

In “The Torment of Beethoven,” Polonsky studies the musician in society and rejects the idea that any real artist can find satisfaction in this world – alienation is unavoidable, and should be embraced. The “rebel” is tormented by loneliness, symbolized by his deafness, but really deriving from the natural isolation of the true artist. “I am an exile,” he says, “and yet, my conception of life is heroic... to struggle, to seize fate by the throat and strangle it.” Beethoven’s music critiques “false” happiness; it is music for “this new age in which no man knows whether he

⁴¹⁵ Polonsky, *Teleplays*, 241-256.

⁴¹⁶ Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) 92-93.

will live or die from day to day.” The only legitimate stance for the artist was to be, like Beethoven, a “hero.”

This epitomized the divide between the CP leadership and communists like Polonsky and his colleagues of similar mind and spirit. For the Party, art was a weapon in the fight against capitalism. For many artists and writers, left politics was the foundation for their art, but their work would suffer from forced conformity, whether to the party line or to HUAC. Beethoven, product of the Enlightenment and the apex of musical achievement before the nationalistic strain of Romanticism came to the fore, personified the artist of radical humanism that Polonsky wanted to be. “The role of the artist is not to worry about the political sensitivities of people,” he wrote two years later in a review of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The New Mandarins*, “but to stimulate them into new areas of experiment and expression.” Sounding very much like Dwight Macdonald, he added that works of art should not concern themselves with “practical politics” *per se*, as the “tendency in social commitments is uniformity,” which destroys art.⁴¹⁷

Intellectually, Polonsky continued to claim the mantle of Maltz’s 1946 critique, but his work consistently demonstrated political and social commitment. His decision to write pseudonymously for television rather than openly for the theatre, or as a novelist (a decision which, in retrospect, he could not explain), indicates that he valued the potential for reaching a mass audience, by any means available, very highly.

⁴¹⁷ Timon (Abraham Polonsky), “The Troubled Mandarins,” *Masses and Mainstream* 9 (August 1956: 35 n), cited in Buhle and Wagner, 170-171.

Defining News, Shaping Memory

On television, as on radio, the technique of simulating difficult and possibly fatal reporting conditions, and including technical and sound “problems,” was used again to great effect. The writers and directors also instructed CBS reporters on their delivery – when to pause for dramatic effect, when to speak with no breaks in order to enhance the intensity of an unfolding situation, when to fire questions rapidly in order to pressure someone and make them appear unsympathetic, and when to probe more softly and generate “human interest.” How much these reporters (and others in the news division) absorbed and then used in their “real” news broadcasts is impossible to know, yet one can easily imagine how such artistic direction helped *You Are There* veterans improve their on-air style. Certainly Cronkite’s skill and reputation as a national “anchorman” – a new designation that Cronkite pioneered just months before the series began – grew because of this show.⁴¹⁸

Many CBS News programs also derived style or substance from *You Are There*. In the late fifties, *You Are There* veteran reporter Clete Roberts had a show called *Clete Roberts Special Report*. One episode, “The Human Explosion,” opened,

“Last Monday, September twenty-third, 1957, an explosion in Little Rock, Arkansas was heard ‘round the world. It was a human explosion that shook the foundations of our government – that came as close to rebellion as anything this country has seen in nearly one hundred years. This is Little Rock, the land of Faubus. And these are his people.”

This closely follows the *You Are There* style and format in several ways.

First, the exact date (less necessary here than on the historical program). Next, the drama and its universal significance are played up to full effect. Then, the

⁴¹⁸ The term “anchorman” had only just been coined by Sig Mickelson in reference to Cronkite’s on-camera role at the 1952 political conventions. The anchor desk at *You Are There* thus was a very early manifestation. Mickelson, 81.

identification of the scene – “this is Little Rock” – as the image shifts from Roberts in the studio to the unrest in the streets of the Arkansas capital. The closing, read with the emphasis on “these,” exactly follows the cadence of “And *you* are there.”

In *CBS News: Eyes on the World*, a 1962 special (hosted by *You Are There* veteran Charles Collingwood) that overviewed the extensive News Division, Walter Cronkite introduced two programs that should be considered the series’ progeny, *Twentieth Century* and *Eyewitness* (formerly *Eyewitness to History*). The latter offered an “electronic eye through which we can focus on the scenes where history is being made.” In other words, it took the premise of *You Are There* and moved somewhat further in the direction of news. Cronkite even used the catchphrase, but (ironically) in the past tense: “And you were there – an eyewitness to an event in the history of our time.” The other program, *Twentieth Century*, had succeeded *You Are There*, changing the chronological focus and, of course, the format.

You Are There itself sometimes edged closer to news, particularly in the last season (1956-57) and in several earlier episodes that covered World War II. In a special *You Are There*: “Cyprus Today,” CBS dispensed with recreations but reported the news of the previous few months from Cyprus in the show’s typical format.

Footage of rioting was mixed with interviews to “develop and explain the situation.”⁴¹⁹ Soon after, a similar *You Are There* program aired from Moscow.⁴²⁰

This indicates the extent to which CBS News thought of *You Are There* as one of the network’s premiere public affairs programs.

⁴¹⁹ NYPL, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, “You Are There,” B File, Photograph and press release from *You Are There*: Cyprus Today, Sunday, July 1, 1956.

⁴²⁰ WHS, Sig Mickelson Collection, Box 1, Folder “Programs – You Are There,” Memorandum from H. L. McClinton, President of Calkins & Holden, Inc. (advertising agency) to Robert Livingston of CBS, December 20, 1956.

These episodes were clearly “news,” but what about a broadcast covering the events of a decade before? In 1955, as “Leo Davis,” Polonsky wrote the script for “The Liberation of Paris.” Reporting from August 25th, 1944, Cronkite sets the scene by very quickly explaining that the Axis powers are finally starting to “feel the return blow of the Allies.” This is the “*second* front,” made possible only by the great effort of the Russians on the eastern front. “Liberation” contrasts with a later, post-purge episode, “D-Day,” credited to writer Maury Stern (more on that credit later) and directed by Jack Gage. In “D-Day” the Soviets are never mentioned and the war is conceived of as a wholly American undertaking. Several times, a reporter refers to the invasion at hand as “the beginnings,” as if D-Day marked the start of the Second World War. In a way, this episode prefigures the World War II Memorial on the National Mall, in that, the Allies are absent and sovereign U.S. states stand almost in their stead. Rather than construct an episode (or monument) that demonstrated how the various Allied nations came together to defeat fascism, the structure emphasizes how the various states worked together to create an awesome, *national* military force. CBS reporters interviewed soldiers preparing for, and in the midst of, battle by asking about their home states, their families, and their very American hobbies and sports. Nor are we ever asked to remember fascism’s atrocities, which is probably the *raison d’etre* of Polonsky’s “Liberation”.

Early on in the Polonsky episode we watch in horror as “French fascists” (the narrator spits out the alliteration) shoot at “patriots.” The lengthy third and final scene takes place in the German’s suburban prison, where the Nazi commander continues to execute French partisans during the evacuation. He condemns one man,

charged with some minor offense, after the prisoner gloats a little in the impending victory. First putting up a fight, the man then screams, “You are right to kill me. It is right for a Nazi to kill to the last minute. It would be wrong to spare me and let the world imagine for even one moment that you are members of the human race. Yes, kill me. Yes, kill me! So that we will never forget what you are!” Poignantly, facing the firing squad and the viewer, his last words are, “Remember. For those who forget may God curse them with wars and death ‘til they and their children are no more. Vive la... [sound of gunshot]”

To help us remember, real footage of innumerable executed faces and bodies rolls in silence for an uncomfortably long time. How different this is from America’s quick postwar forgetting of German atrocities (in order to bring the Federal Republic into the fight against the Soviets). Where else in 1955 could one see such a vivid denunciation of fascism (with, for good measure, a reminder of the Allies’ debt to the Soviets)?⁴²¹

The key issue in this episode, and the question the reporters keep coming back to, is whether it was “wise” for Parisians to revolt. Had they remained passive and waited for Allied troops to arrive in Paris, would they and their city have been better off? Cronkite finally explains that, whatever the consequences, resistance by the

⁴²¹ Available on DVD. The second chapter is set in a café, where the FFI (French Forces of the Interior) has a local headquarters. Here Polonsky argues somewhat contradictorily that the war is absurd. Following an FFI bombing, a few partisans drag a wounded German soldier into the café and lay him out across two tables. Before he dies, they get his name. It is French. Probably his family was of French descent, “driven out three hundred years ago” as part of some other pointless persecution, and now sent back “to kill, for reasons he doesn’t understand.”

Both of these episodes integrate film stock shot at the real event with staged medium shots and close-ups. Much of the real-life war footage is gruesome. In “Liberation,” a German man, set afire, rolls around on the street in obvious agony until he dies. Compared to Polonsky’s other scripts, “Liberation” contained little dialogue, with long stretches of silence during the dramatic opening scenes.

citizenry was vital to the “spirit, the soul, the very honor of the French people.” Like many other cold war era scripts, this one praised the engaged citizen – the patriot. But these men and women became heroes by actively, violently opposing their own fascist-allied government. These were the last warriors of the Popular Front, cousins to the anti-fascist international brigades that fought Franco in Spain.

Polonsky’s World War II story thus looked back to the alliances of the war and the 1930s. In contrast, “D-Day” looked ahead to the postwar era of American superpower. These two episodes have now been packaged together on one DVD. They would likely be viewed together, providing a more complete picture of the war than either would have done separately. But for the most part the D-Day story of the war won out in American memory. In popular historical imagination, World War II had little to do with an international alliance against fascism or Parisian guerillas. But *You Are There* demonstrates that alternate histories of the war did reach a mainstream audience, at least for a while.

Several *You Are There* episodes used the framework of empire to question American expansion (and quite possibly, its growing involvement in Vietnam).⁴²² In “The Great Adventure of Marco Polo” (1954), Kubla Khan tries to make sense of the “inscrutable and incomprehensible” Western powers. “What I find full of laughter is their words, the marvelous words of peace and piety with which they clothe their wicked acts.” The “great Khan Genghis” never said, “I come to save you’ when he meant to slay.”⁴²³ The same critique of “the West” adds the most reflective layer to

⁴²² WHS, Polonsky Collection, Box 11, Diaries, April 7, 1954. In his diary, earlier in the year, Polonsky wrote of his anger and dismay at Eisenhower for dragging the country into war in French Indochina.

⁴²³ Buhle and Wagner, *Dangerous Citizen*, 176.

the already well-textured “Cortes Conquers Mexico.” This first-season episode featured Eartha Kitt as Hernan Cortes’s Indian interpreter and mistress. The interracial extramarital affair with Kitt’s character assumes a level of cosmopolitanism not commonly associated with 1950s television. Kitt’s “Marina” devises the notoriously devious scheme through which Cortes forces Montezuma to proclaim him emissary of the gods. Part threat, part promise, with his sword in Montezuma’s back, Cortes demands the king speak to his people and proclaim the Spaniards heaven-sent. “Tell them and we will be brothers and we will love and protect each other. Tell them, or else you and all of them will die. Now speak.” The choice of the soon to be absorbed: immediate execution or a slower demise obscured by promises of mutual benefits.⁴²⁴

Another script that closely examined the consequences of two superpowers clashing over odd bits of remote foreign lands was “The Battle of Gibraltar,” credited to Howard Rodman. The episode focused on the suffering of the lowest rank soldiers (of England, France and Spain) and the local population (who suffer most of all, through starvation, rape, the destruction of their homes, and death) during this one small conflict in the global struggle between two great empires. “Half my life I’ve spent in these caves,” complains an old woman, “while strangers fight each other on my land. Why? What right do they have?” In the end the good guys, the English, win the decisive battle. But at the same moment, mocking both the “victory” and the

⁴²⁴ Polonsky, *Teleplays*, “Cortes Conquers Mexico.” By the end of the episode, Cortes has given Dona Marina away to a friend – he cannot bear her dominance over him any longer. Her name would live on, Cronkite tells us, as an Indian word for traitor. Our sympathies have now shifted fully to the side of the Aztecs as we learn from the anchorman that Montezuma was murdered and Cortes destroyed the once beautiful capital. On May 1, 1949, the radio series aired “The Death of Montezuma,” written by Michael Sklar and Robert Lewis Shayon. The radio play focused on the Aztec response to Montezuma’s “cowardice,” as the high council strips the emperor of his title he is murdered by his former subjects. The teleplay was thus a prequel to the earlier radio play.

idea of an indirect war, the old woman and her husband find that their home has been completely destroyed.⁴²⁵

The final episode of the Polonsky-Bernstein-Manoff-Lumet-Russell era, “The Triumph of Alexander the Great,” aired on March 27, 1955. Alexander faces a mutiny from his Macedonian troops, who object to foreigners holding prestigious positions in “their” government. This crisis sets the stage for a more significant discussion about the nature of government, empire, and world peace. Wearing Persian clothing, to express his rejection of both Macedonian provincialism and Greek ethnocentrism, this early citizen of the world insists that “all men are brothers” and “all the peoples of the earth” must be treated equally. He seeks “a world, a government, in which all nations are partners” with “all peoples equal, none subject to the other” – peace achieved through world government (with equal representation – no *Pax Americana* here) and an end to racial discrimination. It is a fitting and quite beautiful finale.⁴²⁶

Several other leftist writers wrote scripts for *You Are There*. Some of these were accepted; some were not. Paddy Chayevsky, who would soon write and gain notoriety for the academy award-winning *Marty*, offered a script to *You Are There* entitled “The Triangle Shirt Waist Company Fire.” Though it was never produced, the script indicates that other friends of the writing trio knew that they had a possible outlet for their talents at CBS, where they could not only make some money but also

⁴²⁵ WHS, John Frankenheimer Papers, Box 6, *You Are There*: “The Battle of Gibraltar” (December 5, 1954).

⁴²⁶ The radio series had also covered this subject in a broadcast on March 20, 1949, entitled “Mutiny in India.” Written by Michael Sklar, it was the last of a three part series on Alexander. The radio and television episodes bear no resemblance to each other. In the former, Alexander is presented as a greedy conqueror, intent on ruling the world.

offer their social or political views through historical events. It also indicates the limits of what could be done on the show, as Chayevsky's scenes would have been shockingly gruesome.⁴²⁷

Saul Levitt, another blacklisted, also wrote scripts for *You Are There*. He submitted several scripts through a front named Maury Stern. Levitt would achieve his greatest fame through his play, and later made-for-TV movie, *The Andersonville Trial* –which Stern claimed he wrote.⁴²⁸ He (or perhaps Stern?) wrote at least four scripts for *You Are There*, including “D-Day,” “William Pitt’s Last Speech to Parliament,” “The Resolve of Patrick Henry,” and “The Abdication of Napoleon.” These episodes are not among the most engaging of the series, nor are they culturally, politically, or historically provocative. Like the later episodes of 1956-1957, they lack tension: no unsolvable moral dilemmas, just stories about famous men in their finest hours.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁷ WHS, Paddy Chayevsky Papers, Box 11, Folder 9, “Triangle Shirtwaist Company Fire.” Chayevsky framed the episode as a CBS News special feature on the “problems of women in industry” (“live” from March 25, 1911). Compared to the usual writers’ styles, Chayevsky’s script comes off as dense and heavy-handed, which perhaps explains why the episode never made it on air. Of course, the revoltingly violent deaths of every single character may have turned off Russell or whoever it was that read and rejected this script. The horror of the climax is extreme, as the main characters, now afire, die screaming as they jump down the elevator shaft or out a window. Even a CBS reporter was to burn to death in this story. At the end, just before Cronkite’s summation, the last shot was to focus on Naomi, the first woman we came to know. “Bodies on floor... Slumped over a sewing machine is a skeleton in a skirt and blouse, once Naomi Wiener, who had a big date at the Hippodrome...” While some of the other, produced, episodes contained gruesome footage, the proposed images of charred young women pushed too far.

⁴²⁸ Polonsky, *Teleplays*, 323n. As remembered by Russell, Levitt was cleared and able to write using his own name by 1955. Russell specifically mentions “D-Day” as an episode credited to Levitt, but that program, now available on DVD, gives Stern the writer’s credit at the end of the film. So it is difficult to know whether Levitt and Russell accurately remembered Levitt as the author of all scripts bearing Stern’s name, or if Stern really wrote one or more of them himself.

⁴²⁹ The theme of resistance did find its way into Levitt’s “The Resolve of Patrick Henry” (1956), in which Jefferson counsels the House of Burgesses to reject Henry’s call to arms because the British might think it treason – “treason being whatever those in power say it is.” Henry is the hero of the episode though, so the message to be taken away would seem to be the importance of challenging Power (rather than Jefferson’s cautious approach). Levitt may have been blacklisted, but the fact that he had been cleared by early 1955 suggests his politics were of a less active (or less left) variety than

Endings

The decline of *You Are There* occurred in two stages. First, the network forced out Polonsky, Bernstein and Manoff and the show left for Hollywood in the fall of 1955 without Lumet or Russell. Not surprisingly, the quality suffered. Earlier shows had confronted difficult and complex issues but the later episodes presented straightforward facts in a nearly drama-less format.⁴³⁰ Two years after the move to Hollywood, *Twentieth Century* took its place. This was 1957, the same year that Du Pont ended the *Cavalcade of America*. It may have been coincidence that the two most heralded historical dramas left the air at the same time, both replaced by more contemporary programs, but it seems more likely that something had changed.

On a practical level, the networks and sponsors decided that they could reach more people and make more money through contemporary programming. The expansive interpretation of “news” shrank to limits more recognizable to us today. And the networks increasingly replaced anthology shows with formulaic series and their regular casts of lovable characters. Television had extended its reach into almost every part of the country by then, and its audience had grown more diverse economically as well. The messages communicated by *You Are There* no longer suited the medium. More important to our protagonists, the worst manifestations of McCarthyism were passing into history. The blacklist was losing its effectiveness. It would still be several more years before everyone tainted by “a list somewhere” could

those of our trio, a conclusion supported by the content of the episodes he wrote. As already discussed, “D-Day” in particular contained nothing but the most nationalistic, uncritically patriotic and celebratory history, and none of these scripts tread too deeply into perilous political waters. “Patrick Henry” is available on film at the LC, Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division.

⁴³⁰ Which is not to say that many people were not just as pleased with the factually informative format.

work openly, but things were starting to open up. It was therefore no longer necessary to talk only in code. Perhaps, too, the ideological battles that had begun decades before were finally over – or were at least changing form.

At the same time, the increase in television viewing choices represented a broader expanse of sources of information. Public affairs programming on the very restricted television medium of the early fifties had in key respects descended from World War II era propaganda and ideologically driven productions of the 1930s. These directed lessons, historical or non, were decreasingly acceptable to an audience that was growing more sophisticated and more accustomed to a wealth of choices. Moreover, television's entertainment function was emerging triumphant over both public affairs programming and highbrow anthology series – the two genres straddled by *You Are There*. By the late 1950s, Americans used the medium differently than they had earlier in the decade, actively searching for amusement on an increasing number of stations positioned across the two frequency spectrums. The complicated and often-obscure historical episodes reenacted on the *You Are There* of Lumet and his writers disappeared from public view, though they persisted in classrooms as an educational tool. The attempt at popular education through the television medium again faced the problem that plagued every such effort: in short, the market.

In 1957 David Susskind hired Bernstein's friend Marty Ritt to direct Sidney Poitier and John Cassavetes in *Edge of the City*. Otto Preminger openly hired Dalton Trumbo to write the screenplay for *Exodus*, after which Kirk Douglass hired him to adapt Howard Fast's *Spartacus*. Bernstein began to shake off the blacklist when Sidney Lumet was hired by Carlo Ponti to direct a movie starring Ponti's wife,

Sophia Loren. Lumet hired Bernstein to write the script for *That Kind of Woman*, released in 1959. Even then, he still faced difficulties, as Paramount for a long time refused to give him a contract. While still dealing with that, Marty Ritt and Yul Brynner, the first producer-director team of *Danger*, offered him the chance to write *The Magnificent Seven*.⁴³¹ After that he revived his career completely and went on to write many acclaimed motion pictures, including 1961's *Paris Blues* (directed by Ritt and starring Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, Sidney Poitier, and Diahann Carroll), *Fail Safe* (the 1964 and 2000 versions), *The Molly Maguires* (1970), *Yanks* (1979), and *The Front* (1977), for which he received an Oscar nomination.

Arnold Manoff's story is the saddest of the *You Are There* team. He had a difficult time getting un-blacklisted (just after Lumet hired him for Ponti's film, Bernstein fronted for Manoff on a script he submitted to Marty Ritt). Manoff wrote a bit more for television, including the series *Naked City*, *Ivanhoe*, *Pursuit*, and the *Defenders*, before he succumbed to ill health and passed away in 1965 at the age of 51.⁴³²

Polonsky managed to contribute to a small number of films in the latter half of the 1950s. His near-break came when Harry Belafonte hired him to write *Odds Against Tomorrow* (1959), a film produced by the star's new production company, Harbel, and directed by Robert Wise, best known for *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951). The plot of *Odds Against Tomorrow* centers around three men (Belafonte, Ed Begley, and Robert Ryan) who fail in their attempt to rob a bank because of their ingrained racial mistrust. Belafonte and Ryan's characters kill each other in an

⁴³¹ Bernstein, *Inside Out*, 259-277.

⁴³² Buhle and Wagner, *Dangerous Citizen*, 250.

explosion set off by their gunfire, leaving their bodies so unidentifiable that the authorities cannot determine which was white and which black. After *Odds*, Belafonte, Polonsky, and Sidney Poitier planned to make a whole series of films about African American life, but the financing for their very first project, a Polonsky script called “Sweetland,” fell through after Paul Newman and other investors grew fearful of professional fallout and withdrew. Not until 1968’s *Madigan* would Polonsky receive a writing credit for a studio motion picture. The following year he directed Robert Redford in *Tell Them Willie Boy is Here*, twenty-one years after directing John Garfield in *Force of Evil*.⁴³³

You Are There lived on as films used in junior and senior high school history and literature courses. I learned about ancient Greece through “The Death of Socrates” in the early 1990s, forty years after the episode first aired as a response to anti-communism. Current online reviews and reminiscences suggest that *You Are There* continues to be seen as an accurate representation of history.⁴³⁴ That raises troubling questions for historians, yet in many ways the series’ interpretations

⁴³³ Ibid., 179-192.

⁴³⁴ Many of the radio shows are now available online, and fans of radio’s golden age can listen to the program any time they want. Twelve of the television films have been released on DVD, and reading the customer reviews at amazon.com it would seem to be popular for home schooling. One mother-teacher showed the Socrates and Alexander episodes (on one DVD) to her 5 and 7 year olds after they had finished their 5-week study of Ancient Greece. Surprisingly, both children “liked it a lot,” perhaps because “it brought to life stuff they’d read.” She calls the series a “great and thoughtful production, nice and simple from the 50’s.” Thoughtful? Certainly. Simple? Far from it.

A teacher who uses the shows in his classroom wrote, “Walter Cronkite and his news staff deliver great coverage of historic events ‘as they happen’.” More excitedly, one fan points out, “They used actors playing real people, but they are interview[ed] by real CBS News reporters!” What made the series work for him more than anything else was the shooting angle: “the actors talked to you and answered your questions” as if “you were there in person, seeing history in the making.”

Online reviews submitted by listeners to archive.org, a site featuring older radio programs, reveal how fans appreciate the radio series. The series (in mp3 format) “takes me back,” according to “someguy2,” an interesting if unexplored thought about a show from his own past that purported to take listeners back to the world before their birth. In another message with the subject “Homeschooling Hooray!” a mother writes, “This is a wonderful gateway to history topics and more indepth [sic] study.”

prefigured those of the historical profession, especially in its emphasis on social history and history “from the bottom up,” as well as its investigations (especially Polonsky’s) of the relationship between politics and culture. Playing a bit fast and loose with the facts – condensing several days into one half hour, for example – might be the gravest indictment of the series. That, and the absurd claim of “authenticity,” at which any academic historian would surely frown.

As for the intended lessons the writers hoped would reach millions of American television viewers, any interpretation that finds radical themes throughout the course of the series needs to be tempered. Certainly the show’s politics fit a liberal worldview, but the cues indicating positions from the far left often were too slight for notice by anyone not already on the left. The trio clearly wrote for two audiences (at least) – one that watched the program to be entertained or educated by televised history, but without having a very clear sense of the analogies being made, and another that understood the references, shared the politics of the writers, and chuckled sadly at the truth of the comparisons across time.

Chapter 5: Narrow Gauge History

“More important to the world than the atom bomb, is this conception of freedom for the individual.”⁴³⁵

- Harry S. Truman, Dedication of the Freedom Train, 1947

“Its abiding consequence will be to clarify the people’s perceptions of the grandeur of the nation’s past, the majesty of its present, and the glory of its future...”⁴³⁶

- Contemporary review of the Freedom Train

From September 1947 to January 1949, a “Freedom Train” carried 126 of America’s most important historical documents to 325 towns and cities in all 48 states. More than a third of the population participated in some part of the campaign, which also included patriotic and celebratory “Rededication Weeks” at every stop. Conceived of by Justice Department personnel and endorsed by President Truman, the newly formed American Heritage Foundation (AHF), an association of leading advertising and businessmen sponsored by the nation’s largest corporations, organized and promoted the tour. In every community touched by the “popular movement,” the business and advertising leaders behind the AHF organized civic participation around the central theme of “freedom.” Along the way, other groups from across the political spectrum challenged the AHF’s definition of freedom. In the course of this extended conversation, postwar Americans elaborated a new civil religion that was built on the foundation provided by these well-traveled documents.

⁴³⁵ H. Walton Cloke, “Truman Asks U.S. to ‘Share Liberty’,” *New York Times*, September 17, 1947.

⁴³⁶ William J. Peterson, “America’s Freedom Train,” *The Palimpsest* XXIX, no. 9 (September 1948): 268.

The Freedom Train traveled the country “bearing a precious freight of documents, and speeding through the land like a modern Paul Revere to arouse the people to a sense of danger while stirring their pride in the glory of the national heritage.”⁴³⁷ Communism was the immediate danger, but as it rumbled along its 37,000-mile journey, extolling “freedom” at every stop, this train looked to flatten all ideologies and squeeze American history into the narrowest of tracks. It demanded worship as the diesel-fueled ark of a sacred heritage, and branded as heretics any who refused to join the new church of “Americanism.”

At the same time, as a result of the need to build unity and consensus, this dogma underwent dramatic revision. This train of American history toured the country at just the moment when America became a real presence in nearly every corner of the globe, and ceased to exist as, merely, a nation in and of itself. With so many people watching, both at home and abroad, the Freedom Train represented American heritage very cautiously, painting a too-rosy picture, but also firmly insisting on the practice of the principles it claimed were the fundamentals of that heritage, namely liberty and equality.

Despite the efforts of organizers to control the message, freedom carried with it many different meanings, as did the historical documents assembled to stand for the eternal values of the nation. For the most part, the campaign’s activities ignored the documents themselves, except to wave them figuratively around as a rally flag. At times, however, Americans heeded the train’s call to civic engagement by more actively considering the implications of free speech, the equality of all humankind, or how freedom related to their economic rights (the last particularly disquieting to the

⁴³⁷ Peterson, 258.

train's corporate sponsors). Despite the AHF's rhetoric, learning from and experiencing history firsthand was less the intention than claiming the mantle of freedom for the sake of the sponsors' political and economic agendas. Ultimately, the public's failure to follow the political course suggested by the AHF halted the popular effort to launch a second tour.

The Freedom Train followed a long tradition of mixing religion and patriotism, but broadened and redefined American civil religion for the postwar era. The collected documents, as well as their nearly mythic authors, functioned as the core idols of this new religion. At the celebrated stops at stations in every state, "advance agents" of the AHF instructed Americans of all backgrounds in the catechism, while the media reported the penalties for non-participation.

This unprecedented attempt to educate the public in American history came at the close of a period marked by national propaganda campaigns. Wartime bond drives and other homefront propaganda (and before that, Blue Eagle parades and other pro-New Deal productions) prepared Americans for the Freedom Train. The media blitz from radio, newsreels, newspapers, and magazines made a personal interaction with the American past difficult to avoid in 1948. The act of proclaiming oneself "for freedom" joined the individual to society, reviving once more the rapidly disappearing feelings of wartime unity. "Rededication" provided a guidebook for continued patriotic service in peacetime – or rather, in Cold War. Much of the rhetoric focused on spreading freedom abroad, while the prescribed activities helped to set the tone for increased anticommunism at home. Not everyone followed the

AHF's direction, but the Freedom Train stimulated a moment of civic engagement at phenomenally high rates of participation.

A number of scholars have written about the Freedom Train, most within the past several years. They have unanimously concluded that the organizers sought to impose "consensus" on the American people (by consensus they mean a basic agreement on values and ideology).⁴³⁸ A fair conclusion, but without a careful examination of that process, including the interactions of the past and the present, the public and the documents, religion and politics, and propaganda and history, much of the story has remained obscured by this interpretation. This chapter begins by considering the significance of the mobile locus of this campaign, then briefly reviews the history of the Freedom Train's origins. Motives for participation varied considerably, and how the public experienced the Freedom Train often diverged from official statements of purpose. The rest of the chapter elucidates how the train and the surrounding campaign operated, what limitations it faced, and the reasons behind its unexpected demise.

The Great American Railroad

Trains hold a special place in American memory. Their presence, audible and visible, stirs the collective consciousness of continental conquest, migration, expansion, and manifest destiny. Hollywood regularly affirms this memory with the

⁴³⁸ Wendy Wall, *Inventing the American Way: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5-12; Richard Fried, "Precious Freight: The Freedom Train," in *The Russians are Coming! Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Stuart J. Little, *The Freedom Train and the Formation of National Political Culture, 1946-1949*, MA Thesis, Department of History, University of Kansas, 1989.

standard shots of a train blowing out steam and whistling while pulling into or out of an Old West or big city station. Though the country has long since become the land of automobiles (and the “freedom of the open road”), historical America – and even more so the hazily remembered or mythologized old-time America – is largely a land of trains.

Published in 1947, the first year of the Freedom Train, History Book Club editor Stewart Holbrook’s *The Story of American Railroads* celebrated the train’s special place in American memory. He wrote of steam engines, “No sight, no sound in my native land so stirs up my imagination as those do. As symbols of the United States they are better, and more accurate, than the covered wagon and the report of the homesteader’s rifle. I think of them as unmistakably American as the Stars and Stripes and the Constitution.”⁴³⁹

The following summer (and again in 1949), Chicago hosted a “Railroad Fair” that marked 100 years of trains in that city. It drew millions of Americans to the site of the 1933 Century of Progress Exhibition in Burnham Park. Made possible through the cooperation of 38 independent carriers, Museum of Science and Industry President Lenox Riley Lohr organized the exhibition. Lohr had been the general manager of Chicago’s Century of Progress, then became president of NBC, and finally returned to Chicago in 1940 to transform the Museum of Science and Industry into an internationally recognized technology museum. The fair’s program claimed it

⁴³⁹ Holbrook tells stories more than he writes histories; this book is full of tall tales and anecdotes that, combined with some history, instruct as well as entertain. One of the chapters is an appreciation of Pullman porters. It celebrates their numerous feats of heroism, the quality and consistency of their work, and their leadership in the black community. It also derides those passengers that whistle for them “as if for a dog” or otherwise disrespect the men who made rail travel feel luxurious. Stewart Holbrook, *The Story of American Railroads* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1947), 451.

allowed millions of Americans to “relive again in vivid realism those dramatic moments of the past when an infant people was fighting its way to its present position in the world.” Exhibits showed the railroad “joining by steel rails... the previously loose-knit states... into a compact, powerful, prosperous nation.”⁴⁴⁰ The fair drew on nostalgia for then-disappearing steam trains to advertise the industry and the future of rail travel to the postwar public. It also expressed a particular narrative of American history that emphasized transcontinental movement, national expansion, seizure, and progress.

Besides marking the start of the Cold War and domestic anticommunism, the late 1940s represented a last chance for American railroads. Over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, the railroad industry rose to its peak levels in the 1910s (which year depends on whether we measure mileage, ridership, income, etc.), declined during the 1920s and 1930s, revived dramatically during World War II, and then suffered a quick and likely permanent downturn after that. By the early 1960s, competition from air, road, and even sea transport had decimated the nation’s railroads. In the immediate wake of World War II, however, a sense of optimism pervaded the industry. Much of the accumulated debt of the previous twenty years was paid off with wartime profits, Congress and the public were grateful for railroads’ essential contributions to the war effort, and earlier investments in new technologies appeared ready to yield returns. That rail travel instead came almost to its terminus was not entirely surprising, but there was at least a glimmer of hope in the late 1940s.

⁴⁴⁰ Guide to the Chicago Railroad Fair, 1949, available at www.railarchive.net.

When Holbrook published his appreciation in 1947, he thought America's trains would continue to run for many decades to come.⁴⁴¹ Even a decade later, when an Interstate Commerce Commission official named Howard Hosmer suggested that Pullman sleeper cars would disappear by 1965, and passenger coaches by 1970, "most people laughed."⁴⁴² In retrospect, the trends are more than obvious; however, even at the time, the kind of nostalgic history engaged in by Holbrook (and the Chicago fair) suggests that, his protestations to the contrary, the signs were clear enough in the late-1940s.

Before the war ended, labor issues had emerged as a major challenge to the railroad industry. War increased the industry's labor force by 25% to 1,420,000 by war's end (out of a national labor force of about 55 million).⁴⁴³ Facing rising costs due to inflation, in the fall of 1941 most of the unions demanded increases in pay. After the recommendations of Roosevelt's Emergency Mediation Board failed to meet with labor's approval, labor leaders called for a railroad strike to begin on December 7, 1941. The reconvened board reconsidered its proposals, which led to an increase in average annual salary from \$2045 in 1941 to \$2307 in 1942. But by 1943, inflation again led to dissatisfaction and the unions called a strike for December 30, 1943. This caused Roosevelt to take over the railroads, which stayed under War Department administration for less than a month. In the meantime, the action averted the strike and again won higher wages, which averaged \$2726 by 1944. But the workers' wartime victories contributed to the industry's long-term infeasibility.

⁴⁴¹ Holbrook, 443.

⁴⁴² John F. Stover, *The Life and Decline of the American Railroad* (New York: Oxford, 1970), 192.

⁴⁴³ Wilbert Ellis Moore, *Industrial Relations and the Social Order* (Manchester, NH: Ayer Books, 1977), 458; *Ibid*, 186.

During World War II, the industry worked hard to avoid a federal takeover, as had happened during World War I. Public relations men emphasized that in the first war the public had paid \$2 million per day to operate the nation's rail system while in the second, the railroads paid \$3 million per day in taxes. The industry thus claimed to epitomize the tremendous value of free enterprise, and corporate America pointed to the railroads as a shining example of what de- (or at least less-) regulated business could accomplish.⁴⁴⁴

In the spring of 1946, railroad workers struck again, but this time President Truman resisted the unions by seizing control of the railroads and drafting workers into the Army. His speech to Congress, interrupted by a message informing him of the success of his bold maneuver, described the chaos that he claimed faced the nation if the strike continued. The strike “threatens to paralyze all our industrial, agricultural, commercial, and social life.” It would “bear equally upon businessmen, workers, farmers and upon every citizen of the United States. Food, raw materials, fuel, shipping, housing, the public health, the public safety – all will be dangerously affected. *Hundreds of thousands of liberated people of Europe and Asia will die* who could be saved if the railroads were not now tied up [italics added].” In an almost apocalyptic passage, Truman insisted these railroad employees were fighting against “the Government of the United States itself,” and that “can never be tolerated. If allowed to continue, the government will break down.” The escalating conflict

⁴⁴⁴ Stover, 189.

between labor and management threatened to tear the country – and the world – apart.⁴⁴⁵

Planning for the Freedom Train began during the spring 1946 strike. The “disunity” exhibited in these disputes between capital and labor had caused concern well beyond the railroad industry. The strikes and some election-related violence in 1946 led many in advertising, business, and government to conclude that the country desperately needed some sort of unifying campaign.⁴⁴⁶ Similarly, the labor unrest led many Americans to support the Taft-Hartley Act, passed over Truman’s veto on June 23, 1947. Taft-Hartley was the aggressive counterpunch from a business community finally resigned to the durability of the Wagner Act. A massive campaign by the National Association of Manufacturers framed the bill as, finally, “some pro-public legislation.” Taft-Hartley benefited all Americans, so the argument went, instead of only labor unions.⁴⁴⁷ Business framed the debate in terms of a degrading and harmful system collective bargaining versus the American system “based on the dignity and freedom of the individual.”⁴⁴⁸ The Freedom Train reaffirmed that definition of America and implicitly rejected labor’s approach.

In what could be seen as either a highly ironic or highly suitable decision, when a national “unity” campaign finally came together in 1947, the chosen location was a train. Billed as the “longest train trip in history,” the Freedom Train showcased “unparalleled cooperation” by 52 railroad companies, proving to the people of every

⁴⁴⁵ Harry S. Truman, “Special Message to the Congress Urging Legislation for Industrial Peace, May 25, 1946,” in *Public Papers of the President of the United States: Harry S. Truman, Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President, January 1 to December 31, 1946* (Washington, United States Government Printing Office, 1962), 277-280.

⁴⁴⁶ Bird, 162; Wall, 171.

⁴⁴⁷ Bird, 162.

⁴⁴⁸ NARA, RG 64, Box 6, Folder 5, *Good Citizen: The Rights and Duties of an American* (An Official Freedom Train Publication, 1948), 1.

state just how well private industry functioned.⁴⁴⁹ The organizers confronted disunity on its home turf, and sought to demonstrate what a powerful force consensus could be.

All Aboard the “~~Civil Liberties...~~...er, “Freedom Train”

On April 8, 1946, the Justice Department’s William Coblentz formulated the embryonic plan for an archival exhibition train after passing a lunch hour in the National Archives rotunda. As he looked over the documents, Coblentz thought that, fragile though they were, they contained a potential energy – the power to refocus a country that seemed, to him, to be quickly fragmenting after wartime unity. He immediately took the idea to Solon J. Buck, Archivist of the United States, then to his boss at Justice, Director of Public Information, Colonel Timothy McInerny. Both endorsed it, as did Attorney General Tom Clark shortly thereafter. In less than 48 hours, Coblentz drew up detailed plans for a rail-traveling “Civil Liberties Exhibit.”

That name too clearly recalled recent communist-led campaigns for justice so after taking control in late 1946, the project’s corporate leadership vetoed it. Coblentz also proposed contrasting America’s most important texts with those of Nazi Germany, to more clearly delineate the meaning of American liberty, but this too changed. The final bell had sounded in the fight against fascism and there was no further need to remind Americans of the errors of former villains (nor the good deeds

⁴⁴⁹ NARA, RG 64, Box 5, Folder 7, “The Freedom Train,” *Atlantic Coast Line News* XXVIII, no. 12, November, 1947.

done by former friends). Some Americans had already seen a small collection of German documents on the November-December 1945 “Victory Loan Tour,” a modest rail-traveling exhibition created by the National Archives that served as a small-scale model for the Freedom Train.⁴⁵⁰

In the spring of 1947, Truman endorsed the traveling “Bill of Rights Exhibit,” as it was then called. Staff at the National Archives began assembling documents and Tom Clark took over the project. Clark later explained his enthusiasm to a congressional committee by noting that the train possessed “the means of aiding the country in its internal war against subversive elements” and would “improve citizenship by reawakening in our people their profound faith in the American historical heritage.” Truman gave his “strongest endorsement,” and noted, “We have come to a moment in the history of the world, when such an exhibition has timeliness and great educational value.”⁴⁵¹ But for the business leaders who would soon take over the project, the train did not possess “educational value” so much as it offered educative opportunities.

By September, Coblenz’s one-car, three-month exhibition had expanded to a full train and a full year of transcontinental travel. As the venture blossomed, costs grew beyond the point where Congress would fund the project. Clark thus turned to the private sector, starting with his friend Edwin Weisl, a New York attorney connected to Hollywood. Weisl introduced Paramount Pictures President Barney Balaban and his assistant, Louis Novins, to the project. At Balaban’s bidding, Novins quickly made the project his. Shortly thereafter, the National Archive’s Elizabeth

⁴⁵⁰ Little, 10.

⁴⁵¹ James Gregory Bradsher, “Taking America’s Heritage to the People: The Freedom Train Story,” *Prologue* 17, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 229.

Hamer commented that, “Hollywood, chiefly, is putting up the capital for the exhibit.” When Coblenz and McInerny left Washington for a meeting with Balaban and Novins at Paramount’s New York offices in November 1946, control of the project went with them. Thereafter, the business, advertising and media executives determined the character, scope and content of the Freedom Train.⁴⁵²

Privatization also followed from the wish to avoid charges of propaganda, an ironic situation in light of the massive propaganda campaign soon launched by the corporate sponsors.⁴⁵³ The public-private partnership represented a continuation of that which began during the war, when the cooperation of the War Advertising Council, the Office of War Information, Hollywood studios, and other corporate and advertising bodies fostered the idea that business was a willing and able ally of government. As Daniel Lykins has shown in his work on the Advertising Council in particular, in the years immediately following World War II, leaders in these organizations impressed upon government officials their abilities to handle precisely these types of propaganda campaigns.⁴⁵⁴ For an administration eager to persuade American’s of the necessity of a tough stand against communism, the offer was hard to refuse.

As their first move, Novins and Balaban brought the Advertising Council into the planning. Formerly the War Advertising Council, this organization played a key role in propaganda efforts designed both to promote World War II and to improve the

⁴⁵² Little, 12

⁴⁵³ Foner, 249.

⁴⁵⁴ Daniel L. Lykins, *From Total War to Total Diplomacy: The Advertising Council and the Construction of the Cold War Consensus* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

public's perception of business.⁴⁵⁵ That November, the Advertising Council started planning a "campaign to sell America to Americans" (in other words, to redefine America on their terms and sell that new definition to the public). Once the Advertising Council was brought on board, the two projects merged under the leadership of Novins and Thomas Brophy, President of the advertising agency Kenyon and Eckhardt, Inc., and a leading figure on the Council's Board of Directors.⁴⁵⁶

Brophy and Novins assembled a group of forty leading men in business and entertainment, including: Eric Johnston, President of the Motion Pictures Association of America; Justin Miller, President of the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters; Spyros Skouras, President of 20th Century Fox; Philip Graham, publisher of *The Washington Post*; CBS President Frank Stanton; NBC President Niles Trammell; *Reader's Digest* publisher DeWitt Wallace; Advertising Council President Theodore Replier; and songwriter Irving Berlin. In December 1946, they met with the government people – Buck and Hamer from the National Archives, Luther Evans from the Library of Congress, and Coblenz, McInerney, and Clark from Justice – at Clark's office in Washington. There, Novins presented a broader proposal in which the train's historical documents served as the central focus of a much wider reeducation campaign.

Reading a statement prepared by Novins, the Attorney General stated that the end of war had brought "cynicism, disillusionment, and lawlessness." These words, which would be used often to promote the campaign, referred primarily to the

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁵⁶ Bradsher, 230; Little, 13.

public's perceived lack of faith in the system of free enterprise and labor's rebuff of assurances that what benefited business, benefited all Americans. They also tapped into public fears of a rise in juvenile delinquency and other criminal activity, and establishment concerns that in peacetime a disengaged public would fail to support an aggressively internationalist foreign policy. Novins/Clark also claimed that the "indoctrination in democracy" offered by the Freedom Train was "the essential catalytic agent needed to blend our various groups into one American family. Without it, we could not sustain the continuity of our way of life."⁴⁵⁷

In January 1947, Brophy called on Winthrop W. Aldrich, chairman of Chase National Bank, to take an active role in getting the wheels turning. On Valentine's Day, they incorporated a new organization, the American Heritage Foundation, with Aldrich as chairman, Brophy as president, and Novins as the executive secretary. Until that point, some Republicans had complained that the project reeked of partisan politics (the 1948 election was not that far off), but Aldrich's solidly Republican background effectively silenced those criticisms, unfounded at any rate. Echoing the words of the other prominent organizers, Aldrich announced he supported the project because "cynicism, lawlessness, and seeming disregard for American traditions of fair play and individualism" threatened America.⁴⁵⁸

Through the spring of 1947 Aldrich, Novins, and Clark assembled a board of trustees, carefully including a few men, at least, from beyond the advertising and business worlds. CIO leader Philip Murray and AFL head William Green joined as Executive Vice Presidents, powerless positions, but essential for public relations. The

⁴⁵⁷ Bradsher, 231; Little, 21.

⁴⁵⁸ Little, 27; Bradsher, 232-233.

hundreds of contemporary newspaper, magazine, and scholarly journal articles that described the project all characterized it as a government-business-labor collaboration, paid for by individual contributions. But almost all of the funding, and all of the direction, came from corporate America, with Du Pont, U.S. Steel, General Electric, and Standard Oil of New Jersey contributing at least \$20,000 each.⁴⁵⁹ Clark nominated Walter White of the NAACP but Aldrich and Novins declined to invite him as well as A. Philip Randolph and Lester Granger. In an indication of how narrowly the “broad coalition” was actually construed, no African Americans served on the Board. Nevertheless, given the widespread support for the campaign, already evident in spring 1947, all three of these men felt compelled to support the project and each attended the opening ceremony at the White House in May.⁴⁶⁰

Complex Motives, Simple Freedom

In addition to the appeal for national unity, the campaign stressed several varieties of individualism. The most prominent aspect of this individualism, the summons to political participation, appealed to a wide spectrum of Americans with varied reasons for supporting civic engagement. For the AHF and others concerned about “creeping socialism,” a disengaged public might not worry about, or even notice, the arrival of communism:

⁴⁵⁹ Wall, 207.

⁴⁶⁰ NARA, RG 200 AHF, Box 198, AHF Preparation for the Freedom Train, Folder: White House Conference, “Conference at the White House for the Purpose of Organizing the American Heritage Program and Inaugurating the Freedom Train, May 22, 1947”; Little, 29, 36. White raised issues of race at a meeting following the White House announcement. He said he was not as worried about foreign ideologies as he was about American lynchings. But he pledged the “unqualified support of thirteen million American Negroes who desperately want to see democracy made a living reality in our country.”

“Thinking Americans present no problem but non-thinking do – non-thinking Americans who fail to appreciate the blessings of our American Heritage and who refuse to take seriously the duties of American citizenship. These inactive citizens constitute a veritable Sixth Column that threatens the national fabric more critically than all the maneuvers and intrigues of the Fifth Column. It was this Sixth Column of inactive citizens that enabled the Communist Fifth Columnists to turn the democratic republic of Czechoslovakia into a police state.”⁴⁶¹

Plenty of other Americans were similarly worried, often with more immediate considerations in mind. *Newsweek* reported in 1948 that leaders in Cowlitz County, Washington had written Congress to have the Freedom Train make a stop there after a straw poll found that Henry Wallace led the list of potential presidential candidates with 24% of the vote. “As they saw it, approximately one-fourth of Cowlitz County’s population of fishermen, lumbermen, and farmers, needed an education in the fundamentals of American democracy.”⁴⁶² This aspect of the program received even greater attention after the 1948 election, when the AHF leadership decided that broadly encouraging political participation, without sufficient “education,” was not a very wise course for them to follow.⁴⁶³

A perceived need to educate the public motivated the corporate sponsors (and had done so since the first days of the New Deal). They feared that too many Americans failed to understand freedom correctly – that is, understand that the preservation of freedom required the nation’s full unambiguous support of free enterprise. At the start of the Cold War, the Truman administration shared the concern that the public needed a reminder of the necessity of protecting freedom. But for Truman and Clark, this referred not only to American freedom, but also the entire

⁴⁶¹ NARA, RG 64, Box 7, “The Mid-Century Manual of the American Heritage Foundation Proposing Rededication to Our American Heritage”

⁴⁶² *Newsweek* 31, no. 13, March 29, 1948: 18.

⁴⁶³ Richard Fried, 47.

free world. And it was a generally positive political freedom (an assertion of rights) rather than a negative economic freedom (the absence of government regulation).

Thus freedom served two masters, each with a different use for the word. In a March 1947 address to the nation, Truman set forth what became known as the “Truman Doctrine.” In the speech, the President described the nation’s foreign policy as worldwide struggle for freedom. To gain the public’s support, Truman characterized his anticommunist policy as the defense of freedom, proclaimed the United States the leader of the “Free world,” and demanded America’s support for “freedom-loving peoples” all over the globe.⁴⁶⁴

In April 1947, Clark and Aldrich both reached out to Reinhold Niebuhr and asked him to join the board. Niebuhr, who had helped to found Americans for Democratic Action that January, was already serving on the Public Advisory Committee of the Advertising Council and had thus worked with many of the principals involved in the new AHF. Characteristically, Aldrich misled the theologian by writing that the project (including the Advertising Council’s reeducation campaign) was “sponsored by the United States Government.” Clark’s letter to Niebuhr made no mention of sponsorship, focusing instead on the importance of “bring[ing] to the people of the United States a real understanding of the basis of our Americanism...” He strongly encouraged Niebuhr to “identify yourself with an effort that has... enormous potentialities of re-awakening in Americans the deep-seated reverence I know them to have for the exalted history of our country.” Niebuhr hardly shared Clark or Aldrich’s view of American history (entirely un-

⁴⁶⁴ Foner, 252.

“ironic,” as it were), or their understanding of the purpose of the past.⁴⁶⁵ His participation is better explained by the overlap between the AHF’s rhetoric about serious civic engagement and his own interest in encouraging Americans to consider the less pleasant realities of both their own history and the eternal human condition. He also may have been attracted by the campaign’s ecumenical approach to religion, which shared connections with the postwar interfaith movement. Novins, Balaban, and other business leaders involved with the AHF were also working for religious tolerance. The AHF campaign, like the interfaith movement, emphasized the Judeo-Christian tradition.⁴⁶⁶ It also stressed strong religious faith as the best counterbalance to communism. As if to illustrate the connections between a unified (or consensus) religious faith, the American economic system, and anticommunism, in his 1955 work *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* Will Herberg not only pronounced the process of unifying the American faiths complete but also said that “free enterprise” formed the basis of this new “common religion.”⁴⁶⁷

Widespread desire for a vital, anticommunist American civil religion contributed to the popularity of the train. Niebuhr argued that dual dangers – communism and secularism – confronted Americans in the late 1940s. Only through careful study of its own ethical principles, rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition,

⁴⁶⁵ LC, Reinhold Niebuhr Collection, Box 1, Letter from Aldrich to Niebuhr, May 2, 1947; Box 3, Letter from Clark to Niebuhr, April 14, 1947. In *The Irony of American History* Niebuhr responded directly to the type of assurances provided by the AHF: “Yet the price which American culture had paid for this amelioration of social tensions through constantly expanding production has been considerable. It has created moral illusions about the ease with which the adjustment of interests to interests can be made in human society. These have imparted a quality of sentimentality to both our religious and our secular, social and political theories. It has also created a cultural which makes “living standards” the final norm of the good life and which regards the perfection of techniques as the guarantor of every cultural as well as every social-moral value.” Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York: Scribner, 1952), 57.

⁴⁶⁶ Wall, 225.

⁴⁶⁷ Will Herberg, 46-49, 88-93.

could the United States succeed in its Cold War mission without losing its soul. In the hazy atmosphere of atom bombs and cold war, Niebuhr thus sought greater integration of religion into political life, though not necessarily in the celebratory form adopted by the AHF. Robert Bellah retrospectively identified this particular vision of American civil religion, which sought to transform patriotic worship into a spiritual quest, as transcending the nation itself. Instead, he thought, it fostered the worship of universal (Judeo-Christian) core values that, in turn, allowed postwar Americans to see their own way of life as the global ideal.⁴⁶⁸ Similarly, in 1946, Carl Becker described how civic celebrations and patriotic holidays reminded Americans that “their institutions and freedoms are the kind of institutions and freedoms best suited to all mankind because prescribed by the law of nature and the will of God.”⁴⁶⁹ When the Freedom Train arrived in Washington, DC on November 27, 1947, Speaker of the House Joe Martin said, “It is a symbol of our humble faith in God, our faith in ourselves, and our heart-deep desire to help the rest of the world to see, to learn, to share, and to love the marvelous fruits of freedom as have we in the United States.”⁴⁷⁰

In canned form, those fruits were being collected for distribution in Italy and France by a transcontinental Friendship Train that ran contemporaneously with the Freedom Train. Newspaper articles sometimes confused or combined the two trains, partly because of their simultaneity, but the confusion also reveals more significant meaning. In different but related ways, both the Freedom and Friendship trains symbolized, in the most positively benevolent terms, America’s new Cold War roles

⁴⁶⁸ Hughey, 162.

⁴⁶⁹ Becker, 13.

⁴⁷⁰ Sam Stavisky, “Exhibit to Be Open for Second Day at D.C.’s Union Station,” *The Washington Post* (Nov 28, 1947), 1.

as provider and protector. Starting with 12 boxcars in Los Angeles, the Friendship Train soon dwarfed its better-known brother, growing to 200 cars stocked full of flour, dried and canned produce, sugar, evaporated milk, and pasta. Additional sections soon added hundreds more donated carloads. Sadly, a fire in a Paris warehouse destroyed 2,000 tons of the collected foodstuffs in the winter of 1948.⁴⁷¹

At the dawn of the Cold War, many less theologically sophisticated public figures echoed Niebuhr's arguments for the necessity of religious engagement. Whitaker Chambers wrote in his autobiography of the need to face communism with an equally powerful faith – one that drew upon both religious and political belief. “At every point,” he wrote, “religion and politics interlace, and must do so more acutely as the conflict between the two great camps of men – those who reject and those who worship God – becomes irrepressible.” Chambers' words allude to the fact that the new postwar civil religion was more inclusive than the old, but also more tightly controlled and defined – an opening up simultaneous with greater regulation. Eisenhower's famous injunction that “our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply held religious belief – and I don't care what it is,” followed from this same sense of an urgent need for adhering to a faith – other than communism.

Contemporary Americans also heard this theology espoused by evangelist Billy Graham. William Randolph Hearst started to “puff Graham” at about the same time that he joined with the AHF to promote the Freedom Train. The publisher's admiration for Graham's blend of “morality and fervid Americanism” underlay his support of the train as well. Graham also contributed to the cause of (religious) unity,

⁴⁷¹ “City to Welcome Food Train Today,” *The New York Times* (November 18, 1947), 1; “Where Freedom Train Food Was Destroyed,” *The New York Times* (Feb 2, 1948), 4; “Freedom Train Collects Food for Europe in Lincoln's Name,” *The Washington Post*, (Feb 13, 1948), B1.

“by his classic revivalist’s willingness to ignore doctrinal and institutional barriers in gathering his forces.” And his brand of religion shared the AHF’s vision of what “rededication” could accomplish – “the staying of God’s wrath against all humankind,” and Americans in particular. The same theme of civic responsibility through individual morality stressed by the AHF is apparent in Graham’s imploring, “You say, ‘But Billy, I’m only one person.’ Ah, yes, but when you make your decision, it is America through you making its decision.” Individual conversion would redeem the nation.⁴⁷²

The Freedom Train similarly emphasized national redemption through individual conversion and participation. The editors of *Palimpsest*, the journal of the Iowa State Historical Society, noticed a “continuing pattern that shows up among these documents [that stresses] the importance of the individual human being.”⁴⁷³ Like the Christian fixation on individual salvation, this approach may have comforted people who felt overwhelmed by mass society and global war, and whose economic fortunes seemed to depend on forces beyond their control. Insofar as the train encouraged a belief in individual potential (and in many ways it did not, as will be shown), following the necessary conversion act of “rededication,” it closely resembled Graham’s crusade for individual and national salvation.

Many postwar intellectuals and public figures believed that a strong, stable society must hold and agree upon a set of sacred beliefs and symbols. Emile Durkheim formulated this theory of social cohesion in the early decades of the century, which American sociologists had by the 1940s recast in American terms.

⁴⁷² Silk, 55, 67.

⁴⁷³ Peterson, 276

“There can be no society,” Durkhiem wrote, “which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective ideas which make its unity and its personality.” To overcome twentieth century specialization and individualization, Durkheim theorized that a “new religion, expressed as a secular civic morality transcending internal social divisions, would be embodied in the state, instilled through the public schools, sustained by collective rituals, and capable of engendering the moral integration of the whole society.”⁴⁷⁴

The uneasy international situation of the late 1940s led many Americans to a greater sense of urgency regarding such rites of rededication.⁴⁷⁵ J. Paul Johnson, Chair of Religion at Mt. Holyoke, wrote in his popular postwar textbook on American religion that democracy by itself was “insufficient to carry through the crises of the coming decade.” The religious fanaticism of Communists had to be faced down by a similar faith in democracy as the Will of God: “Democracy had to be made no less than ‘an object of religious dedication’ “The state must be brought into the picture; governmental agencies must teach the democratic ideal as religion.” This required regular “ceremonial reinforcement.” John Foster Dulles, one of four members on the Freedom Train’s Documents Committee, suggested that the most pressing need was to “regain confidence in our spiritual heritage.”⁴⁷⁶

The Freedom Train ultimately functioned like the reinforcement that these religious prescriptions called for, and it helped mold American civil religion into a form fitted for the fight against communism. Sociologist W. Lloyd Warner’s work in the 1950s on Memorial Day parades applies almost equally well to Freedom Train

⁴⁷⁴ Hughey, 21, 25.

⁴⁷⁵ Explored by Richard M. Fried in *The Russians Are Coming!*

⁴⁷⁶ Silk, 94.

ceremonies in that both functioned as key civil religious rituals. Both also expressed, as Warner said, the unity of the participants as a group with a non-sectarian God. The train demanded worship, and it became a symbol – not of American freedom, as the organizers claimed, but of a specific type of patriotism that the campaign helped to construct.

Defining Freedom: “Is it for real – or just a show again?”⁴⁷⁷

In May 1947 the name changed finally to “Freedom Train” (it had been “Liberty Train” since January) and Truman hosted the launch party at the White House on May 22. One hundred seventy-five people attended the event, including, in addition to the organizers, such notables as Henry Ford II, Fred C. Heinz, Charles E. Wilson, William Randolph Hearst, Jr., David O. Selznick, Lester Granger and Walter White.⁴⁷⁸

“All Americans,” Novins explained to the assembled crowd, “meet on the common ground of their American Heritage. That is the basis for their survival as a free people, the fundament of their liberties, and the soul of their way of life. Without our heritage of freedom, differences become subversive, personal opinions become futile, and controversy becomes anarchy.” The documents carried on the Freedom Train, he continued, would turn the vague and abstract principles that underlay the nation’s existence into “vital factors for our everyday existence.”

⁴⁷⁷ Langston Hughes, “Freedom Train,” *The New Republic* 117, no.11, September 15, 1947: 27.

⁴⁷⁸ Little, 30.

Even though control of the project had passed from the public to the private sector, the original expectations of these documents remained unchanged. The difference was in the results wished for by the various groups involved. The National Archives and Justice Department staff had proposed and begun assembling an exhibit focused on civil rights. This exhibit prominently featured documentation of economic and social reforms of the 20th century. The documents would serve as examples of effective legislation and point Americans in the direction of continued reform. The corporate sponsors and organizers preferred a different route to the future and thus wanted the train's documents to encourage patriotic worship of a more restrictive "freedom" – namely, free enterprise.

At the White House, Novins laid out the three phases of the American Heritage Foundation program. First, the Freedom Train would carry the documents "sanctified by the blood of martyrs in every generation of our existence." Second, each community visited by the train would hold a Rededication Week. Each day would have its own special designation, such as Veteran's, Labor, Commerce and Industry, Schools, Bench and Bar, and Freedom of Religion. Third, the Advertising Council would simultaneously coordinate a national patriotism campaign to resell America to Americans.⁴⁷⁹

Many of the key documents had been selected but some decisions still had to be made. Two committees shared this burden. First, the Documents Advisory Committee made recommendations. This committee consisted of the Librarian of Congress, Luther Evans; the Archivist of the United States, Solon J. Buck (usually represented by Elizabeth Hamer); Princeton historian Julian P Boyd; renowned

⁴⁷⁹ Little, 34-35. Fried, 34.

collector A.S.W. Rosenbach, and several others. This panel of experts submitted their proposals to the Documents Committee, which made the final decisions. This group consisted of a different sort, and included John Foster Dulles, John W. Davis (Democratic nominee for the Presidency in 1924, anti-New Dealer, and later defendant's counsel in *Brown vs. Board of Education*), William Aldrich, and Ed Weisl. They rejected proposals for documentation of the immigrant experience, forbade anything related to Jews (deemed too controversial), declined Executive Order 8802, which established the Fair Employment Practices Commission, as well as the recent Report of the President's Commission on Civil Rights, and dictated that no documents related to labor unions would be included. Elizabeth Hamer, the archivist who had first started compiling documents during the previous summer, expressed her utter disillusionment with the Foundation by March 1947, calling the Documents Committee "a bunch of reactionaries."⁴⁸⁰

Every historian writing on the subject has described the selected documents of the Freedom Train as representative of consensus history.⁴⁸¹ Without question, the American Heritage Foundation, as well as the Truman administration, presented the history of the United States in a manner that suggested minimal conflict amongst Americans and a broad unity of purpose in foreign affairs. Avoiding divisive issues such as race and economics, the committee limited the amount of internal strife to a

⁴⁸⁰ Little, 56-57.

⁴⁸¹ All of the major works on the Freedom Train refer to the history as "consensus." Stuart Little describes the train as corporate hegemony put into practice, with the imposition of consensus onto the American public. In his rephrasing, Richard Fried says the train held "the conflicting forces and languages within the political culture that were attempting to define citizenship and Americanism." Fried, 33. Wendy Wall's 2008 work describes the train as consensus history, but also as part of the invention of "the American Way," a process that begins in the 1930s and lasts through the 1950s. Wall's more expansive language comes closest to the truth, but even hers is too limiting because it focuses only on the political. The cultural impact, especially in the context of civil religion, has not been sufficiently addressed.

few pages from the history of women's suffrage – a relatively safe and contained topic. The Civil War documents erased slavery with the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment, but the absence of the 14th and 15th Amendments left African American civil rights unaddressed. The highlight of the period, the Gettysburg Address, was itself a consensus building speech, and featured here in just that way.⁴⁸² The many other wartime documents on the train yielded no hint of dissent or doubt.

However, this selection process reveals something beyond consensus. The perceived threat from the USSR motivated the drive for national unity that in turn demanded consensus history. The Truman administration involved itself in the Freedom Train project largely out of this concern. The American Heritage Foundation's participation was, in contrast, driven primarily by business' fears of labor unrest and strength. As we will see, the choice of documents and the emphasis on unity was only the first step in an advertising blitz that ultimately depended on the documents less for what they said than for what they symbolized, as interpreted by the Foundation. Consensus stood well out in front of the ultimate goal: the redefinition of America in terms of a deliberately vague, yet singular, "freedom," which meant more than anything the freedom of business to act without restriction.

For most Freedom Train visitors and Rededication Week participants, freedom remained an elusive term. Mostly it escaped definition. The accompanying

⁴⁸² Even Lincoln's inclusion proved to be acrimonious. Writing in *Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, James Douglass Anderson argued that putting Lincoln on the same train as Washington was absurd. In his view – an unreconstructed Southern one – Lincoln was a tyrant who went well beyond King George III in destroying civil liberties. James Douglass Anderson, "Washington and Lincoln: Two Ill Mated Spirits of the 'Freedom' Train," *Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 30, no.1 (July 1948): 5-19.

parade in Sioux City, Iowa “proved,” according to the city’s *Journal* newspaper, that America “has freedom, appreciates that freedom and is ready, if necessary, to defend that freedom.” It further demonstrated that “what we crave in this country is a FREE society.”⁴⁸³ The failure to consider what freedom meant typified press coverage of the campaign.

Instead, newspapers followed the AHF in celebrating a heroic conception of the “heritage of freedom.” The *Des Moines Register* commented, “Documents are symbols... And when you board the Freedom Train you’ll believe again in all the great men who set us free. You’ll believe in the reality of your American freedom. You’ll realize all over again the need to live and work and think, courageously and valiantly, to perpetuate the American legend for which we’ve struggled through so many years, through so many famous men.”

While “freedom” enjoyed widespread support, not everyone went along with the campaign’s usage or heeded the call for overt displays of patriotism. Communists pointed out that the Truman administration’s chant of freedom coincided with its imposition of the Loyalty Oath for federal employees, a point made also by Henry Wallace, who attacked the train as a symbol of a new bi-partisan Cold War consensus. Wallace also questioned the proclaimed new age of “unity” by emphasizing the discrimination faced by African Americans, Jews (unfairly persecuted by “the Loyalty Order”) and workers under the “undemocratic” Taft-Hartley Act.⁴⁸⁴ The Party viewed the train as a “huge propaganda cover-up for the most widespread violation of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution in our history. It

⁴⁸³ Peterson, 275. Quoting the Sioux City Journal.

⁴⁸⁴ James A. Hagerty, “Wallace Warns of Wall St. ‘Rule’,” *The New York Times* (Sep 12, 1947), 1.

is ‘democratic’ camouflage behind which they will also intensify drives throughout the world.”⁴⁸⁵ *Pravda* called it “hypocrisy on wheels”: “Hired radio liars, provincial Senators, and ‘selfless’ business men, atomic diplomats and pro-Fascist philosophers advertise freedom so hard they foam at the mouth.”⁴⁸⁶

The critique strikes at the heart of the whole campaign: the co-optation of the word “freedom” by the organizers. While the Party correctly identified the word’s centrality and rightly questioned how varied interests were throwing it around, the critique overlooked the divisions within the campaign regarding freedom’s meaning. At the christening of the train at its first stop in Philadelphia, Tom Clark explained how the United States must share its freedom with the world, else “there will soon be no freedom for anyone.” “Smashing his fist on the speaker’s table,” Clark demanded that, “All of us must be free or none of us are free.”⁴⁸⁷ The Attorney General’s public statements about the train always emphasized this point – freedom was an all or nothing proposition, at home and abroad. When not talking about exporting democracy, Clark spoke against America’s “worst enemy”: prejudice. “When you find a man who is prejudiced against some certain group of Americans because of color, race, or religion,” he said at the Philadelphia launch, “you can set it down that he is an ignorant man.” In what he saw as the train’s implicit refutation of prejudice, Clark believed the train would help to “put this badly torn up world back on the right track.” Truman likewise described the train as “a heritage which we Americans must share with the world, for in this noble heritage of freedom for the individual citizen,

⁴⁸⁵ Communists Hit Freedom Train Tour, *The Washington Post* ([Sep 13, 1947](#)), A1.

⁴⁸⁶ “Pravda Assails Freedom Train,” *The New York Times* (Dec 5, 1947).

⁴⁸⁷ “Freedom Train is Christened at Philadelphia, Reds Assailed,” *The Washington Post* (Sep 18, 1947), 13.

without distinction because of race, creed or color, lies the world's great hope of lasting peace."⁴⁸⁸

The AHF's definition of freedom varied little from that of business and advertising organizations of the previous decades. Freedom was wholly negative – the removal of all constraints on business enterprise. And, as Du Pont President Crawford Greenewalt said, freedom was indivisible; tampering with free enterprise was the same as restricting free speech or religious freedom.⁴⁸⁹ The only addition was the adoption of an internationalist meaning that included the promotion of freedom (still free enterprise) abroad. The business community's trend toward internationalism started during World War II; it persisted into the peace as the desire to "continue the prosperity of war corporatism undergirded their support for postwar economically based internationalist policies."⁴⁹⁰ In this significant area of overlap the Truman administration's tough anticommunist foreign policy melded with the interests of big business.

Four months before his death on April 10, 1945, historian Carl Becker delivered a series of lectures at the University of Michigan on the subject of "Freedom and Responsibility in the American Way of Life." Contrasting Becker's lectures with the Freedom Train spotlights certain aspects of the AHF program and reveals several limitations. Like the AHF, Becker worried about the lack of understanding on the part of the American people of both their freedoms and their responsibilities as citizens. And like the Freedom Train, he illustrated his points

⁴⁸⁸ H. Walton Cloke, "Truman Asks U.S. to 'Share Liberty'," *New York Times* (Sep 17, 1947), 23.

⁴⁸⁹ HL, Accession 1410, Du Pont Public Affairs, Box 31, Folder: 150th Anniversary, 150TH Anniversary Ceremonies program.

⁴⁹⁰ Daniel L. Lykins, *From Total War to Total Diplomacy: The Advertising Council and the Construction of the Cold War Consensus* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 30.

through the key documents of American history. The state and federal constitutions of the United States, he began, “disclose the annoying fact that for every right or freedom they confer they impose, implicitly if not explicitly, a corresponding obligation or responsibility.” For most of America history, freedom without much responsibility had proved sufficient for exploiting natural resources, conquering a continent, and fostering businesses prosperous enough to share some of their wealth with nearly everyone. And Americans could generally “regard international affairs as a formality to be attended to by the Secretary of State; and in normal times we could afford to take domestic politics casually, even cynically, as a diverting game...” After World War II, however, the situation had changed, and Becker called upon his fellow citizens to focus “far more serious and intelligent attention to public affairs.”⁴⁹¹

Each lecture examined a freedom that Becker said was constitutionally guaranteed in order to determine what it really meant, what aspects of that meaning were truly essential to contemporary American life, and what responsibilities were implicit in each essential freedom. What makes Becker’s lectures even more interesting, in this context, is his concern about the growing influence of corporations and the advertising industry on an uninformed public. Thus, while his message appears similar to the AHF’s, Becker’s concern is that Americans know their rights and obligations in order to protect themselves against organizations like the AHF. “[T]he thinking of the average citizen and his opinion about public affairs is in very great measure shaped by a wealth of unrelated information and by the most diverse ideas that the selective process of private economic enterprise presents to him for consideration – information the truth of which he cannot verify; ideas formulated by

⁴⁹¹ Becker, 2, 19, 21.

persons unknown to him, and too often inspired by economic, political, religious, or other interests that are never avowed.”

Becker’s personal campaign also differed from the AHF’s in terms of which freedoms comprised the American heritage. Free enterprise did not necessarily make the list: “In this critical time we shall not keep the house united and preserve our liberties by refusing to recognize that economics and politics are not separable from ethics and morality, or by Seventh-of-March speeches advising the people not to discuss the institution of private enterprise, which is in fact the central issue.” Coerced unity, without real debate, would do more harm than good. Additionally, he criticized vague appeals to “revere the founding fathers” and their eighteenth century solutions. Better to follow their example and “re-examin[e] the fundamental human rights and the economic and political institutions best suited to secure them.” Perhaps, he provocatively suggested, the form of government they laid out almost 200 years before no longer suited the “complex conditions” and “complicated problems” of 1945. A critical, collective analysis of the founding documents offered the only chance of finding out.⁴⁹²

Like Becker, a number of postwar intellectuals argued that the time for a serious reexamination of the constitution was at hand. Reviewing Frank Monaghan’s *Heritage of Freedom* catalogue of the Freedom Train exhibit in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Eric Goldman provides another example of the historical profession’s attitude toward the project. Goldman points out that without exception, “the documents do not concern social reforms of the last half century.” While the wish to avoid controversy partly explains this, he suggests that the “key fact” is that

⁴⁹² Ibid, 39, 78.

the “overwhelming emphasis of the documents defines American liberty as the establishment and defense of political independence and of political and religious liberties” – what Becker referred to in his lectures as negative liberty. In contrast, Goldman thinks that many Americans understand American freedom as “including opportunities for a generally better life.” And from a policy standpoint, is it wise, he asks, “to offer a quasi-official conception of American liberty that has precisely the limitations which the Soviet Union gleefully assigns it?”⁴⁹³

As the train moved through every state in the union, the press, engaged citizens, and political and civic leaders continued to define freedom in ways that sometimes went well beyond the Foundation’s construction. For example, building on the Truman administration’s understanding of the campaign, a new (and short-lived) journal called *Freedom & Union: Journal of the World Republic* integrated the Freedom Train into its movement for world government. Looking at the very same historical documents, the editors saw George Washington arguing for a global “Union of the Free” – specifically, the immediate federal union of “the Atlantic democracies,” and the gradual creation of a universal republic.⁴⁹⁴ Similarly, a Baltimore attorney named S. Raymond Dunn suggested that a peace plane modeled on the Freedom Train should circle the globe promoting a new United Nations citizenship.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹³ *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 35, no. 1, June 1948: 107-108.

⁴⁹⁴ *Freedom & Union* 1, no.1, October 1946: 1-2; *Freedom & Union* 2, no.4, April 1947: 1; *Freedom & Union* 2, no. 11, December 1947: 19. Heinz ran a full page ad on the inside cover of the first issue that explained why Americans were the “best-fed people in the world.” The answer was that “Americans are free.”

⁴⁹⁵ “Baltimorean Urges a U.N. ‘Citizenship’,” *The Washington Post*, December 14, 1947.

Some of the official speakers at AHF events challenged the campaign's emphasis on free enterprise as the central tenet of American freedom. A Cornell College (Iowa) professor, an Austrian refugee, told an Iowa crowd that, "Freedom is liberty plus groceries... when the stomach gets hungry our senses of liberty and freedom sometimes gets lost."⁴⁹⁶ Labor leaders associated with the campaign also voiced dissent. At a labor-management luncheon in New York (designed to show consensus), A.F. Whitney, president of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, spoke out against "industrialists who reaped millions of dollars during the two world wars." His speech celebrating labor's contributions to society contrasted sharply with Balaban's praise for business.⁴⁹⁷

Protestors also challenged the narrow definition of freedom through more overt actions. Reactions to these protests reveal how the campaign tried to control freedom's meanings. In Philadelphia and New York, demonstrators picketed on behalf of conscientious objectors to World War II, who remained imprisoned for exercising their freedom too much. New York police "ripped placards from stanchions, broke the wooden standards into small bits and dragged four of the men across Forty-second Street... when they fell or lay on the sidewalk." Even though police had earlier given protestors permission to demonstrate, they ordered the group of forty to reduce itself to nineteen, then declared that the remainder must move across the street, and finally silenced them by force. A photographer who captured the "herding of one group into a shoe store doorway" was himself arrested, further

⁴⁹⁶ Peterson, 277.

⁴⁹⁷ Wall, 226-227.

mocking the Freedom Train's contents.⁴⁹⁸ At other stops, "soap boxers" waited until inside the train to begin speaking, in which cases the marines "escorted the protesting offender, as gently as possible, to the exit."⁴⁹⁹

Some people protested less directly. A Marine Corps-Navy Chaplain wrote *The Washington Post* in support of a wounded veteran, missing a hand, who refused to sign the loyalty oath Truman imposed on federal employees. Truly "free" men, he wrote, "do not have to sign loyalty pledges, or visit Freedom Trains, or shout 'Red, Red' in order to obtain or preserve freedom."⁵⁰⁰ Not all Americans appreciated the call to wear one's patriotism on one's sleeve.

More positively and more successfully, protests directed at southern segregation on the Freedom Train elicited a relatively firm stance against "the essential un-Americanism of such attitudes" from the organizers and from most of the country.⁵⁰¹ If the train isolated communists who objected to its interpretation of the past, it also excluded southern segregationists from its definition of Americanism – a "moral victory with implications far beyond the immediate event," noted *The Washington Post*.⁵⁰² Indeed in the two recalcitrant southern locales passed over by the train, Birmingham and Memphis, the public battle over segregation on the Freedom Train prefigured the civil rights movement. This was especially true in Birmingham, where Commissioner of Public Safety Eugene "Bull" Connor revealed

⁴⁹⁸ "Conscientious Objection Demonstrators Clash with Police Near Freedom Train," *The New York Times*, September 26, 1947.

⁴⁹⁹ David A. Stein, "The Freedom Train Nears Last Siding," *The Washington Post*, December 19, 1948.

⁵⁰⁰ Joseph A. Rabun, "Loyalty and Conformity," *The Washington Post*, December 5, 1947.

⁵⁰¹ "Aboard the Freedom Train," *New York Times*, December 26, 1947.

⁵⁰² "Freedom Train," *The Washington Post*, January 16, 1949.

his intransigence in what seems in retrospect like a trial run for his 1963 showdown with Martin Luther King.

The Foundation prohibited strict segregation in the train cars, but compromised to accommodate cities that wanted to maintain separate lines outside of the train. Many southern cities followed some sort of halfway segregation that alternated entry for small groups of whites and blacks (who then mingled on the train). And many of the Rededication Week events, put on as they were by local community organizations, remained segregated. The issue dogged the train all over the country. In Oklahoma City one hundred members of an African American chorus quit a historical pageant after being told they would be kept out of a “‘melting pot’ scene” and a “statues of freedom scene,” and would have to sit separately in the balcony.

As with other troublesome groups along the route, these Oklahoma choristers earned accusations of communism.⁵⁰³ In an April 1948 *Washington Post* column, Malvina Lindsay connected a “below-the-belt” campaign against the Women’s Action Committee for Lasting Peace to both the Freedom Train and a broader effort to intimidate women out of politics by labeling them communists. As evidence that the attacks worked, Lindsay noted that at least one town had tried to bar the local branch of the Committee from participating in Freedom Train ceremonies on the grounds that they were communists.⁵⁰⁴

Women participated in the Freedom Train ceremonies at every stop of the tour. But their voices were heard most clearly on Rededication Week “Women’s

⁵⁰³ “Negroes Boycott ‘Freedom Train’ Welcome in Okla.,” *The Washington Post*, Jan 26, 1948.

⁵⁰⁴ Malvina Lindsay, “Cowardly Campaigning: Intimidating Women,” *The Washington Post*, April 15, 1948.

Days.”⁵⁰⁵ On top of the exclusion of women from the American Heritage Foundation’s committees and board, as well as the charges of communism leveled against politically active women, the confinement of “women’s issues” to a single, separate day reflected the “disappearing” of women from the political sphere in the age of McCarthyism.⁵⁰⁶

Onboard

The tour began in Philadelphia on September 17, 1947, the 160th anniversary of the signing of the Constitution. “Constructed as a National Shrine,” it cost \$175,000 to outfit the train with steel and thick plastic display cases, close off windows with steel walls, install fluorescent lighting, and paint the interior a “subdued greenish-blue” and the exterior a solid white with red, white and blue stripes running the length of the train. Inside, display cases lined both sides of each car in a slightly zig-zagged configuration. Murals constructed of clear plastic and white outlines depicted historical themes or famous persons next to some of the exhibited documents. These consisted of a few great men and several military victories. Exemplifying this philosophy of exhibit, the mural next to the Emancipation Proclamation contained no African Americans. Instead, it depicted

⁵⁰⁵ “Rededication Program by Women Today,” *The Washington Post*, November 24, 1947.

⁵⁰⁶ Landon R.Y. Storrs, “Red Scare Politics and the Suppression of Popular Front Feminism: The Loyalty Investigation of Mary Dublin Keyserling,” *Journal of American History* 90, no. 2, September 2003: 494-495, 519-521.

several stages of Abraham Lincoln's life in a fashion not unlike church murals or windows that depict scenes from the life of saints or Christ.⁵⁰⁷

The first car entered contained documents from the colonial era through the 19th century. Memorabilia and exhibits of documents connected with famous Americans lined the second. The third car held 20th century material, especially World War II memorabilia. Of these "most cherished documents of our American past," eleven hailed from the Colonial era or earlier. This group included a copy of the Magna Charta, a letter written by Columbus that described the West Indies, the Mayflower Compact, two documents from the free speech trial of John Peter Zenger, Roger Williams on religious freedom, John Milton on the freedom of the press, the "manifesto" of Nathaniel Bacon, and the first book printed in the colonies, by Stephen Daye, in 1644. Fifty-four documents represented the revolutionary generation, including what most people thought of as the highlight of the train, Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence. The 19th century exhibits were few in comparison. Just six documents covered the antebellum period, eight had some connection to the Civil War, and only two came from the Gilded Age, both concerning women's suffrage. Not surprisingly, late-19th century conflicts between business and labor earned no representation on the train, nor did anything related to the rise of corporations and the great captains of industry. The Civil War documents included an offer of elephants by the King of Siam to President Lincoln (surprisingly, no one seems to have asked organizers why this should be considered as one of the

⁵⁰⁷ NARA Still Photographs Division, RG 200 AHF, Box 1, Photograph of the Emancipation Proclamation display; Little, 67; American Heritage Foundation Communications Committee, "Information for Press and Radio on The American Heritage Program and The Freedom Train," New York: American Heritage Foundation, 1947).

most significant documents of American history), Robert E. Lee's acceptance of the Presidency of Washington College, a congressional act to aid education, and five documents more directly connected with the war. World War II dominated the 20th century car with almost thirty documents. This emphasis was logical given the project's goal of rekindling the wartime spirit of unity. The remaining eight included the constitutional amendment guaranteeing women's suffrage, six documents that demonstrated the benevolence of American empire, and Wilson's draft for a League of Nations (the only reference to World War I).⁵⁰⁸

A separate display case contained the "Bonds of Freedom." The AHF displayed here a selection of U.S Treasury bonds from 1779 to 1947. When America needed money, the exhibit suggested, it raised funds through bonds – not higher taxes. Moreover, the exhibit framed the bonds in the context of individual stock ownership, something that the Ad Council and the AHF's corporate sponsors pushed hard for in the years after World War II as a way of merging the interests of average Americans with big business. Through the purchase of Treasury bonds, Americans bought "shares in America" and made a tangible and personal investment in the nation.⁵⁰⁹

Surprisingly little explanation accompanied the documents. Labels offered basic facts – date, author, and perhaps another sentence or two of identification. Washington's copy of the Constitution "shows corrections in his large, firm handwriting," but what significance those corrections had was left unsaid. The label

⁵⁰⁸ Frank Monaghan catalogued the entire collection in *Heritage of Freedom: The History and Significance of the Basic Documents of American Liberty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).

⁵⁰⁹ Wall, 214.

for Edmund Randolph's speech to the Constitutional Convention on May 29, 1787 read: "This, the so-called 'Virginia Plan,' because the framework from which the Constitution was drafted."⁵¹⁰ The lack of explanation here suggests again that the specifics of the documents mattered very little to the organizers. The big train symbolically transported freedom – that was the important thing to know.

Once the train arrived in each of 322 American communities, the overwhelming majority of visitors – over 90% in some places – never made it onboard. Of the fifty million people (1 in 3 Americans) who participated in at least some part of the campaign, only 3.5 million actually beheld the "immortal parchments."⁵¹¹ Much of the campaign's attention focused on schools and encouraged children to attend the ceremonial events surrounding the train's arrival. Yet at many stops only two lucky children per school gained entry (unless they visited in an unofficial capacity, waiting in line with everyone else). Adults often waited for a full day and in the end could be found still standing on the platform.

Other happenings kept those in line occupied. Small-time entrepreneurs hawked souvenirs at every stop, persisting despite attempts by the AHF to regulate this market. Performance artists and singers entertained crowds in exchange for tips, and children played tag and other games.⁵¹² In the southern cities that accepted the non-segregation policy, visitors to the train must have spent a considerable portion of their long wait contemplating the mixed crowd. In those that insisted on partial

⁵¹⁰ NARA, Still Photographs, RG 200 Records of the American Heritage Foundation, Box 1, Folder C-13 and D-30.

⁵¹¹ Peterson, 265; Fried, 40. In Los Angeles, 400,000 people turned out and 30,000 saw the documents. In Charlotte, 8,416 out of 100,000. Most cities had similar ratios.

⁵¹² NARA, AHF, Gilbert Bailey, "Why They Throng to the Freedom Train" *New York Times Magazine*, January 25, 1948.

segregation, photographs show people standing in both lines looking rather intently at their opposite number.⁵¹³ Officially, queued visitors heard speeches from local dignitaries and received copies of “Good Citizen” and the *Reader’s Digest* “Bill of Rights.”⁵¹⁴

For those who made it inside the “rolling treasure house,” Marines on duty ushered them through as quickly as possible. Early on, organizers changed the background music that played through speakers in each car to faster paced songs that would keep people moving. Those who gained admittance “got 20 to 30 minutes of the greatest show on earth – a heart-warming, soul-stirring exhibit of the documents that made the United States free – and great.”⁵¹⁵ In fact, over the whole tour, time spent in the train averaged just 15 to 20 minutes, leaving as little as three seconds per document.⁵¹⁶

The ostensible purpose for removing these priceless papers from their secure locations and taking them on the road was that people needed to read and experience these texts for themselves. But in practice the train’s administrators showed very little concern for this. In New York, visitors engaged with each document for a longer period of time than anywhere else on the tour. While there, Walter O’Brien, the train’s traveling director, commented, “People seem to be spending more time reading the documents. It’s a good thing in a way, but it keeps other people from seeing them.” To increase flow, New York City police joined with the Marines to

⁵¹³ NARA, Still Photographs Division, RG 200, American Heritage Foundation, Box 1, Freedom Train.

⁵¹⁴ NARA, RG 64, Box 6, Freedom Train Scrapbook and Related Materials, “Music, Documents, Postcards, Editorials” Folder, “Highlights of the First Year of the American Heritage Foundation”- Interim Report of Thomas D’Arch Brophy, President, to the Board of Trustees, American Heritage Foundation, November 4, 1948.

⁵¹⁵ Sam Stavisky, “Exhibit to Be Open for Second Day at D.C.’s Union Station,” *The Washington Post*, November 28, 1947.

⁵¹⁶ Little, 69.

usher people through more quickly, and the background music was frequently interrupted by pleas to hurry along.⁵¹⁷

Reading each document on the train was impossible; in fact, reading even one document proved to be a challenge in all but the smallest towns on the tour. Instead, “It is enough, in the short time that can logically be apportioned, to gaze with silent admiration at the matchless scene: to experience a mood of reverence; to spend an unforgettable moment among these documents of our liberties.”⁵¹⁸

Reverent observation did not necessitate careful study in the way that, for example, Becker’s invitation for critical analysis would have done. The fact that most participants in the campaign never set foot in the train, and the fact that those who did see the documents were only permitted (by their military custodians) to quietly and quickly admire them as they passed by, indicate how organizers thought the texts should be used – not as subjects for historical study, but as something that they could point to while making their arguments to the crowds outside. *National Geographic* inadvertently touched on this when it noted, “Seeing history instead of reading it was a treat for schoolchildren.”⁵¹⁹ The difference between seeing and reading is crucial since the former implies receptivity and the latter demands interactivity. Other contemporary reviews overlooked this problem, especially those that, like the *Saturday Review*, praised the train for emphasizing documents (“capable

⁵¹⁷ “Slow Pace Jams Freedom Train,” *New York Times*, September 27, 1947, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2005) 17. NARA, RG 64, Box 5, Folder 7, Magazine Articles, *The Collector: A Magazine for Autograph and Historical Collectors* LX, no.11, November 1947.

⁵¹⁸ Peterson, 266.

⁵¹⁹ *National Geographic*, 542.

of being read afresh and with new inspiration”) and the visitor’s “power of reason,” over relics like the “shinbone of a saint, the ashes of great men or of martyrs.”⁵²⁰

Despite the stated intentions to ground the “abstract principles” of American freedom in these texts, the way that they were hurried from town to town, allowing just a few people here and there a quick glance at pieces of papers said to be all-important, achieved nothing close to this. Instead, not only did the principles remain abstract, but the documents, brought tantalizingly close but kept just out of reach, gained additional mystic qualities.

The language used by supporters indicated to the public the proper spirit with which to approach the train’s contents. These statements refer to the train as a site for civil religious observation rather than history. Descriptions referred to it as a “traveling shrine” and “a shrine consecrated to human freedom and American liberty.”⁵²¹ The official exhibition catalogue, edited by Frank Monaghan, advertised itself as “the Bible of our political freedom... and the story of what it means today.” In 1949, Rabbi Ira Eisenstein told the Rabbinical Association of America that civil holidays and “documents such as those included in the Freedom Train... should be made the subject of pious study and meditation.”⁵²²

“Inside, one has the feeling he is in church,” wrote the *New York Times*. “The only light is soft, fluorescent glow reflected from the lighted documents. Parents shush their children and little school boys take off their caps without being told. People speak in low guarded tones used by tourists in ancient cathedrals. The

⁵²⁰ “America’s Ambulatory Museum,” *Saturday Review* 31, no. 10: 23.

⁵²¹ Peterson, 265; NARA, News Features, p. 10, Order NF962.

⁵²² Irving Spiegel, “Common Religion Urged for the U.S.,” *New York Times*, June 22, 1949, Proquest Newspapers The New York Times, pg. 25

amplifying system sends out a flow of patriotic and folk tunes.”⁵²³ Director O’ Brien said, “It’s almost a cathedral effect. Everyone seems to become reverent and sort of quiet” (but “some of the girls find it hard to keep their eyes on the documents and off the Marines in their brilliant blue uniforms”). Edward R. Murrow noticed schoolchildren who entered as if headed into the circus, but exited “as though they had been to church.”⁵²⁴

This sacralization, however, contrasts with frequent references to relevance and familiarity. The *Saturday Review* clarified its position on the documents by adding, “as long as they are still relevant to our own time and situation.” Only *because* Americans again faced a time that “tries men’s souls,” did Tom Paine’s “Crisis” mean something.⁵²⁵ Visitors approached the documents as sacred yet familiar texts that also pertained to their own lives, but not as primary sources for historical study. In Nashville, “it was not a consuming interest in history that brought the family to town. Their reverence for the Constitution was not that of historians.” Rather, while visitors typically “[stood] in awe of freedom’s history,” they also enjoyed connecting their rights as they knew them to the documents on display.⁵²⁶

Visitors consistently sought out the most familiar and most important documents. When Ernest Edwards hiked 40 miles to see the train at Pueblo, Colorado, he went to see “those documents that I read about in my civics class.” In particular, like so many others, Edward wanted to see the Declaration of

⁵²³ Bailey, “Why They Throng to the Freedom Train.”

⁵²⁴ Fried, 41.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

⁵²⁶ Bailey, “Why They Throng to the Freedom Train.”

Independence, “because I’ve read so much about it.”⁵²⁷ One reporter suggested that the “symbolism” of the key documents drew visitors to the train. Without it, “these documents would be of interest only to the historian...”⁵²⁸ In other words, the public came to see the most familiar symbols rather than to read unfamiliar texts.

The reverence accorded the documents followed partly from their presentation, which suggested that these papers granted certain freedoms and guarantees at suitable moments in history. Or else some famous person granted it at that time. Either way, the implication was that something very significant happened because someone important wrote and signed this piece of paper. In this mode of explanation, there are no social movements, no people, and no history.

In the end, many other documents could have served the same purpose as those selected for the train. Except for those that bore directly on religious and political freedom, very little connected the historical evidence with the free enterprise arguments made by the AHF. Nor did the organizers expect visitors to look that closely at the documents on display. The fact that any and all documents that complicated or conflicted or in some way with the national celebration of individual freedom were hidden out of the public’s view, mattered much more.

As they disembarked from the third and final car, every visitor received a copy of the “Bill of Rights,” a three-page summary printed by *Reader’s Digest*. They also had the opportunity to sign the Freedom Scroll. Vague phrases supporting freedom comprised most of the brief text, though a line that may have bristled isolationists clearly referenced America’s global responsibilities: “This heritage of

⁵²⁷ “Hikes to See the Freedom Train,” *The Washington Post*, July 11, 1948.

⁵²⁸ “Freedom Train,” *The Washington Post*, November 30, 1947.

freedom I pledge to uphold, For myself and all mankind.” As David Hackett Fischer argues, this pledge differed from a pledge of allegiance or a loyalty oath. It emphasized individual autonomy and the right (and duty) to stand for what one believes is right. Three million people signed the scroll, so 500,000 (20%) either declined or failed to sign for some other reason.⁵²⁹

“The time for rededication has arrived!”⁵³⁰

Before the train arrived, towns and cities followed instructions prepared by the American Heritage Foundation for producing their own “Rededication Week.” Advance men made it clear that these ceremonies were mandatory for communities wishing to remain on the train’s route.⁵³¹ Newspapers printed articles and editorials, and radio stations broadcast announcements and stories of “American heritage” to such a degree that the local populations “were fairly bombarded with slogans, pictures, and cartoons.”⁵³² As Langston Hughes wrote (ironically) in his poem “Freedom Train”:

“I read in the papers about the Freedom Train.
I heard on the radio about the Freedom Train.
I seen folks talkin’ about the Freedom Train.
Lord, I been a-waitin’ for the Freedom Train!”⁵³³

Local observances of Rededication Week varied, but every community put on a spectacular show, as mandated by the AHF. Sioux City, Iowa began its week with Sunday church services that extolled American freedom. A concert on Monday night

⁵²⁹ David Hackett Fischer, 537.

⁵³⁰ *Good Citizen*, 1.

⁵³¹ Wall, 222.

⁵³² Peterson, 269.

⁵³³ Langston Hughes, “Freedom Train,” *The New Republic* 117, no. 11, September 15, 1947, 27.

by the Sons of Legion musical corps (literally the sons of veterans) “left few members of the audience dry-eyed.” A parade on Tuesday evening featured floats, “giant searchlights,” and C-47 transport planes flying back and forth overhead. The next day Sioux City schools showed off students’ floats – something other Iowa cities could not do since they closed their schools during their Freedom Train visitations. On Thursday the train “glided into Sioux City ‘like a graceful swan’.” Folks had started lining up at 3:30 a.m. to catch a “fleeting glimpse of the most inspiring and priceless documents ever brought to the Hawkeye State.” Each of the faithful “underwent the soul-satisfying experience of communing with the great men and women who had helped discover, develop and shape the great nation Americans live in today.” In Davenport, the city’s newspaper editor wrote about the glorious opportunity to “visit the Freedom Train, stand humbly in the presence of documents charged with personalities of great and heroic men, and thank God for America!”

The campaign achieved a special moment of perfection in Burlington, Iowa. When the train stopped there, “four boy scouts – a Catholic, a Protestant, a Negro, and a Jew – posted the colors at the welcoming ceremony.” Later that day, the 2,000,000th visitor climbed aboard. All across the country communities planned and executed similar celebrations. A Burlington, Vermont Rededication Week saw George Washington, Paul Revere, Betsy Ross and other impersonations of historical celebrities “walk the streets” as part of the festivities. Two hundred fifty thousand people watched a two-hour parade in Dover, Delaware.⁵³⁴

Occasional protests questioned some parts of the AHF campaign, but the most caustic description of the “rededication” pageantry came from an almost absurdly

⁵³⁴ National Geographic, 539.

prescient short story by James Agee first published in *Politics* in April 1946, the same month of Coblenz's inspired vision. "Dedication Day" describes a national (via radio and television) ceremony in which Americans participate without understanding just what they are celebrating; at the new structure built halfway between the Lincoln Memorial and "Washington obelisk," "it was not clear either to the speakers or to the listeners precisely what or to what purpose or idea the Arch had been raised." Etched in bold above the newly lit "Eternal Fuse," the monument's inscription, kept veiled and secret until the ceremony, reads, "THIS IS IT." But the public has mobilized for the event out of an "irresistible obligation" to recognize "a great event." Asked to "sign their names to the moment in a few authorized words," Americans respond as expected, just as most would recite the Freedom Pledge and sign the Freedom Scroll one year later.

Prefiguring the scrupulous planning of the AHF, Agee imagines the inclusion of "four ravenous Cardinals," "a group of eminent Protestant clergymen," and the "most prominent and progressive of American Reformist Rabbis" among the assembled dignitaries. Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters, who would actually record and make a hit of Irving Berlin's "Freedom Train" in 1947, have, in Agee's earlier fiction, recorded a catchy hummed version of "Taps" that has already sold more than a million copies.⁵³⁵

The lone subversives in the story are a guilt-ridden nuclear physicist and a young soldier who knelt and wept. This action, in a domino effect, led tourists in line behind him to kneel and disrupt the flow of pedestrian traffic. "Such are the

⁵³⁵ In a live television broadcast, Arturo Toscanini leads the NBC Symphony Orchestra and the Westminster Chorus in a performance of the "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, newly translated by Louis Aragon and Harry Brown, "under the supervision of Robert Sherwood."

unfortunate effects of a single man's unbridled individualism." The physicist commits suicide while throwing the switch that lights the Eternal Fuse, hoping in this final act to give the new monument its meaning. Agee's physicist behaved much like the Communist Party when it urged "progressives" to conduct tours of the train to explain the "true meaning of the Bill of Rights, the Constitution, the Emancipation Proclamation, etc." But, like the Freedom Train and the campaign to resell "America," "optimism" substituted for attempts at "understanding" ("far less communication of understanding"). The point was the ritual itself.

Before the second publication of "Dedication Day" a month before the Freedom Train finally came to rest, another short story appeared that, although less obviously, also commented on celebrations of American heritage. In June 1948, Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" appeared in *The New Yorker*. Generally understood as an attack on small-town America, its emergence at the midpoint of the Freedom Train's journey suggests its relevance to what might be considered the golden age of national propaganda campaigns, especially those in the form of civic celebrations. In its horrifying depiction of one town's ritualized, annual rededication ceremony, "The Lottery" questions both the ethics of patriotic sacrifice and the worshipful respect paid to "tradition" (one that clearly should be abandoned). At the beginning of the AHF's campaign, New York pacifists asked, "Is our American Heritage a past to worship?"⁵³⁶ Jackson's story offered an answer similar to Becker's: that heritage needed to be looked at more critically. But as with the protestors, the public generally responded to Jackson with either indifference or hostility.

⁵³⁶ Wall, 217.

The AHF's communications committee included the heads of the radio (and television) networks as well as Eric Johnston (the president of the Motion Pictures Association of America who instituted the first Hollywood blacklist during the first months of the Freedom Train's tour) and the presidents of the three major newspaper-publishing associations. These men insured that the train received far more attention than the average history-based project. From the start, the business and advertising men at the head of the campaign used their vast resources to reach millions of Americans. Hosting his first fundraising luncheon for the project, Brophy proclaimed, "Here is a great opportunity to tell the truth to the people of this country by the means we know best how to use – Motion Pictures, Radio, Newspapers, Magazines, all methods of mass persuasion developed to a high state of perfection in America by American Business."

The onslaught began with news features written by the AHF and distributed nationwide. Some of these features explained the AHF itself, through quotes from its leadership. These often misled the reader as much as they informed. For example, one report of an interview with Brophy quoted him saying, "The American Heritage Foundation's program has nothing to do with our economic system." Other articles described the train or listed some of the documents, a couple related the history of American railroads, and several attempted to connect popular sports to the train's mission. An article about basketball claimed, "it is hard to think of basketball being invented or encouraged in a totalitarian country... Basketball is as American as the Declaration of Independence."

The sports pages were not the only lowbrow space invaded by this disguised advertising. Several comic strips, including *Li'l Abner* and *Ripley's Believe It or Not*, featured promotional stories. Joe Palooka even called off a prizefight when he learned it would conflict with the arrival of the Freedom Train.⁵³⁷ A special edition *Captain America* also promoted the campaign.⁵³⁸

The special features that targeted women outlined a different form of participation in the campaign than that identified in the articles written for men. These pieces encouraged participation, asking female readers if they measured up to Abigail Adams or Lucretia Mott, and demanding that contemporary American women accept their responsibilities to preserve freedom. At the same time, however, they presented a narrower definition of political participation

In condescending tones, these AHF articles explained to women readers what freedom meant for them. American heritage means more than “a precious stone” or a family heirloom; it also refers to “the independence which was won for you.” For women, unlike men, the right to vote was a “privilege” for which they should be grateful. “Liberty” might be best understood as the freedom to buy the fashions that made American women “internationally famous.” One article summarized the women’s rights movement thus:

“Just one hundred years ago, under the name of 'Sentiments and Resolutions' America's wives and mothers and sweethearts asked that they be allowed to use the rights and privileges which belonged to them as citizens under the Constitution. They meant the right to vote, go to the public schools, meet on community issues, or as they said, 'to promote every righteous cause with their righteous means.' This was our lady ancestors' way of arriving in the spot light of public affairs. And typical of American women, they arrived with escort.”

⁵³⁷ NARA, RG 64, Box 3, Folder 4, “American Heritage Program for Your Community,” News Features, 14, 32.

⁵³⁸ Fried, 42.

Those escorts were their husbands. Most of the women's rights movement leaders "were happily married and mothers of large broods." The features repeatedly reminded women of their work at home, even while writing about their right to work outside the home. One article related the history of women's fight "for the right to speak on issues which mothers and wives hold dear – home, family, property, the right to earn a living." Another piece, entitled "History Proves a Woman's Place is in Home and Office," referred to "their heritage of a place in business and family life." Women had to do their jobs in "two spheres," both of which demanded their full dedication.⁵³⁹

The high level of participation by Barney Balaban and other Hollywood studio executives led to a collaboratively made short film, *Our American Heritage*, which had played in 14,445 theaters across the country by November 1948.⁵⁴⁰ RKO Pictures produced the one-reel film with the cooperation of "all the major studios."

The film opened with a mass of uniformed men marching in lock step, cheered by the crowds that lined the street. An American flag marks the head of the marchers (they appear to be Legionnaires). Until that point one could incorrectly assume these are Nazis, put in the film by way of contrast. The narrator explains the scene by informing viewers that this is "a time for flag-waving." The new age demanded such patriotic displays. The "hectic" postwar world offered "new panics every 15 seconds" and people needed to grab onto something solid. "Our" history was solid.

⁵³⁹ NARA, RG 64, Box 3, Folder 4, "American Heritage Program for Your Community," Women's Features, 18-19; On women's double duty during and after World War II, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 65-78.

⁵⁴⁰ Brophy, "Highlights of the First Year."

The rest of the film defined the nation's ideological boundaries by bringing nearly everyone into the fold of American history. "We fought" for independence, "we wrote" the constitution and "we added amendments." "We," the Americans of 1947, had done all of these important things while "this guy" (shot of malcontent) griped and pointed out various problems in society. "But while he griped for 162 years, we built for 162 years." Real Americans worked in unison; those who protested and complained about injustices or inequities did not belong to "we."

Our American Heritage summarized the whole campaign in less than 10 minutes. Complimenting the exclusion of dissent, the film explicitly included immigrants, Jews, and African Americans. A few words about freedom of religion accompanied a shot of four houses of worship: three types of churches and, most prominently, a large synagogue. A polling place scene opens as a black man hands in his ballot and exits just before a white woman casts her vote. At the end of the film, as a chorus sings the "Freedom Pledge," diverse faces appear sequentially in close-ups. There are men and women, sufficiently foreign-looking immigrants, grimy laborers and dusty farmers, and the best dressed of these Americans is a black man in a sharp jacket and tie.⁵⁴¹

The AHF also used radio extensively. Radio spots resulted in 130,000,000 listener impressions (one radio message heard by one listener) per month in 1948, or 1,692,000,000 for the tour's first 13 months. These consisted of short advertisements as well as information integrated into regular radio programs.⁵⁴² The corporate sponsors also pressured local stores to support the Freedom Train. An AHF

⁵⁴¹ NARA, RG 342 USAF, *Our American Heritage*.

⁵⁴² NARA, RG 64, Box 6, Highlights of the First Year of the American Heritage Foundation.

Retailers' Manual went out to storeowners in every community touched by the campaign. Suggestions included advertising the store's support in the local press or on radio, window displays which might use facsimiles of some of the train's documents or mannequins made to look like great Americans, posters and elevator signs, and giving their employees time off work so that they could participate in Rededication Week activities.⁵⁴³ How many employers gave their workers time off is unknown, but photographs suggest that many storeowners created window displays, and contemporary newspapers contained advertisements from local businesses announcing their support of the campaign.⁵⁴⁴

In addition to the publicity coordinated by the American Heritage Foundation, some of the campaign's corporate supporters promoted the Freedom Train through their own devices. While the train hauled its "precious cargo," Du Pont offered to its *Cavalcade of America* listeners "The Man Who Took the Freedom Train." Here, the lesson reached millions of listeners at once, including many people who would be unable to see the train in person. In this episode, protagonist Eddie Bullock is a frustrated and frightened young man, prevented from achieving much of anything (even marriage) by a sort of postwar malaise. "Strikes all over the country. The cost of livin's goin' up. A depression's comin', and some folks say there'll be another war any minute. And a lion – a lion even escaped from the zoo!" To this list of fears, his girlfriend, Shirley, responds,

"You make me sick, Eddie Bullock. You'd think you were the only person in the world who had any worries. Well, if you think I'm going to sit around and wait for peace on earth and no more war and no more depression and inflation and deflation and what not just so you can sleep nights you're mistaken. I don't want to marry anybody with that much patience."

⁵⁴³ NARA, RG 64, Box 3, Folder 12, Retailers' Manual, American Heritage Foundation, 1947.

⁵⁴⁴ NARA, RG 200, Photographs of the Freedom Train, Boxes 1 and 2.

Eddie goes to see the train in New York, where he slips into a daydream that soon makes his experience much more interesting than that of the average visitor. During his fantastic voyage on the Freedom Train, more courageous men like Washington and Lincoln help Eddie learn his duties as a citizen. In one car he encounters the Pilgrims, who seek his counsel on whether or not to persevere in their mission. To Eddie's position that it's none of his business, the Pilgrim's insist, "Do not avoid the issue, Brother Bullock. Decide." At this stage, Eddie refuses to commit and flees to the next car. Two cars later, in response to Eddie's whining protestation that he does not want to ride the train to Gettysburg, Lincoln replies, "Neither do I, son." The leaders, Eddie learns, are no different – no one seeks the heavy responsibilities, but they accept them as conscientious citizens.

Eddie's brother, John, also rides this eerie train. John died a few years before, on Iwo Jima, after he too answered the call of duty. The brothers' meeting is almost too much for Eddie to bear, but in the end it helps him to accept his own responsibilities. As the train speeds ahead, Eddie eventually makes his way to the locomotive, only to find that *he* is the conductor – average, ordinary Eddie drives the train of freedom. To save his brother, Eddie initially wants to use his newfound power to stop the Freedom Train, but once again, like female leads throughout the *Cavalcade* series, Shirley reminds him of his duty:

"If you stop the train, John won't get to Iwo, but neither will the others and we'll lose the war. Lincoln will never get to Gettysburg. Mrs. Jessup won't get to Oregon, Washington will freeze forever at Valley Forge and Columbus won't ever discover us. Don't you see, Eddie? Freedom is you and me. You're the boss. You can drive the train anyplace you want to."⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁵ HL, Pictorial Collections, *Cavalcade of America* Transcripts, no. 563.

Finally, Eddie understands that individual Americans control the destiny of the republic. This conversion narrative derived from the AHF's emphasis on individualism: specifically, individual freedom and individual responsibility. More to the point, Du Pont and other large corporations involved themselves in this project because the lesson as they meant it referred to there being no need for government "interference." As they understood it, individual freedom led directly to free enterprise.

Several circumstances link Du Pont and the Freedom Train. The company contributed to the American Heritage Foundation, and Du Pont also participated in the broader campaign to resell America to Americans. But perhaps just as important, the historical consultant to *Cavalcade*, Frank Monaghan, served in the same capacity with the Freedom Train, advising the committee of Dulles et al. In the end, Monaghan shared the dissatisfaction voiced by Hamer and the other archivists, historians, and librarians. He advised replacing 40% of the chosen documents with more relevant material, which, of course, was never done.⁵⁴⁶ Despite his long involvement with Du Pont, Monaghan failed to understand that the corporate sponsors' agenda depended far less on the selection of relevant historical evidence than it relied on a façade of historical truths from behind which it could propagandize more securely.

"For everyone who really wants to be a 'Good American,'" the AHF offered the 72-page *Good Citizen*. "Cynicism" and "neglect" were weakening the system at home, while abroad, "its flaws are being exaggerated." The booklet therefore laid out nine keys to good citizenship. These included voting, jury duty, cooperation with the

⁵⁴⁶ Wall, 216.

law, paying taxes, serving in the armed forces when necessary, toleration of difference, support of public education, participation in one's community, and family – “the atom-that-can't-be-split of our republic.” Each of these warranted from two to four pages, with detailed explanations of how to achieve each key. The most detailed instructions accompanied the right/duty to vote, with extensive guidance about how to adequately prepare for ballot box decisions, but each of the nine was well explained.

These keys to good citizenship were hardly objectionable, which was precisely the point. Following the guidelines would help to preserve the system, just as the AHF suggested. Only those people who wanted to change the system – or, as the AHF said, “those groups... hostile to the dignity and freedom of men” – could possibly object to the campaign.⁵⁴⁷

On a subtler level, the rededication to these fundamentals implied a return to a stricter constitutionalism. *Good Citizen* linked its nine keys to the U.S. Constitution (in particular, the Bill of Rights and a few other amendments). The parts of the American experience not directly included, some of which might not have been as pleasant, were off limits. As Eric Goldman wrote of the documents on the train, this narrow definition of American heritage (basically confined to the Constitution) circumscribed more troubling issues of economic rights or social justice. History – what happened in between then and now – almost disappeared, or at least it possessed no meaning beyond sacred origins. More importantly, this implied that “our American heritage” consisted solely of the negative freedoms enumerated in the Bill of Rights.

⁵⁴⁷ *Good Citizen*, inside cover.

“A permanent residue of patriotism will be left in all the regions”

The AHF’s publicity program extended into 27,000 public schools nationwide. The Foundation considered this aspect of their program to be one of the most important, and it was one of the most beneficial as well. The late 1940s witnessed an upsurge in courses in American history and civics, but when the Freedom Train pulled out of Philadelphia the curriculum remained uncertain and uneven.⁵⁴⁸ Few contemporary observers doubted that schools should do more to educate students for republican citizenship.⁵⁴⁹

The AHF offered a 32-page “study guide” to teachers of 4th through 12th graders. The guide contained lesson ideas for courses in English, U.S. History, Civics, and Social Studies. It suggested both individual lesson plans and longer curriculum units structured around themes of rights and responsibilities, the democratic process, and key freedoms.⁵⁵⁰ A 1948 study done in Louisville, Kentucky showed that schoolchildren there engaged in a year’s worth of civic education activities in preparation for the train’s summertime visit. The author’s suggestions for continued exploitation of the train’s popularity included the creation of units based on particular documents borne as cargo. For example, the Bill of Rights could foster the study of contemporary civil rights and political issues, which would help

⁵⁴⁸ Tyrrell, 111-112.

⁵⁴⁹ NARA, RG 64, Box 3, Folder 4, “The American Heritage Program for Your Community,” 43

⁵⁵⁰ After the first year of the campaign, the AHF had distributed 135,000 copies of the study guide to teachers. NARA, RG 64, Box 6, Highlights of the First Year of the American Heritage Foundation, Interim Report...

students to understand the 1948 presidential campaign. And studying the trial of John Peter Zenger could stimulate classroom discussions of free speech in 1948.⁵⁵¹

Using the collected documents to encourage civic engagement was, of course, a primary objective of the AHF campaign, but teachers who used history to stimulate discussion about controversial political issues carried freedom's torch quite a bit past the boundary drawn by the AHF. How many teachers actually did this, and how many schoolchildren absorbed the lessons of active political participation is unknown. In any event, as a result of the AHF campaign, schools emphasized citizenship and history's contributions to and demands on the present, and millions of young Americans spent more time studying the political process and their role in it than they would have otherwise.

Due to popular demand, the Freedom Train ended 1948 with a return trip to the east coast, spending three weeks in greater New York City before heading south to its final stop in Washington, DC. The train sat in DC's Union Station during the 1949 Presidential Inauguration, where Tom Clark, now a Supreme Court Justice, closed down the train. At the time it appeared that Congress would help fund another tour that would begin in just a few months. But by May the appropriations bills had quietly disappeared without a vote. The rapid loss of enthusiasm confounded archivists who were preparing for a new train, and historians have been similarly flummoxed. Perhaps Truman's reelection caused some of the supporters to question the efficiency of such a campaign. Some of the AHF trustees expressed their concern that "merely getting people to vote without encouraging them to vote intelligently and

⁵⁵¹ Mildred Tibbits, "Suggestions for Junior High School Teachers in Utilizing the Visit of the Freedom Train as an Experience in Teaching Social Studies," (University of Louisville, 1948) 12, 17.

on an informed basis is not necessarily a good thing.”⁵⁵² On the other hand, the AHF had promoted the train as just the thing that would correctly advise the public. It simply worked out a bit differently than they had hoped.

The train that brought American history to people of every state in 1947-49 would be unimaginable in little more than a decade. By then, many of the towns the train had visited no longer had passenger rail service. Even the tracks had disappeared in some parts of the country. A tour of this kind would have to travel by bus or by airplane, neither of which offered anything like the same spirit of community manifested in the gatherings of entire towns at their rail depots.

Emerging from a global war, and entering into a new era of prolonged superpower conflict, the time was right for self-reflection, thoughtful consideration of what constituted American values and ideals, and a rededication to the principles found to be worth sacrificing and fighting for. In the best light, these were the goals of the organizers behind the Freedom Train. Participants would see and learn for themselves exactly what the abstract principles of freedom and liberty really meant, as illustrated by America’s foundational texts.

In practice, the content of the documents mattered very little. Most visitors did not see the documents, and those who did could only admire them as relics. No opportunities existed to discover meaning in the texts (to say nothing of considering broader historical contexts). But the American Heritage Foundation had already supplied the public with the “correct” interpretations anyway, and these had been drummed into the local community for weeks before the train’s arrival. As they said in their own advertising, “*we* seek to give meaning to the American heritage [italics

⁵⁵² Fried, 47

added].”⁵⁵³ Unless one boarded the train seeking to challenge the Foundation’s business-friendly interpretation of that heritage, the days (or weeks) of preparation obviated any need to actually read the documents. The men behind the vast publicity machine invoked their spiritual power, and claimed to speak for them, but in fact they remained in the background, dimly lit and still inaccessible to most.

⁵⁵³ “Information for Press and Radio on The American Heritage Program and The Freedom Train” August, 1947.

Chapter 6: “Authentic Original Relics”⁵⁵⁴ of an Emerging Empire: The Cold War Birth of the National Museum of American History

“Today there is greater need than ever before in our history for reaching all of the people with the story of our country’s heritage and the development of the American way of life. The Smithsonian Institution is especially strategic in disseminating this message.”

-Internal report, 1953

“Pride in the exhibit extends to the elevator girl – ‘At last, we’ve got something modern.’”

-*The Washington Post*, 1957

More than ever before, Americans in the 1950s visited and learned history from museums. Dissemination increasingly supplanted preservation as the primary purpose of the museum, as curators sought new ways of reaching the public and museums became prominent tourist attractions.⁵⁵⁵ A “new museology,” emphasizing interaction, educative functionality, and popularization swept the field. Patronage of museums increased dramatically, as did efforts to instruct the new visitors.⁵⁵⁶ The Smithsonian Institution played a leading role in these efforts while constructing a functional American history designed to meet the propaganda needs of the Cold War.

⁵⁵⁴ Smithsonian Institution Archives (SI), RU 623, Box 1, History of the SI Exhibits Program, Promotional brochure entitled, “A New Museum of History and Technology to tell the story of the United States.”

⁵⁵⁵ The museum boom was global; 90% of the world’s museums were constructed between the end of World War II and the end of the twentieth century. Gordon Fyfe, “Sociology and the Social Aspects of Museums,” 39, in Sharon Macdonald, ed., *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 33-49.

⁵⁵⁶ SI, RU 623, Box 8, John C. Ewers’ copy of *The Museologist* 58, March 1956, Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences. The “new museology” of the 1950s should not be confused with the 1980s movement of the same name. The later “new” trend reflected widespread acceptance of the need to interrogate the essential purposes of museums while the earlier movement referred to a renewed emphasis on exhibit effectiveness and establishing an “integral contact” between visitors and objects on display.

Similar to the Freedom Train, and also linked in several ways to the history presented by Du Pont, the postwar Smithsonian became the site of an intensely patriotic, pro-military, and pro-business history created through the cooperation of corporations and the state.

The Museum of American History developed out of a specific historical moment that followed the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War. The fact that the United States did not have a distinct national history museum until achieving its postwar superpower position, and then chose that moment to create such a museum, is hugely significant both in terms of understanding Americans' relationship with their past and understanding the presumptive role of the Smithsonian in interpreting that past.⁵⁵⁷

Focusing on the origins of the museum, this chapter explains how the developments explored throughout this dissertation led to its creation and determined its form. The political, economic, and ideological concerns that motivated the postwar demand for more “history” were felt keenly in Washington. Museums, with their unique ability to stimulate interactions between visitors and material from the past, also came to be seen as bulwarks against an age of reproductions and mass communication.⁵⁵⁸ Something “real” – perhaps even some fundamental truth – could be found in a museum. During the 1950s, the Smithsonian provided rapidly increasing numbers of visitors with official “truths” about American history. The

⁵⁵⁷ Indeed, few historians have studied history museums at all, and most of the work that has been done focuses on contemporary (or very recent) exhibits rather than the history of the museums. Even recent volumes dedicated to analysis of history museums generally follow this pattern. For example, see Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

⁵⁵⁸ Daniel Catton Rich, “Museums at the Crossroads,” *Museum News* (March 1961): 36-38.

museum assumed a key role in the construction of national identity and the definition of the “American Way of Life” – a position from which requests for funding could be more easily made.

In 1957, legislation signed by President Eisenhower created the National Museum of History and Technology (MHT), later renamed the National Museum of American History (MAH). This act merely culminated the exhibits’ modernization program that spanned the 1950s, as well as a dozen years of intensive planning and campaigning by curators and their supporters, and a longer period of hopeful work on the part of a few key men in the Institution. It also reflected a dramatic new appreciation of, and hope for, the role that the past could play in modern American life.

Museums and Historical Memory

Museums stand conspicuously at the intersection of memory and history. Visitors’ collective and individual memories come into contact with a history that, even more visibly than in books, has been constructed. The museum, writes Gaynor Kavanaugh, is a “meeting ground for official and formal versions of the past called *histories*, offered through exhibitions, and the individual or collective accounts of reflective personal experience called *memories*, encountered during the visit or prompted because of it.”⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁹ Gaynor Kavanaugh, ed. *Making Histories in Museums* (New York, Leicester University Press, 1996), xii- xiii, 1.

Much of the most recent work in the field of museum studies has concentrated on museums as sites of memory rather than history. If memory means thinking about objects or events in their absence, exhibits could be understood, according to Susan Crane, as “forms of representation that attempt to solidify memories’ meanings” by providing visitors with the “real” object – proof of a certain event that they should remember.⁵⁶⁰ In this figuration, museum curators wield the power that is implicit in the ability to “solidify” particular meanings. Moreover, since the collections encourage individual recollections, what is displayed may affect visitors’ “extra-institutional memory.” In other words, their existing memories interact with and to some degree absorb newly acquired collective memories, which thus continue to influence how visitors think about major events, people, or themes after they have left the museum. Omission from exhibits, on the other hand, encourages forgetting, or at least not actively remembering, the neglected parts of the story.⁵⁶¹ Barbara Mizstal calls this process of learning what is memorable and what should be forgotten “mnemonic socialization.”⁵⁶²

Since Maurice Halbwach’s work in the 1920s, memory has been understood as the instinctual counterpart to more self-conscious history. Where the two interact, as at many historical museum exhibits, the displayed history may awaken the sleeping giant of unconscious memory, forcing either a revision or confrontation with the

⁵⁶⁰ Jan Vansina argues that objects play this same role in the performance of oral traditions in *Oral Tradition As History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 44.

⁵⁶¹ Susan A. Crane, “Introduction,” 1-2, in Crane, ed. *Museums and Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1-16.

⁵⁶² Barbara Mizstal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003), 12, 15.

newly encountered facts. Or, it may simply reinforce existing memory, especially if the design of exhibits follows from a desire to avoid controversy.

For museum visitors then, historical arguments (or historical revisions) are often concealed within the very objects displayed to trigger subconscious mnemonic responses. Museums *are* sites of memory, but this awareness should not preclude recognition of how they function as historical interpreters for the public. Despite the trend to analyze museums' effects on memory, the visitors undoubtedly conceive of their time in history museums as an interaction with, or experience of history.

In recent years, perhaps no other site of collective memory and historical interaction has so consistently been the subject of controversy as the history museums that line the National Mall. As the publicly funded curator of America's national story, the Smithsonian's interpretation of history has come under intensive scrutiny from historians, politicians, interest groups, the media, and the general public. Several public historians have devoted considerable energy to documenting and analyzing the battles over recent exhibits, particularly the *Enola Gay* exhibit of the mid-1990s. Without exception, these writers have expressed outrage at the non-historians who have meddled in their domain. Edward Linenthal, Paul Boyer, Tom Englehardt, Philip Nobile, Barton Bernstein, Mike Wallace and others have complained that, at the Smithsonian, historical accuracy has recently been forced to withdraw in the face of base political posturing. Yet even as they relate the story of how this happened (an "inevitable" outcome, according to Linenthal) – i.e., how political considerations unsurprisingly play their part in this most political of

locations – these historians seem unwilling to even ask more meaningful (and more historical) questions about the nature of a national museum of American history.⁵⁶³

Implicit in all of these works are two assumptions: that we (historians) know what the Smithsonian's purpose is, and that the museum complex charged with preserving our national memory should also, in some sense, be our national historian (rather than another monument on the Mall). Yet few historians have explored that point or inquired into the origins of the modern historical museums under the Smithsonian's publicly funded umbrella to see why the Institution's historical exhibits evolved as they did. This chapter assumes instead that, as Neil Harris has shown, museum creation requires historical explanation. If we are to understand how, at this key site of historical memory, particular narratives gained in prominence while others failed, we must revisit the postwar moment when the modern Smithsonian really began to take shape. Moreover, the early history of the MAH must be explained in terms of the patterns of postwar Americans' relationship to the past, as well as contemporary concerns. Even the few existing historical treatments of the museum fail in this respect, since they fall into the same internalist trap as the curators they describe.⁵⁶⁴ In fact, broader changes in society's requirements of public history led to the dramatic overhaul of history exhibits at the Smithsonian.

⁵⁶³ The Smithsonian is governed by a Board of Regents, which must include the Vice President of the United States and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

The most detailed account of the *Enola Gay* exhibit battle is in Philip Nobile, ed., *Judgment at the Smithsonian: The Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (New York: Marlowe and Company, 1995); also Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Metropolitan, 1996); and Mike Wallace, "The Battle of the Enola Gay," in *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996) 268-318.

⁵⁶⁴ Marilyn Sara Cohen, "American Civilization in Three Dimensions: The Evolution of the Museum of History and Technology of the Smithsonian Institution" (PhD thesis, The George Washington University, 1980); Arthur P. Molella, "The Museum That Might Have Been: The Smithsonian's

Museums “play a major role in expressing, understanding, developing, and preserving the objects, values, and knowledge that civil society values and on which it depends.” Further, they possess a special capacity to generate, or at least revitalize, social commitments to the system.⁵⁶⁵ This relatively new way of thinking about museums derives from Michel Foucault’s writings on prisons and follows the same line of reasoning in arguing that these modern institutions encourage self-regulation.⁵⁶⁶ In other words, visitors to museums learn how to interact with the state and civil society.

At the Smithsonian, curators recognized that the Institution’s specimens held both a “historical value” and a “patriotic value,” as the objects (often referred to as “relics” and “treasures”) inspired patriotism and civic commitment.⁵⁶⁷ Much of the discussion during the extensive Cold War renovations concerned how to most effectively use the artifacts in order to achieve such ends. It is clear that, to the Smithsonian curators, the museum offered at least the possibility of conditioning visitors’ thought and behavior, and they created many new programs in order to achieve that goal.

National Museum of Engineering and Industry,” *Technology and Culture* 32, No.2 (Apr., 1991), 237-263. While this is true of the literature on the Smithsonian, it is even truer of museum studies in general.

⁵⁶⁵ Ivan Karp, “Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture,” 5, in Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Museums and Communities* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 1-18.

⁵⁶⁶ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Tony Bennett and Stuart Hall have led the Foucauldian analysis of museums. See Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995); Stuart Hall, “Un-Settling ‘The Heritage’: Re-imagining the Post-Nation,” in *Whose Heritage? The Impact of Cultural Diversity on Britain’s Living Heritage* (London: Arts Council of England, 1999), 26-58.

⁵⁶⁷ SI, Accession T90006, Box 8, Folder “SI – Description of Exhibits, 1947, 1950, 1951,” “The Smithsonian Institution: A Description of Its Work,” January 1947.

Museums – especially national museums – claim greater authority to bestow legitimacy than most other “institutions of memory.”⁵⁶⁸ The Smithsonian’s authoritative location on the National Mall adds to this weighty quality and likely encourages visitors to presume the accuracy of the history within – provided they possess some level of trust in the system. However, not long after the Museum of History and Technology (Museum of American History) opened its doors in 1964, systemic doubt may have caused, or contributed to, the significant decline in attendance at the museum during the last three years of the 1960s (though it continued to draw the largest crowds of any Smithsonian museum until 1976, when the National Air and Space Museum opened).⁵⁶⁹

Inclusion in the hallowed halls of a national museum of history certifies the importance of the collected objects. As they “objectif[y] the past and organize... memory around diverse artifacts,” history museums rely on *things* to help tell a coherent story and to stimulate memories (this is particularly true of those museums that emphasize technology).⁵⁷⁰ These things have their own specific origins that cannot be ignored.⁵⁷¹ The routes they follow on their journeys to the exhibit hall reveal a broader set of contributors and interested parties – from railroads to pharmaceutical companies – who should be considered along with the more commonly recognized creators of museum displays: the curators. Likewise, their

⁵⁶⁸ Kavanaugh, 26, uses the phrase “legitimizing institutions.”

⁵⁶⁹ SI, RU 99, Box 297, Folder “Visitor Surveys,” contains attendance figures for the 1960s.

⁵⁷⁰ Misztal, 21.

⁵⁷¹ Gaynor Kavanaugh, “Making Histories, Making Memories,” 8, in Kavanaugh, ed. *Making Histories in Museums* (New York, Leicester University Press, 1996), 1-14. Things stimulate memories, which is why Kavanaugh argues that “dream space” (an opportunity for reflection as much as a physical space) in museums is important.

removal from their original contexts to generally decontextualized museum displays unavoidably alters, and often erases, their historical meanings.⁵⁷²

The museum *naturalizes* as well. Challenging a written interpretation is in many ways far easier than dismantling a well-constructed narrative on display behind glass panels or velvet ropes. Seeing is believing, and artifacts serve as facts in displays' sometimes nearly imperceptible historical arguments. For example, in the postwar Smithsonian, a "History of the Armed Forces" exhibit designed to educate visitors about "American" soldiers in the earliest English colonies sought to naturalize the U.S. military by showing their perpetual (in effect, eternal) presence. In more subtle fashion, an exhibit that purported to present the history of petroleum-derived energy by focusing exclusively on the artifacts of American oil companies naturalized a distinctly capitalistic exploitation of natural resources.

Contemporary scholars in the fields of public history and memory have suggested that within the past generation, museums have evolved from vast storage facilities into sites of blockbuster shows and popular entertainment.⁵⁷³ These authors assume that the "edutainment" function of museums emerged only within the past few decades, but this process began, at least at the Smithsonian, in the years immediately following World War II, as part of a calculated plan to reach and influence new audiences.

⁵⁷² This is a particular problem of the "internalist style" of display, most prominent in museums of technology. Machines have usually been displayed without any reference to external contexts. Lawrence Fitzgerald, "Hard Men, Hard Facts and Heavy Metal: Making Histories of Technology," 118, in Gaynor Kavanaugh, ed. *Making Histories in Museums* (New York, Leicester University Press, 1996), 116-130.

⁵⁷³ Myszal, 19-21.

Although the MHT opened in January 1964, the new museum's contents came from exhibits refurbished or created during the late 1940s and 1950s. Looking at the directions proposed and taken in these years, it becomes clear that several key assumptions undergirded the construction of the Smithsonian's historical exhibits (and the new MHT building) during the postwar period. For the most part, these assumptions reveal contemporary, dominant ideologies about the past and its relationship to the present. First among these was the notion that the United States had by 1950 achieved global prominence, if not dominance. No matter what the field, from medicine to military, the stories told through the new postwar exhibits led from meager (usually "colonial") origins to postwar global supremacy. The Smithsonian's revitalized exhibits would celebrate the nation's "rise to greatness." Exhibits encouraged admiration rather than serious investigation into the past. As the 1964 opening day *Washington Post* headline read, "Museum Is Shrine to Rise of U.S. as Nation."⁵⁷⁴

Second, curators and other senior staff assumed that the history of the country, including its "cultural development," could be told through its technological progress.⁵⁷⁵ This is obvious in the name of the new Museum of History and Technology, but the understanding of history as technological progress was far more entrenched than that, both as an intra-institutional paradigm and as part of a zeitgeist that celebrated (with some anxiety) American scientific and technological superiority. An implicit goal of the museum in the 1950s, it had far-reaching consequences too, minimizing more fractious social and political history, and leading to an institutional

⁵⁷⁴ "Museum Is Shrine to Rise of U.S. as Nation: Old Steam Locomotive, Period Rooms Appeal, Washington in His Toga," *The Washington Post* (January 23, 1964), A18.

⁵⁷⁵ Cohen, 260, 330.

dependence on the corporations that manufactured (and donated) the great machines. In many respects, what the refurbished exhibit halls in the National Museum (precursor to the MHT) offered visitors in the 1950s was a history of the most successful American businesses.

Third, curators understood the museum's mission to have radically changed from its prewar role as national repository. They now believed in reaching out to the general public to educate and "influence" their thoughts and actions. The choice of subjects, the design of exhibits and greater attention to how their spatial relationships produced meaning, an explosion of new outreach programs, and increased efforts to explain what exhibits meant, all reflected this aspiration.⁵⁷⁶ New media replaced written labels, designers took over responsibility for displays from curators, and "fun" became a primary objective of a trip to the Smithsonian.⁵⁷⁷ A key feature of this new outreach, however, was its multi-pronged approach to communication with visitors. In their attempts to communicate with more of American society, curators and designers made different levels of text available, and even constructed parallel

⁵⁷⁶ A useful distinction has been made by Henrietta Lidchi between the "poetics" and the "politics" of exhibits. The poetics refers to the production of meaning through the construction of the exhibit while the politics refers to the broader role of museums in the production and spread of knowledge. At the Smithsonian, both politics and poetics changed during this period. The "political" changes prefigured the alterations in display, but, much of what was exhibited (and continues to be exhibited) remained as holdovers from earlier periods. Thus the poetics of the postwar exhibits reflected both new thinking about communicating ideas to the public and the older imperative to retain countless specimens for specialists. Henrietta Lidchi, "The Poetics and Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures," in Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage, 1997), 151-222, cited in Rhiannon Mason, "Cultural Theory and Museum Studies," 20, in Sharon Macdonald, ed., *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 17-32.

⁵⁷⁷ This shift occurred throughout the museum world in the 1950s. For example, in 1958 the Southeastern Museum Conference adopted a statement that museums have the "obligation" to interpret their collections through "creative activities" and should act as a "bureau of standards for the larger community." SI, RU623, Box 8, Folder "Museum Philosophy," clipping from the Southeastern Museum Conference; *The Museologist*, a publication of the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences, read by Ewers, Taylor, and other Smithsonian curators, editorialized throughout the decade about the need for contemporary museums to sift through the mass of specimens left over from the Victorian museum and present it to the public in an educational and interesting way.

galleries for those interested in learning in more detail than the new methods of presentation in the general gallery would permit. Assuming a need to appeal to a broader public, they hoped the new postwar exhibits would communicate material effectively to multiple audiences across age and education levels, class lines, and regional and national boundaries.⁵⁷⁸

Fourth, to help create the new exhibits the Smithsonian turned to American businesses, which *de facto* meant the creation of history favorable to business interests. In the 1950s, corporations became substantially more involved with non-profit institutions like the Smithsonian, as symbolized by the 1957 appointment of Du Pont President Crawford Greenewalt to the Smithsonian's Board of Regents (replacing famed engineer Vannevar Bush).⁵⁷⁹ The increased corporate involvement followed the landmark 1953 New Jersey State Supreme Court decision in *A.P. Smith Manufacturing Company v. Barlow, et al.* that effectively upheld the legality of corporate philanthropic donations to institutions that did not directly benefit either the corporation or its shareholders. Society now assumed, said the court, that business would support its public institutions. The assumption made in turn by business was that those institutions should reflect corporate ideology.⁵⁸⁰

Fifth, new history exhibits created for the American public, foreign dignitaries, Congress, and other sensitive groups necessarily painted a rosy picture. Postwar funding was hardly secure and curators had to be extremely cautious about

⁵⁷⁸ Cohen, 218.

⁵⁷⁹ "Smithsonian Nominees Get Nod," *The Washington Post*, March 20, 1956. SI, RU 190, Box 56, Folder "Hagley Foundation, Inc." In the 1960s, MHT Director Frank Taylor served on the Advisory Committee of the Hagley Foundation, Du Pont's research library and museum at the company's original Eleutherian Mills powder works on the Brandywine.

⁵⁸⁰ Richard Eells, *Corporation Giving in a Free Society* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956). Eells stressed that corporations needed to ensure the survival of the free enterprise system through philanthropic donations for institutions that promoted pro-business thinking.

topics that might cause controversy. Consensus defined American history, and anything that did not fit that interpretation had to remain outside the museum.

Finally, and less significant, perhaps, but closely connected to all five of the above, museum planners viewed the older Smithsonian buildings, particularly the “Castle” and the similarly designed Arts and Industries Building, as unfortunate remnants of Victorian architecture and national embarrassments. How could the triumphant progress of the United States (especially its technological progress) be displayed in such an edifice? Curators and supportive congressmen campaigned for a sleek, “suitable modern building” (outfitted with modernist exhibit designs). The 1950s have been described as a “turning point for museum architecture” and the MHT designed in 1955-57 by the firm of McKim, Mead, and White holds a significant place in this architectural history, despite its many flaws.⁵⁸¹

Upon this foundation, the Smithsonian constructed several historical narratives for contemporary Americans to view. The most prominent of these were narratives of military, corporate, and technological progress, as well as the more general “rise to greatness” of the United States. In many ways, the Cold War Smithsonian functioned similarly to the United States Information Agency (USIA) and other propaganda bureaus. Just as their overseas exhibits, films, lectures, conferences, and publications presented the evidence of a vital American culture in the past and present, so the Smithsonian flaunted American accomplishments in political, cultural, and material life. In fact, besides “inspiring patriotism” with

⁵⁸¹ Smithsonian Institution, *Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution for 1956* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1956), 2; Cohen, 206-208. It should be understood that while the architects designed the façade, much of the interior design came from Frank Taylor. Taylor drew up detailed plans for the exhibit halls, which the architects worked from.

exhibits in Washington, the Smithsonian also participated directly in overseas propaganda efforts.⁵⁸² Curators wrote “lectures” on topics such as “American Inventions Have Altered Our Way of Living,” which were distributed to USIA Information Centers around the world. USIA also filmed some of the Smithsonian’s “treasures” to show to foreign audiences, though whenever possible, foreign dignitaries were led through the museum itself on special tours.⁵⁸³

The Prewar Smithsonian

In the years following the conclusion of World War II, museums flourished in the United States. Not since the last decades of the 19th century was there such a widespread interest in museum building, acquisitions, exhibitions, and, especially, education. Some at the Smithsonian speculated that global travel in the Armed Forces, higher education levels resulting from the GI Bill and other federal funding, and increased leisure time following near universal adoption of the forty-hour work week contributed to a widespread hunger for knowledge.⁵⁸⁴ Whether true or not, the two eras also shared a sense of historical discontinuity produced by rapid change. Americans of both periods sought a usable past. But where the Victorian museums were, according to Neil Harris, “a corrective, an asylum, a source of transcendent values meant to restore some older rhythms of nature and history to a fast-paced, urbanizing, mechanized society,” the postwar Smithsonian celebrated the journey *to*

⁵⁸² U.S. Representative John Vorhys, Congressional Record, Volume 101, 84th Congress, 1st Session, June 8, 1955, 7909-7912.

⁵⁸³ SI, Accession T-90006, Box 11, USIA, 1960-1965.

⁵⁸⁴ SI, RU 623, Box 7, Extension Service Folder, Extension Service Proposal (ca. 1953).

that new society, as the pinnacle of human achievement. The point of the past in most exhibits was the impressive distance traveled to the present. The postwar museum also continued trends that had begun in the 1920s, building upon foundations laid by that era's technological museums and history parks. In content and design it also drew upon world's fairs and trade shows, following in particular (in more ways than one), the 1933 "Century of Progress" in Chicago.⁵⁸⁵

Nonetheless, some aspects of the postwar Smithsonian can be traced to the specific influences of its remarkable late-19th century director, ichthyologist George Brown Goode. Goode established the Institution's method regarding technological and material artifacts, "situating them on a progressive continuum from rude to complex, savage to civilized." This evolutionary "anthropological" approach, typical of turn of the century anthropology, would never really be supplanted at the Smithsonian.⁵⁸⁶

Historian Gary Kulik considers Goode to have been heir to Charles Wilson Peale, the founding father of American museums, in that he followed Peale's emphasis on connecting scholarship and public education through the *systematic* display of significant objects.⁵⁸⁷ A man of his times, Goode understood history as progress; he sought to explain that progress through a succession of cultural stages, from the most primitive to the most civilized. The displays followed his system of

⁵⁸⁵ Neil Harris, *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 137.

⁵⁸⁶ Wallace, "Progress Talk: Museums of Science, Technology and Industry," in *Mickey Mouse History*, 78. Although chartered in 1846, the first significant exhibits were displayed only in the 1880s.

⁵⁸⁷ Gary Kulik, "Designing the Past: History-Museum from Peale to the Present," in *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 6-7; Cohen 14, 274. Cohen says Goode studied and to some extent copied European display methods in 1880, while representing the U.S. National Museum in Berlin.

evolutionary development from “the simple to the complex.” But more than any particular philosophy, exhibits reflected the fact that the collections had already outgrown available space (and staff), particularly after the Smithsonian gained 42 carloads of objects from the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition.⁵⁸⁸

His two most prominent subordinates epitomize the dichotomy of Goode’s neatly taxonomized (yet still cluttered) science and technology exhibits and the museum’s shrine-like but cramped American history section. A. Howard Clark, the National Museum’s history curator, conceived of the museum’s role as a shrine housing important relics, where awed citizens could contemplate the great deeds of Revolutionary heroes.⁵⁸⁹ Decades later, during the Cold War, arguments in favor of increased funding for the Smithsonian often expressed the same sentiments, referring to “national treasures” and the “treasure house” of the “relics of the past,” indicating that this conception of the museum’s function had resiliency.⁵⁹⁰ Goode’s other assistant, John Elfreth Watkins, a civil engineer with links to the railroad industry (evidently Goode hired him at the insistence of the Pennsylvania Railroad), began collecting artifacts that would tell the story of American progress through developments in that industry.⁵⁹¹ Thus, at the turn of the 20th century, history at the Smithsonian consisted of hagiography as well as displays of the nation’s technological progress (and prowess), and the museum had already linked itself in

⁵⁸⁸ Cohen, 6, 17; Kulik, 9-10; Arthur P. Molella, “The Museum That Might Have Been: The Smithsonian’s National Museum of Engineering and Industry,” *Technology and Culture* 32, no.2, Part 1. (April 1991): 240.

⁵⁸⁹ Kulik, 9.

⁵⁹⁰ Congressional Record, Volume 101, 84th Congress, 1st Session, June 8, 1955, 7911; see also President Lyndon Johnson’s remarks at the dedication of the Smithsonian Institution’s Museum of History and Technology, January 22, 1964, in SI, Accession T90006, Box 4, Folder MHT Opening – 1961-1964.

⁵⁹¹ Molella, 242. Cohen, 275.

multiple ways to industry. But the staff consisted of just five people, and the National Museum was confined to the Arts and Industries Building.

In *Mickey Mouse History*, Mike Wallace explores how the dominant position of engineers and scientists at the Smithsonian affected the presentation of history and the development of methods of exhibition. George C. Maynard, an electrical engineer at Bell Telephone, followed Watkins, bringing the technologies and ideologies of that industry to the Smithsonian just as Watkins had brought those of the railroad industry a generation earlier.⁵⁹² Then, in 1911, mining engineer Carl W. Mitman arrived. Mitman began advocating for a separate museum for the history of technology in 1920, arguing that the United States was virtually alone among advanced nations of the world in neglecting to create a museum – a “public sign of appreciation” or a “monument” – in which to display the history of America’s material progress. Only after World War II would Congress see the value of such a display.⁵⁹³

From the 1920s onward, Mitman and his young protégé, Frank A. Taylor, worked to create a new Smithsonian museum focused specifically on the history of technology. Crucially, this same period witnessed the proliferation of science and technology museums, the professionalization and entrance into the middle class of engineers and scientists, and clashes between labor and capital that directly involved the industrial processes then being documented and displayed. Where Goode’s exhibits had recognized the cultural aspects of machines, the exhibits in the 1920s had a narrower focus, all but ignoring social context. The uneasy relationship between

⁵⁹² Molella, 247, 260.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, 250.

capital and labor in the 1910s and 1920s might have been interesting territory to explore but curators stayed clear of the difficult issues that would have arisen from placing their prized mechanical possessions in a socioeconomic setting.⁵⁹⁴ Frank Taylor later recalled that they sometimes discussed developing the “broad social significance” of the technologies on display, but none of the curatorial staff had any idea of how to even begin thinking in those terms.⁵⁹⁵ Wallace argues that beyond this purported ignorance, American engineers – and the men who administered the Smithsonian – had by the 1920s rejected an earlier reformist ideology prevalent in their profession and had accepted new positions within the hierarchical corporate system. Consequently, the engineer-curators fostered the development of collections that supported that system ideologically.⁵⁹⁶

In a setting that removed all contexts, the museum and its visitors become “fixated on the object.” The objects become fetishized, beheld as if they produced their own meaning rather than existing as a small part of a much larger and more complex world.⁵⁹⁷ The thirty-five million “specimens” possessed by the Smithsonian by this period represent what Neil Harris has labeled the “growth of objects” in American museums. The collections resembled an attic full of priceless junk, most of which would remain forever hidden in warehouse crates, and on which the curators might quixotically try to impose some sense of order, in the fashion of Walter

⁵⁹⁴ Wallace, “Progress Talk,” 79-82.

⁵⁹⁵ Molella, 257.

⁵⁹⁶ Wallace, “Progress Talk,” 80.

⁵⁹⁷ Michael Taussig, *My Cocaine Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), xii. Taussig brilliantly theorizes an alternative to the museum’s fetishization of objects by tracing objects’ histories and examining their contemporary social (and museum) setting in an effort to discover hidden meanings.

Benjamin's collector.⁵⁹⁸ The interwar Smithsonian hoarded its treasures and developed its historical exhibits according to the idea that technological innovation spoke for itself.

Mitman and Watkins legated to the Smithsonian a particular and lasting ideology that others have identified even in the contemporary Institution (again, as of 2008, headed by an engineer).⁵⁹⁹ This was an understanding of history as the “genealogy of invention,” a “non-contextual” or internalist approach that has generally persisted despite the efforts of recent curators to add social and cultural contexts.⁶⁰⁰ It implied the equivalency of industrial and social progress, and with each successive machine on display, it affirmed a rigidly progressive interpretation of history.

Mitman gradually transformed the “Arts and Industries Museum” into a more popular destination; he failed, however, to obtain the necessary funds, space, or staff to make his grander vision a reality.⁶⁰¹ During the 1920s and 1930s the collections stagnated, as what little money Congress allocated to the Smithsonian funded research rather than exhibits. Few people inside or outside the museum considered exhibits important enough to warrant their attention. And Mitman never developed a knack for the necessary public relations and lobbying work that needed to be done to secure support on Capitol Hill. His protégé, Taylor, proved to be much more adept. During the New Deal period Taylor began successfully to promote the Smithsonian

⁵⁹⁸ Harris 139-141; Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting” (1931), in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 60.

⁵⁹⁹ Molella, 260-262; Joseph J. Corn, “Tools, Technologies, and Contexts,” in Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989) 239-247.

⁶⁰⁰ Molella, 262.

⁶⁰¹ Cohen, 20.

Institution's work and managed to increase the Smithsonian's staff by drawing from the Civil Works Administration. By the end of the decade, Taylor had greatly improved the quality of the exhibits, to the point where they at least met the standards of three decades before. He also enhanced the reputation of the Smithsonian through a 1930s radio program, "The World is Yours." The unsponsored show aired nationally on NBC with the assistance of the U.S. Department of Education and the Works Progress Administration.⁶⁰² On the program, Taylor and other staff lectured on topics in history, science, and technology to millions of Americans, while providing extremely valuable publicity for the institution. By 1940, the program had become the most popular non-commercial radio program in America but it lost its timeslot as America prepared for war. Taylor later stated that the show brought the Smithsonian the "reputation of having the first of everything" (the quip, "old enough to be in the Smithsonian," also dates from these years) and made the museums on the Mall a favorite destination for tourists.⁶⁰³

More importantly, in the years just before World War II, Taylor established the civil service specifications for positions at the Smithsonian. Through his descriptions he managed to shape the positions themselves, using this power to emphasize exhibit work. He dictated that "preparation of an exhibition done by a scientist or a historian was equivalent to a publication" in terms of evaluation for promotions. For the first time, exhibit work was established as equal to research work. Taylor's new civil service classifications would prove vital to the overhaul of the institution's exhibits after the war.

⁶⁰² Paul H. Oehser, *The Smithsonian Institution* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 170.

⁶⁰³ Cohen, 46-48.

Even so, Cohen argues that “the Smithsonian reached the nadir immediately prior to World War II.” Efforts to get new buildings had failed and wages were so low that the Smithsonian’s 1940 annual report begged Congress for the additional money needed to retain current staff.⁶⁰⁴ While Taylor had a few allies within the museum world by the start of World War II, few people outside his profession yet shared either his concern with exhibits or his objectives for the museum.

Postwar Changes

During WWII, research on new materials and on strategic areas around the world gained the Institution some supporters in Congress. However, at war’s end the exhibits remained in poor condition.⁶⁰⁵ In the cramped quarters of the Arts and Industries Building, visitors were likely to “suffer at least a slight attack of claustrophobia,” said the *Washington Star*. Despite the efforts of Mitman and Taylor, only minor changes had been made to the displays since Goode first designed them in the 1880s and 90s. Single, bare light bulbs illuminated “dusty” and “faded” cases, and the whole place smelled of formaldehyde. It was an “attic,” the “world’s quaintest museum,” or a “country store” stuffed full with a “confusing jumble of dusty exhibits identified by fly-specked labels printed in ancient type.”⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 52.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., 25; SI, RU 190, Box 89, Folder Exhibits Modernization – 1948, Preliminary Report of the Subcommittee on Exhibits, October 12, 1948.

⁶⁰⁶ Paul Sampson, “Smithsonian Turning ‘Attic Into Showcase,’” *The Washington Post* (May 12, 1957), A1; Matt McDade, “Smithsonian Brightens Up Ancient Hall: Dramatic Lighting, New Fixtures Grace Latin American Lore,” *The Washington Post* (April 18, 1954); Cohen, 59-63.

The situation outside the Smithsonian's red brick walls had changed substantially however, and soon the effects would be felt within the museum. The United States sought to show the world, Europe in particular, that its culture, technology, and history were worthy of a nation that presumed to lead the world. Competition with the Soviet Union, especially in the hard sciences, led to increased support from Congress for other parts of the Smithsonian's mission (especially applied research), but the money for exhibit modernization (including, eventually, funding for the MHT building) sprung from a perceived need to display the American success story.

Taylor seized the moment by writing articles in museum and technology journals that called attention to the role the Smithsonian could play in teaching millions of Americans the "history, culture and traditions" of their country and elucidating the "hard work, earnest thought, and sacrifices that had gone before in order to produce the national well-being." He believed too that a visit to a newly refurbished museum could "influence their activities and decisions as individuals and citizens." On a practical level, Taylor saw postwar exhibit renovations as a necessary first step toward gaining political support for a new building. Eventually, the two objectives would merge into a single program of remaking the Smithsonian Institution for a new age.⁶⁰⁷

In 1948, Mitman left to plan the National Air Museum and Taylor succeeded him as Head Curator of the Department of Engineering and Industries. As such, Taylor headed the project to create the History and Technology Museum, and became

⁶⁰⁷ Cohen, 64-66.

its first director in 1958.⁶⁰⁸ Despite increased funding and support, it would take several more years to achieve even the “exhibits modernization program.” Curators still had little involvement with exhibiting their collections, but from his new position Taylor pushed hard for a change in the institution’s focus. Secretary Wetmore’s reservations about the potential for embarrassment notwithstanding, he permitted Taylor to network around Washington and build support for exhibit modernization and, eventually, to form his own committee of like-minded curators to consider how it might be done.⁶⁰⁹

The three curators that joined Taylor on his committee shared his belief that the Smithsonian’s focus should be on general educational exhibits. John C. Ewers, Herbert Friedmann, and Paul Gardner were all well-established and well-respected within the institution as curators, and they also shared similar histories of promoting the revitalization of exhibits in their respective departments. None of them had enjoyed success in this endeavor by the time Taylor brought them together in 1950. Ewers, who specialized in the Plains Indians within the Smithsonian’s Department of Anthropology, had been particularly eager to overhaul the decades-old Native American exhibits. Friedman, who recalled that his predecessor at Natural History remembered the pre-Darwin world of zoology fondly, felt the exhibits there were likewise a bit behind the times. Gardner had a dual role on the committee,

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 67, 300-301.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 70. Assistant Secretaries Keddy and Graf, both of whom had come from other federal agencies, introduced Taylor to key people at the Bureau of the Budget and the General Services Administration. From them he learned exactly what needed to be done in terms of planning and procurement, and he was able to persuade Wetmore that the Smithsonian could really be updated and improved – without embarrassment. Consequently, in 1949 Wetmore authorized a “blue-ribbon committee” to evaluate the possibilities for modernizing the exhibits. Even then the senior staff that comprised this first committee failed to produce any sort of plan to make the Smithsonian into a museum that would benefit the general public. Instead, Taylor had to demand a new committee of his own choosing at the beginning of 1950.

representing the Fine Arts collections and taking charge of artistic and creative planning. As a group and individually the committee toured museums across the country in early 1950 in order to assess possible routes to modernization. Disappointed, they found that, with few exceptions, exhibits at most American museums were in the same sad state as those at the Smithsonian. Hardly anyone, it seemed, had put much emphasis on informative and interesting displays for the public.⁶¹⁰

The committee proposed: first, altering the floor plans in the Arts and Industries Building and the Natural History Museum to make exhibits more accessible and to make visitors' routes through the museums more logical; and second, renovating several of the most popular exhibit halls. They also proposed, under the aegis of the Department of Anthropology, a new art and cultural history exhibition, combining specimens from Ethnology and Fine Arts, that would tell the story of mankind. This would be called the Museum of Man, though significantly its central theme would be "American growth." It never came together, but years later this idea would be partly realized in the "Growth of the United States" exhibits at the MHT/MAH. Finally, the committee suggested that the renovated exhibits would be only one part of a broader program to interact with and educate the public, through lectures, popular publications, and special exhibitions. Wetmore eventually gave his reluctant approval to the plan, but the more adventurous Leonard Carmichael would soon replace him as Secretary at any rate. In the meantime, even before congressional appropriations, Taylor and his allies had begun implementing their plans. Ewers began making changes in the Ethnological and Anthropological Halls,

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 74-78.

planning began for renovating the Main Hall and the First Ladies exhibit, and a new Naval History hall was created.⁶¹¹

The Federal Bureau of the Budget, which Taylor had lobbied directly for years, recommended Congressional approval of the Smithsonian's greatly increased proposed budget in 1952 (the Korean War had delayed plans for the request). The House Appropriations Committee enthusiastically approved an additional \$360,000 for 1953, an increase of almost fifty percent over the Smithsonian's 1952 budget. Still, the amount paled in comparison to what would come. In just a few years, Congress would approve \$650,000 annually for exhibit modernization alone.⁶¹²

The Annual Report of 1953 contained a seven-page "manifesto" from Taylor – the first official philosophy of exhibits since Goode's in the 1890s. It demonstrated a new commitment to the history of culture and technology and a move away from natural history (which had dominated the Smithsonian in the early decades of the 20th century). New exhibits would be designed to tell a coherent story that interconnected the varied objects on display. Overarching themes would be made clear to visitors and the exhibits would collectively "emphasize the special contribution of the United States to the improvement of man's physical and social well-being" through the display of the nation's impressive material culture.⁶¹³

To convince Congress to fund these and grander plans, Taylor and his staff "capitalized on the mood of the United States population toward celebrating national

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 72, 83; SI, RU 190, Box 89, U.S. National Museum Office of the Director, Exhibits Modernization, Report on the Committee of Exhibits, March 31, 1950; Memorandum from F. M. Setzler, Head Curator of Anthropology to John C. Ewers, Associate Curator of Ethnology, March 9, 1953, "Comments on memorandum on the Museum of Man (proposed)."

⁶¹² Cohen, 86-87, 294

⁶¹³ Ibid., 87-88.

history and technological achievements in the early 1950s.” They also played upon fears that the Soviet Union was better at advertising its successes in those fields. The promotional material prepared at the Smithsonian (largely by Taylor) used the historical moment to great advantage. Appeals for funds were wrapped in patriotic language, sometimes emphasizing the “bargain” offered by the Smithsonian as well. According to one promotional booklet, “There is no more effective or economical way to impress the more than one million visitors from every state and foreign land who see the collection each year, with the successful working of the democratic process in America.”⁶¹⁴ These types of arguments helped to convince conservative congressmen like George Dondero of Michigan to prioritize museum appropriations. In the early 1950s, while he spoke against the “art of ‘isms’ and the “communist conspiracy” then threatening art museums and the “fine art of our tradition and inheritance,” Dondero contemporaneously served on the Smithsonian’s Board of Regents and also chaired the House Committee on Public Buildings.⁶¹⁵ The support of both of these bodies was necessary if the MHT was to be built. Other congressmen couched their support for the museum in similar expressions of patriotism, and averred the need for more exhibited history that demonstrated the superiority of the American way of life. In approving the MHT plans, House Appropriations Committee Chairman Clarence Cannon of Missouri boasted that this new building would be as “imperishable as the pyramids.”⁶¹⁶ It would be, not just a shrine, but a lasting monument of American civilization (interestingly, the plans at that point

⁶¹⁴ SI, RU 276, Box 44, promotional booklet, ca. 1953.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 132, 134.

⁶¹⁶ Congressional Record, Volume 101, 84th Congress, 1st Session, June 8, 1955, 7909-7911; Jeanne Rogers, “New Museum Indorsed for Smithsonian: Rep. Cannon, Head Of Appropriations, Backs Building,” *The Washington Post*, (April 30, 1955).

called for the demolition of the historic Arts and Industries Building and for the new “imperishable” shrine to be built on the vacated site).⁶¹⁷

Taylor prepared a promotional booklet that contrasted the poor state of exhibits with their plans for renovation. It explicitly argued that the Smithsonian was in a unique position to influence the thoughts and actions of millions of Americans citizens. Even with the sad state of exhibits circa 1950, three million people visited each year. If the exhibits could be improved and presented in a way that really explained things to the average visitor, there would be substantial potential for mass education.⁶¹⁸

A foreword from Secretary Carmichael set the tone for the stylish brochure, entitled, “A New Museum of History and Technology to tell the story of the United States.” Carmichael stressed the great achievements of the United States, particularly in “erect[ing] a new industrial world based on mass production” and claiming its current position of “world leadership.” The time had come to “display before the world the historic material evidence of our national growth and achievement,” fulfilling not only the Smithsonian’s mission but also serving “other urgent national interests.” This proposal laid out the necessity of funding a new museum on the Mall in language that would appeal to congressmen focused on paying for the cold war. America needed this building to demonstrate its “heritage of freedom” and advertise the “basic elements of our way of life.” Already, the Smithsonian ranked third behind

⁶¹⁷ SI, RU 190, Box 89, United States National Museum, Office of the Director, Folder Exhibits Modernization (1950), Report of the Committee on Exhibits. Like many other documents from this period, this report addressed the need for temporary renovation plans for “the short remaining life” of the Arts and Industries Building and assumed the new museum would be built on the site of the older building.

⁶¹⁸ Cohen, 169. Increased attendance bore this out: In 1947 less than one million people visited the Arts and Industries building and ten years later the number was 2.4 million.

only the White House and Capitol for visitors to Washington, DC. If Congress would approve the new building, a unique opportunity for patriotic education would result. The pamphlet also warned of the results of inaction: already, “irreplaceable material records of historic events” were being refused and lost forever because of lack of space. Even accepted gifts had been so crammed into the old buildings that curators could not “exhibit them in a way that develops their full meaning and value as a national heritage.”⁶¹⁹

Best exemplifying this point, the Smithsonian’s single most popular specimen and “greatest national treasure,” the Star Spangled Banner flown at Fort McHenry covered two full pages of the brochure. In the first photograph, the giant flag is shown as currently exhibited, “half hidden by adjacent displays,” and unable to be completely unfurled. A solitary man stands wedged against the glass case, staring ahead at the lower left corner of the immense flag, which is all he can see. Toward the end of the brochure, in a section that explained the layout of the proposed museum, another full-page picture depicts the banner as it would be displayed if Congress appropriated the money. It would be the “center of attention,” visible from all three floors, reminding all who view its “full-length display” of the “heritage of freedom from which sprang the national achievements there commemorated.” In this picture, several people stand looking up at the flag, now completely exposed (and positioned behind an apparent altar). Two men appear to be in solemn conversation about this venerable object; near them, a mother instructs her child, as he stands rapt in amazement.

⁶¹⁹ SI, RU 623, Box 1, History of the SI Exhibits Program, “A New Museum of History and Technology to tell the story of the United States.”

The scene operates on several levels simultaneously. It appeals to power by suggesting how this symbol of the state would be worshipped if provided with the appropriate space. The image, and even more, the setting itself strongly encourage reverence. There is an instructional element inherent in the oversized display as well as in the open space reserved for visitors. Where museumgoers of yesteryear might have remained hidden among the cases as they looked at the flag, the new arrangement would expose every individual to the scrutiny of his fellow citizen (a variation on Foucault's panopticon). This may not have been a consciously sought after result, but it is consistent with early Cold War demands that American citizens demonstrate their patriotism in the public sphere, whether through recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance (with the 1954 addition of the words "under God"), singing the National Anthem at sporting events, or standing in line to board the Freedom Train and sign the Freedom Scroll.

The Star Spangled Banner would be the "center of attention" in the new museum but other "authentic original relics" and "heritage treasures" would of course be exhibited. Primarily these would be those "elements of our technology and culture that characterize our way of life" (note the present tense) and "give to the problems of living today a historic perspective in the mirror of our past." In other words, rather than (merely) representing and elucidating an earlier historical period, the "relics" existed as part of an explanation of "our" current condition – and as a verification that 1950s America did, in fact, properly descend from the heritage on display. But the relics could not achieve this on their own – that was the problem with the old method of exhibition. The plans for the MHT derived directly from the experience of

modernizing exhibit halls in the early fifties. As with the modernization program, exhibits in the new building would be designed to lead visitors around the displays, in the appropriate order, moving from one “pivotal period of our national history” to another. Upon completion, the visitor should understand the “story of our national progress from colonial settlement to world power.” Citizens would experience a “deepened faith” in America’s “destiny.”⁶²⁰

Still important, however, they would also be awed by the “inspiring opportunity of beholding the... relics” in the “national shrine.”⁶²¹ The use of language generally reserved for religion suggests the veneration of specimens such as pieces of clothing worn by great Americans and locks of hair from every president from Washington to Pierce. Arguments against admission fees used similar language to argue that the museum must be as open as churches and schools. Admission fees “would have an adverse effect on the national interest” and were “not compatible with the position of the Smithsonian Institution as an educational and cultural institution and also as a national shrine.” The museum must be kept free “so that citizen and foreigner alike may freely inspect the material evidence of our national growth and achievement – mementos of the men and events that have made this country great” (as such mementos would not in fact be “material evidence,” this sentence again demonstrates the omnipresent tension between the museum of progress and the national shrine).⁶²²

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² SI, Accession T-90006, Box 3, General Admission Charge Study 1954, “A Report by the Smithsonian Institution at the Request of the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Independent Offices, Relative to Paying Admission to Smithsonian Buildings on the Mall.”

Looking back from 1957, Secretary Carmichael summed up the changes from his perspective, noting that, before the mid-fifties modernization the Smithsonian had been the “picture of a gaslit museum in an age where people are used to television and the newest techniques of display.” But with the new exhibits, the visitor “learns as he looks.” “We want to educate, inform, and at the same time interest the visitor,” said Carmichael. Instead of a messy attic, the Smithsonian had become the “showcase of America – a well-lighted, logically arranged showcase.”⁶²³

The new “logical” arrangement encouraged patriotic belief in a capitalistic, militaristic, and technologically superior America, but Smithsonian administrators continued to complain about inadequate facilities. This message resonated in the Capitol. Senator and Smithsonian Regent Clinton P. Anderson (Democrat, New Mexico) protested to his colleagues in 1957 the fact that the United States now lagged decades behind Europe in museum design.⁶²⁴ House Democratic Majority Leader John W. McCormack of Massachusetts argued the National Museum was twenty years behind “even some of the second- or third-class powers of the world” – a wholly unacceptable position for the United States. Only a few isolationists objected; for example, Charles Vursell of Illinois argued against the expenditure with the same spendthrift reasoning that he used against the Marshall Plan ten years earlier – an indication that officials on both sides of the issue possessed the same understanding of the Smithsonian’s role in foreign affairs.⁶²⁵

⁶²³ Paul Sampson, “Smithsonian Institution Expands its Display of Indian Lore,” *The Washington Post* (June 2, 1955), 18.

⁶²⁴ Congressional Record, Volume 103, 85th Congress, 1st Session, June 21, 1957, 10085.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

But by 1957 at least, most congressmen saw the need for “a greater understanding of our own culture here and abroad.”⁶²⁶ A mostly internationalist Congress approved the plans for this museum, designed for, in the words of Regent and Congressman John Vorys of Ohio, both the “diffusion of knowledge” and “inspiring patriotism.”⁶²⁷ The educative (or propagandistic) function continued to be the central theme of those who supported the MHT. At the dedication in January 1964, Senator Anderson averred it would be “not only the largest but also in some respects the most truly educational museum in the world.” President Lyndon Johnson thought this would especially benefit foreign visitors:

“Why not open the historical doors and let the visitors see what kind of people we really are and what sort of people we really come from? They would instantly realize that we were not always the affluent nation, the powerful nation, the fortunate nation. From the exhibits in this Museum, they would learn that the demagogues’ dingy slogans around the world have no basis in fact. [...] We would show visitors from newly emerging nations that their labors are not in vain – for the future belongs to those who worked for it. [...] If this Museum did nothing more than illuminate our heritage so that others could see a little better our legacy, however small the glimpse, it would fulfill a noble purpose. I am glad to be here. I am always glad to be where America is.”⁶²⁸

Revolution in Exhibit Design

Following the increased attention and funding from Congress, exhibit renovations under Taylor derived less from what other museums had done than from the world’s fairs, trade shows, and department stores visited and admired by Taylor, Ewers, and other curators in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. The Smithsonian adopted the Bauhaus-influenced designs of those earlier decades as the basis for the new exhibit

⁶²⁶ Representative Thompson of New Jersey, Congressional Record, Volume 101, 84th Congress, 1st Session, June 8, 1955, 7909.

⁶²⁷ Congressional Record, Volume 101, 84th Congress, 1st Session, June 8, 1955, 7909-7912.

⁶²⁸ SI, Accession T90006, Box 4, MHT Opening – 1961-1964, “Dedication of the Museum of History and Technology of the Smithsonian Institution, January 22, 1964.”

halls in the early 1950s. To accompany the new designs, at Ewer's urging, curators prepared "scripts" (explanatory text on the displays) for the first time at the Smithsonian. Ewers brought that innovation with him from the National Park Service, which had for many years utilized the script method to tell an effective story about the objects on display. No one at the Smithsonian had bothered with such an endeavor before.⁶²⁹ Taylor appointed Jack E. Anglim, from the Natural History Museum, to a new position, Exhibits Specialist (later Chief of Exhibits), which oversaw all of the exhibit makeovers. Meanwhile, a new hire, Benjamin Lawless, brought the methods of the Cranbrook Museum – practically the only museum Taylor and Ewers had admired on their 1950 tour – to the Smithsonian.

These exhibition methods included a well-defined role for an exhibits designer, who would from that point on bear responsibility for the appearance of Smithsonian exhibits, while the curators determined the content of collections and scripts. Designers moved exhibits away from the standard rectangular pattern divided by precisely straight rows. Curved and angled walls, movable panels, odd-shaped rooms, and temporary floors created a more dynamic space.

Staff, critics, and visitors commented on the revolution in exhibit lighting and color more than any other changes. Lack of adequate lighting had made several of the old exhibits nearly impossible to see, and had also contributed to the perception of the museum as a cavernous storage room best left to be explored by someone with appropriate expertise. The new exhibits thus featured "lighting and color effects" to

⁶²⁹ Cohen, 90-92.

make the halls appear friendlier and to protect against the average American's usual "museum fatigue."⁶³⁰

At the same time, designers and curators worked to control perspective, both visual and interpretive. New exhibit designs forced visitors to look at particular displays in a particular order by closing off access and blocking views. This, thought curators and designers, would allow for greater absorption of intended meaning. The new exhibits featured far fewer objects as well, which meant the curators selected only those specimens that served the themes they tried to convey to the public. Less effective (or contradictory) objects were removed to storage. Descriptive labels were removed to the exhibit panels to reduce clutter around the objects on display and to integrate their descriptions into the story being told by the whole exhibit.⁶³¹ Halls were deliberately "streamlined" and "uncluttered" so that visitors would not be confused by too much information. For example, Latin American Archeology removed hundreds of specimens, instead using just a single item to illustrate each "step" or "archeological development" in the region.⁶³²

The Hall of Historic Americans, designed to "express forcefully, tastefully, and reverently" the connections between the displayed objects and their famous owners, similarly eliminated the unnecessary clutter of the past. To allow space for larger objects and settings curators "relegat[ed] many objects associated with minor

⁶³⁰ Sampson, "Smithsonian Institution Expands."

⁶³¹ Cohen, 97-98, 106.

⁶³² McDade, "Smithsonian Brightens Up Ancient Hall."

political figures to the study collections... There will be space only for the most notable figures in American life.”⁶³³

Perhaps the most dramatic change occurred in exhibit scripts, the textual displays which attempted to bind the artifacts together in a narrative constructed by the curators. Smithsonian staff worked to ensure that all visitors would understand the displays correctly. They often rewrote the panels to erase their own doubts about whether less educated visitors would be able to read and understand the text. New labels and panels “substituted plain talk for scientific jargon.” Indicating the great lengths to which curators went at the dawn of this new era, local laborers were brought in to see how they responded to scripts. For example, when workmen “pulled a blank” on the phrase, “unstratified society,” curators changed it to read, simply, “no social classes.”⁶³⁴ Such simplifications complemented other exhibit modernization efforts, all of which sought to increase explicatory power.

The Smithsonian’s curators also began soliciting opinions from visitors in the form of questionnaires. In both language and intent they reflected the sea change that had taken place vis-à-vis the Institution’s purpose. Mostly these went out to visiting organizations, usually schools. The questionnaires asked if exhibits were appropriately written for their level, if they were dull or interesting, and whether or not they were effective. This solicitude suggests the extent to which the Smithsonian had, by the 1950s, changed from a research institution to a patron-centered museum.⁶³⁵

⁶³³ SI, RU 551, Box 5, Historic Americans Hall: General Information 1960-1971, “General Statement to Accompany Script for a Hall of Political History, n.d. (circa 1960).

⁶³⁴ McDade, “Smithsonian Brightens Up Ancient Hall.”

⁶³⁵ SI, RU 279, AEC Exhibit Folder, Questionnaires.

In stark contrast to the old, the new exhibits were “easy” and a “fun way of absorbing knowledge,” according to a *Washington Post* reporter who often covered the Smithsonian during this crucial period.⁶³⁶ “Interesting and educational exhibits [were] designed to capture the imagination of young and old.” Several innovations changed forever the way that museums engaged with visitors. The “Early Life in America” exhibit, opened in January 1957, featured new “step-in windows,” soon adopted for other exhibit halls, that allowed visitors to enter reproductions of rooms, cabins, teepees, et cetera.⁶³⁷ To replace lengthier written labels, curators created “talking exhibits” that visitors triggered merely by walking up to a certain spot. These machines “beamed” distinct “messages” at two different heights, corresponding to those of adults and children. In some halls the displays themselves were separated into adult and child-sized levels so that children would be spared from such things as models demonstrating the development of the human fetus.⁶³⁸

The 1950s modernization effort was merely the foundation for the campaign to obtain the ultimate goal: the MHT, which would not only provide a modern edifice to celebrate technological progress but would revolutionize the museum experience. However, during the modernization, Smithsonian staff assumed that the new building would be open by about 1960, and that each new hall they finished before then would be “transferred intact to the new museum.” Thus, preparations for the MHT and renovations of existing exhibits were generally two sides of the same coin.

The interior architectural design of the planned museum would allow for different levels of experience. The ten-hall (later reduced to five) “Growth of the

⁶³⁶ McDade, “Smithsonian Brightens Up Ancient Hall.”

⁶³⁷ “Exhibit Depicts Early America,” *The Washington Post* (January 20, 1957).

⁶³⁸ Sampson, “Smithsonian Institution Expands.”

United States” would collectively tell the story of American progress, but a “digest” would be available in just one hall for visitors with less time or less interest, which would still allow them to grasp the meaning of the more detailed exhibits. The digest would also suggest “areas of further exploration” to the more scholarly inclined.⁶³⁹

The layout followed Taylor’s plans for parallel galleries as he had first described them in 1946. The design assumed that most visitors would content themselves with the main halls, but the more advanced audience could move over to smaller rooms to study additional specimens in more detail. In creating this divide, Taylor invoked the necessity of designing a museum that would impress both “our intellectual friends and our ideological enemies throughout the world.” At the height of cold war competition, both the functionality of the building and the “philosophical soundness of its content” needed to be unimpeachable.⁶⁴⁰

A Visit to the Museum

Despite the modest efforts to engage visitors of all backgrounds, studies conducted at the Smithsonian in the mid- to late-1960s concluded that the “average” visitor to the MHT was white, male, middle-aged, and upper middle class. He possessed an above average education, visited for pleasure, and came with friends or family. Three-fourths of visitors came from outside the DC area, mostly from the Northeast and South, with seven percent from foreign countries and eleven percent from the western United States. Just over half had visited at least once before and

⁶³⁹ Sampson, “Smithsonian Turning ‘Attic Into Showcase’.”

⁶⁴⁰ Cohen, 226.

just under half came to see a particular exhibit (as Princess Margaret did when she came to see the locomotives in 1965). Only 15% visited museums more than a few times per year, which led Smithsonian researchers to conclude that since “these persons really do not know how to operate in museums,” they needed still more guidance.⁶⁴¹

Once inside the museum, 14% stayed less than one half hour, 31.5% stayed one hour, 19.8% stayed for an hour and a half, 19% for two hours, and about 15% stayed longer than that. Regardless of their intentions, more than half of all visitors to the MHT saw the major American history exhibits (Growth of the United States was visited by 55%; Everyday Life in the American Past, 54%; Star-Spangled Banner, 53%; First Ladies, 55%; Historic Americans, 52% American Costume, 55%; Washington statue, 46%). Only 34% visited the Armed Forces History Hall in 1967-68, though the exhibit may have been more popular when first designed in the mid-1950s. What they saw was also determined by their point of entry – entering from the Mall instead of from Constitution Avenue made it one-third less likely that one would see any of the first floor. However, half of all visitors managed to see at least some of all three floors.⁶⁴²

⁶⁴¹ SI, RU 99, Box 297, Visitors/Surveys, Folder 1969, Attendance Figures; Box 383, Folder Visitor Surveys, 1968-1969, Survey Results; RU 157, Box 13, Record of Visitors During Fiscal Year 1955; RU 334, Box 8, Folder - Visitor Survey Committee, 1969 Visitor Survey. The MHT was by far the most popular museum on the Mall, drawing more than 750,000 visitors per month during peak season; before its creation, the Arts and Industries Building drew the highest attendance – about two million visitors per year at the end of the 1950s. Of those who came to see a particular exhibit at the MHT or Museum of Natural History, the percentages are as follows: Fossils, 10.2%; Armed Forces, 4.6%; Nuclear Energy, 0%; Medical History, 3.6%; Star Spangled Banner, 1.3%; Gems and Minerals, 25.7%; Anthropology-Archeology, 10.9%; First Ladies, 13.2%; Transportation, 13.9%; Technology, 5.0%; American History, 6.6%; Temporary Exhibits, 8.6%; Other (shops, films), 14.5%.

⁶⁴² SI, RU 584, Box 32, “Facility Use and Visitor Needs in The National Museum of History and Technology: A Preliminary Study,” by Marilyn S. Cohen, Department of Psychological and Sociological Studies, Office of Museum Programs, Smithsonian Institution, November 1973.

Surprisingly, only a few – 3.5% – described their visits as “educational.” The main goal was entertainment. Most visitors were themselves well educated (only 7% had not finished high school and almost half were college graduates), which belies the directors’ efforts to appeal to and instruct people of all educational backgrounds. Just before this visitor study began in 1967, Frank Taylor said, “The new exhibits at the Smithsonian are based on the premise that exhibits should be didactic.”⁶⁴³ The survey shows that visitors approached the displays differently, looking for amusement as much as for knowledge.

Several years before the Smithsonian secured funding for its own tour guides, the Junior League of Washington, an organization of women volunteers interested in the improvement of their community, began docent service for the National Museum in the Indians of South America Hall on Feb 20, 1956, and in the First Ladies Hall on March 19, 1956.⁶⁴⁴ By May 1956, Junior League docents had served 4,491 schoolchildren. Most of the tours were for local school systems (Washington, DC and Arlington, Fairfax, Montgomery, and Prince Georges counties) and were given for 4th, 5th, and 6th graders. Approximately four to five thousand students visited the Smithsonian with a Junior League tour each year from 1956 through 1959. The outreach program expanded rapidly and in the first years of the new decade the figure was over 20,000 per year. By 1963, just before the MHT finally (belatedly) opened,

⁶⁴³ SI, RU 190, Box 29, “Experiment on Exhibits,” Lecture by Frank Taylor, March 13, 1967.

⁶⁴⁴ <http://www.jlw.org> (accessed July 4, 2008). The trend of the activities undertaken by the Junior League of Washington over its nearly one hundred-year history reveals, perhaps, some troubling signs of cultural decay. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s the League helped introduce children to art and history in the museums on and around the National Mall, by the 1980s they focused their attention on the problem of juvenile homelessness (after the membership “had determined that children were homeless too”).

the League had led more than 100,000 students through the Smithsonian's exhibits and provided a model for the Institution's newly created Extension Service.⁶⁴⁵

Teachers who wished to retain full authority over their classes while visiting the Smithsonian could forgo docents and instead use "Teachers Guides," prepared by University of Maryland and George Washington University graduate students for the Washington Area School Study Council (comprised of eight local school systems that worked cooperatively on issues of interest to all parties, with sponsorship from the two universities' schools of education).⁶⁴⁶ Graduate students submitted drafts of the guides to Smithsonian curators, who edited and gave final approval. The guides contained scripts for teachers to use during their class's visit, as well as some classroom activities, and a list of additional readings and educational films.

The scripts for teachers all followed the same formula, no matter what the subject: things were a bit rough, then they got better, now they are perfect. For the "Industrial Revolution Exhibit" (which could easily have been used to far different purpose had labor featured at all in the displays), the tour covered the "first crude machines," then later improvements "which finally result in our modern processes." Suggested follow-up materials included free motion picture films made by two of

⁶⁴⁵ SI, RU 623, Box 1, Docent Service, G. Carroll Lindsay to John C. Ewers, June 22, 1959; Report of Junior League Docent Activities, 1958-59; Annual Rpt of 1960-61; Annual Rpt of 1961-62; "100,000th Visitor at Museum," *The Washington Post*, October 10, 1963. During the 1957-1958 school year, the Junior League docents led pupils through the Early America, Indians, Power, and First Ladies exhibits. The Early America tour synched well with the local school systems' 5th or 6th grade curricula. The Power Hall tour gradually gained in popularity after the League argued its importance to school officials. The Indian tour remained very popular, especially with scout groups. In later years, textiles and gems and minerals joined the standard tour for school groups.

⁶⁴⁶ SI, RU 623, Box 1, Teachers Guides.

America's largest corporations, General Electric ("A Woolen Yarn") and General Motors ("King Cotton").⁶⁴⁷

Despite the enthusiasm for the present, the scripts and exhibits revealed a tension between the desire to teach schoolchildren and other visitors about the past and the possibly more forceful (if less conscious) pull to affirm the glories of the current day. For example, the "Guide to Water and Land Transportation" begins with a note to teachers explaining that the youth of today have the opposite understanding of an adult when they think of jet airplanes as normal and oxcarts as incredible. The museum fieldtrip would correct this, according to the guide, through its displays of old boats, trains, and early horseless carriages. But in fact, the focus of the guide and the exhibit is on the automobile, which made the "American way of life" (as the young students already knew it) possible.

The guides illustrate how the evolutionary approach taken in the 1880s still underlay the modernized exhibits of the 1950s. Scripts for every exhibit repeated the same mantra: "through time in each of these categories there is a flowering and an elaboration from a very simple beginning to a highly complex level." And the more like "ours" a society appeared, the more advanced it was.⁶⁴⁸ The "Shelters" Exhibit, which led children through time and space to, finally, a miniature American house from the second decade of the twentieth century, similarly instructed its visitors that

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid. Incan society was "like ours" because it was "stratified." Indeed the Inca seemed almost a parallel civilization, with their large cities, complex politics, and the "standardization and mass production of arts and crafts" (these parallels may explain why the guide ends with the statement that many Incan buildings still remain standing – despite numerous earthquakes and wars – rather than with their conquest, which might have suggested a parallel destruction of American civilization).

nothing surpassed the American way of life (again reinforcing what they already knew rather than challenging them to think historically).

Docents likely followed the scripts prepared for them. Teachers may have led their pupils around according to the guides. But visitors to the Smithsonian often ignored the viewing sequence laid out for them by the curatorial staff and even the students on field trips took away far different memories than those intended for them. One elementary school class led through the Indian exhibits by Ewers himself wrote him thank you letters which reveal that what they enjoyed (and remembered) were the weapons “they killed people with” and the scalps – not the organization of the displays. Adults often toured the exhibits backwards or went straight to the parts they wanted to see, skipping the carefully planned sequence they were supposed to follow.⁶⁴⁹

In the late 1950s, the Institution still did not yet have its own docent service, nor bookshop, lectures, or tours of any kind. Outreach programs included only occasional public exhibitions at other venues, the publication of scientific reports, replies to specific requests for information, the sale of black and white photographs of specimens on display, and a few information pamphlets.

However, planning for a new Educational Service Department began in the mid-1950s. The new service would coordinate the limited programs already in existence, plus affiliated efforts like the Junior League Docents and the Teachers Guides, as well as new ideas like regular gallery tours, audioguides, classes and lectures, a bookshop, and a school loan service. By the early 1960s, the Smithsonian

⁶⁴⁹ SI, RU 190, Box 89, U.S. National Museum Office of the Director, Exhibits Modernization, Report on the Committee of Exhibits, March 31, 1950; RU 99, Box 481, Visitors to SI Buildings, results of survey conducted by Caroline Wells, 1968-1969.

had broadened its field of interaction with the public considerably, by then functioning more or less as it does today: a full-service “edutainment” center.⁶⁵⁰ According to the 1968 survey, about one-fifth of visitors to the MHT followed a guided or self-guided tour (the rest explored without any guidance). The self-guided tours were available as a brochure that included a route through the museum and the displays or specimens considered most significant. Among the first of these tours were the “National Museum Discovery Tour,” the “National Treasures Hunt,” the largely overlapping “Famous Americans Tour” and “American Heroes and Heroines Tour,” “Machines,” and “Rooms and Shops of the American Past,” which led visitors through every recreated structure in the museum.⁶⁵¹

The Discovery Tour was ambitiously designed for visitors spending at least two hours in the MHT (a minority), to give a nearly complete sense of the collections. The forty-six objects selected for the tour either contributed directly to the “growth of America” or were “associated with a famous American.” The idea behind the object-oriented tour was that visitors would have a “sense of purpose” that would keep them “‘hunting’ for the past” and lead them to make their own discoveries as well. If Smithsonian administrators accepted the survey and resultant report which suggested that MHT visitors did not know how to correctly approach museums, this tour answered with a plan to help them on their way. Fortunately the museum stopped

⁶⁵⁰ SI, RU 623, Box 7, Extension Service Folder, undated proposal for schools (ca. 1960).

⁶⁵¹ SI, RU 551, Box 1, Folder MHT Tours 1970; Folder MHT Signage 1969-1970; Folder Tours 1970. “Machines” led visitors to the “most important” American machines. “Treasures” included the flag, First Ladies gowns, Whitney’s cotton gin, Greenbough’s statues of Washington, Washington’s field tent and camp chest, Jefferson’s portable desk, John Jay’s robe, American coins and stamps. “American Heroes and Heroines” were mostly U.S. Presidents and First Ladies, with a few inventors and two artists (George Catlin and John James Audubon). “Famous Americans” offered a similar but slightly more diverse group and included one African American, George Washington Carver (on a postage stamp).

short of the visitor study's recommendation to advise people lunching in the cafeteria (a third of all visitors did this) about where to go after eating or what they "might discuss and think about... while at lunch." Overall the tours were part of a generation of efforts to get more people to actually study and learn from the didactic exhibits that had been created since the late 1940s. These efforts included audioguides, increased signage, tours, more explanatory displays, and the removal of hundreds of objects from public view. Still, the public persisted in museum-going for fun, and declined most of the guidance offered.⁶⁵²

The Corporation on Display

Each of the Teachers Guides listed references, almost all of them corporations or industry associations. For the Iron and Steel Exhibit guide, for example, the American Iron and Steel Institute and US Steel provided the information for teachers and students. From the guide they could learn that the iron industry made colonization of America possible, that one of the major reasons for the independence movement was American resistance to an English law that prohibited new steelworks in the colonies, and that the industry then played a decisive role in the Revolutionary War (the only negative in the display concerned the disastrous effects of foreign competition). Iron- and steelworkers did not appear in the script – a typical omission in the industrial exhibits.⁶⁵³

⁶⁵² SI, RU 584, Box 32, "Facility Use and Visitor Needs in The National Museum of History and Technology: A Preliminary Study," by Marilyn S. Cohen, Department of Psychological and Sociological Studies, Office of Museum Programs, Smithsonian Institution, November 1973.

⁶⁵³ SI, RU 623, Box 1, Teachers Guides.

Working within modest budgets, the need for new specimens during the 1950s led Smithsonian curators to the doors of big pharmaceutical, telecommunication, automobile, and chemical companies, as well as business and industrial associations. Many of these relationships went back decades, but now these corporations became much more directly involved in Smithsonian exhibitions, advising on content and layout and sometimes even creating entire exhibits themselves. Merck and Company, the drug manufacturer, presented “Vitamins for Health, Growth, and Life,” an exhibit featured in the Medical History Gallery. Visitors not only learned about vitamins generally but also discovered exactly which vitamins they should buy if they suffered from any of the symptoms described in a diagnostic display. Similarly, Ciba Pharmaceuticals donated an antihistamines display case, and the American Pharmaceutical Association; Parke, Davis & Company; Wyeth Laboratories; R.P. Scherer Corporation; Whital Tatum Company; Norwich Pharmaceutical; and several other drug companies contributed drugs, objects, and displays to the gallery.⁶⁵⁴

The Medical History Gallery illustrated the differences between modern, western medicine, which was depicted as universally successful, and all other methods of healing, which the displays disparaged. The exhibit led visitors from “superstition and quackery” (the evil eye, charms, offerings, zodiac stones, exorcisms, hypnosis, etc.) through the development of “regular” medicine in the west over the past few centuries, to modern pharmaceuticals. The “objective moves with the chronology from cultural into technical history,” and from “simple and

⁶⁵⁴ Smithsonian Institution, *Annual Report, 1956*, 38.

gruesomely picturesque tools of the past to the reassuringly sleek and complicated paraphernalia of the present,” wrote Robert Multhauf in a contemporary review.⁶⁵⁵

Merck also donated a model of a 16th century pharmacy, an early and important step toward the acceptance of “real” medical science. Another old apothecary, this one donated by Squibb (through the American Pharmaceutical Association) developed this evolution of drugs further, bringing the story into the 19th century. Several diseases were explored in detail – all of them former killers destroyed by modern vaccines or other drugs. The gallery omitted any contemporary diseases that defied science. A section about food and drug safety concluded similarly, in a completely safe present-day.

As in other exhibits, the imperfect past contrasted sharply with the perfect present. The “Pharmaceutical Manufacturing and Drug Industry” display demonstrated that drugs had not only achieved miracles of cure, they had been made completely safe. The Surgical Dressings Exhibit donated by Johnson and Johnson explained how dressings of “today” were produced by “modern high speed manufacturing techniques under rigid conditions of control.” The bandages are then “sterilized... to insure sterility” – the last step in the “evolution of the bandage.”⁶⁵⁶

Ken Arnold has argued that medical history galleries generally contain “little historical matter.” When they have, it is presented, “as at the Smithsonian’s medical exhibition, ‘to warn the public against the perils of quackery and the faults of folk

⁶⁵⁵ Robert P. Multhauf, “A Museum Case History: The Department of Science and Technology of the United States Museum of History and Technology,” *Technology and Culture* 6, no. 1, Museums of Technology, (Winter 1965): 58.

⁶⁵⁶ SI, RU 623, Box 5, Hall of Pharmaceutical History exhibit scripts.

medicine’.”⁶⁵⁷ More to the point, the exhibits set out to convince the public of the sound science of modern medicine and the benefits of newly available drugs. This also served as another reminder of the glorious future promised by American capitalism.

Much of the success of the exhibit modernization program, and later, the new exhibits in the MHT, depended on the assistance of corporations. The major automakers maintained their own auto specimens in the Arts and Industries Building and later in the MHT. Machinery specimens, from typewriters to tractors, likewise came from corporate donors. Bell Telephone generously helped design the Telephony exhibit, bestowed many of the displayed objects, and installed telephone handsets through which visitors could hear narration about what they saw in front of them.⁶⁵⁸

Following the *Smith v. Barlow* ruling in 1953, corporations increased their involvement with museums and public education. The court’s ruling had stressed that “there is now a widespread belief throughout the nation that free and vigorous nongovernmental institutions of learning are *vital to our democracy and the system of free enterprise* and that withdrawal of corporate authority to make such contributions within reasonable limits would seriously threaten their continuance [italics added].” In fact, “enlighten[ed]” corporations *should* make donations in order to “insure and strengthen the society which gives them existence.” The justification/assumption

⁶⁵⁷ Ken Arnold, “Time Heals: Making History in Medical Museums,” in *Making Histories in Museums*, ed. Gaynor Kavanaugh (New York, Leicester University Press, 1996), 21.

⁶⁵⁸ Smithsonian Institution, *Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution, 1957* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press), 18, 27, 34.

underlying this idea was that such philanthropy would “protect the wider corporate environment.”⁶⁵⁹

Logically, at least, this way of thinking bears similarity to the contemporary arguments for intellectuals to engage more with society, and to demands for museums to consider the public first, as articulated by prominent museologists like Theodore Low.⁶⁶⁰ These arguments cumulatively suggested that corporations, historians, intellectuals, researchers and curators all had a responsibility to the society that produced and supported them. Part of that responsibility was giving back in the form of scholarly work intended specifically for the public and, significantly, for the support of the system itself. Corporate philanthropic donations to museums thus represented a calculated attempt to bolster confidence in American capitalism.

A “marked shift in corporate contributions” followed the *Smith* decision, so that by the middle 1950s, corporations gave substantially larger sums, particularly to educational institutions. Within a few years companies had developed techniques to ensure their money went to institutions “whose objectives most closely paralleled their own.” Overall corporate contributions doubled between 1950 and 1960 (and doubled again from 1960 to 1970) and donations to “education” rose from 17 percent of contributions in 1950 to 35 percent by 1958. Donations to museums and other cultural institutions not engaged directly in research also doubled in this period, but

⁶⁵⁹ Sophia A. Muirhead, *Corporate Contributions: The View from 50 Years* (New York: The Conference Board, 1999), 13-15.

⁶⁶⁰ Theodore Low, *The Museum as Social Instrument* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1942), 29, 32, 37-46; Cohen, 370. Low writes, “The only way to meet people is at their own level and with what they want, not with what you want to give them.” He also advocates better in-museum restaurants, more kiosks, more benches, and more helpful staff – all methods adopted by the MHT.

remained small in comparison to education (though the two fields certainly overlapped in both corporate objectives and institutional practice).⁶⁶¹

In 1953 Taylor wrote an “editorial” (material intended to be adapted for editorials) for circulation in McGraw-Hill publications that called for corporate support for the proposed museum. Described as an immediate “national need,” the museum would serve to “relate our technological progress to the freedom which encouraged it, to spark the interests of youths in fields in which we are so seriously undermanned, and to restate the debt that we owe to our inventors, scientists, engineers, and industrial venturers.” The language is similar to the stated objectives of Du Pont’s *Cavalcade of America*, just as the two organizations both approached the past as almost exclusively the story of individual technological (and financial) accomplishment. The Smithsonian’s technological history “highlight[ed] the work of America’s greatest inventors” just as it “illustrate[d] and commemorate[d] the lives of ... renowned statesmen, scholars, scientists, writers, men of enterprise, and Indian leaders.”⁶⁶²

For those “organizations in industry” who contributed, Taylor offered an audience of eight million visitors a year. Curators were not completely unaware of the possibilities for improper advertising disguised as history, but they rationalized corporate involvement by suggesting that companies not selling directly to the public could have no ulterior motives for sponsorship.⁶⁶³

⁶⁶¹ Muirhead, 17, 20; Richard Eells, *Corporation Giving in a Free Society* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1973), 27-29; Marion Fremont-Smith, *Philanthropy and the Business Corporation* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1973), 10-11, 34-35, 51-52.

⁶⁶² SI, RU 551, Box 1, Folder MHT Preview of Exhibit Halls (1964).

⁶⁶³ SI, RU 276, Box 42, Folder 6, Manufacturing-Petroleum Exhibits, memo from P.W. Bishop to Frank Taylor, October 8, 1957. This memo suggests that curators discussed whether corporate contributors donated money or specimens with the expectation of an advertising benefit. In the case of

Almost as a rule, technology museums celebrate creative inventors and companies while excluding the workers whose lives were most directly affected by the machines. “Under capitalism, this emphasis is not accidental,” writes historian Lawrence Fitzgerald.⁶⁶⁴ H.R. Rubenstein agrees and further argues that American museums in particular have promoted the view that ‘business people are the movers the shapers of society and that workers are no more than interchangeable cogs...’⁶⁶⁵ Or, as Mike Wallace posits, neither workers nor their employers have much of a historical role in technology exhibits, since machines that seemingly move society forward on their own supplant both.⁶⁶⁶ At the Smithsonian, Frank Taylor suggested that, through the display of “objects on which American technical and economic leadership were founded,” the MHT would persuade “generations of Americans” that “diligence, perseverance, [...] and scientific and technical ingenuity were the foundations of U.S. cultural heritage.” And technological innovation would continue to provide an “ever-increasing standard of living” for Americans provided they continued to support the system as described.⁶⁶⁷

Exhibits modernization and the planned MHT offered opportunities for both institutional and direct advertising. For example, the American Petroleum Institute and other “leading concerns in the petroleum industry” coordinated with the Smithsonian on the proposed Hall of Petroleum (planned for the Arts and Industries Building in 1957 with the idea that it would move, more or less intact, to the MHT

Universal Oil discussed in this memo, Bishop and Taylor concluded that because a company did not sell directly to the public, their motives were pure.

⁶⁶⁴ Fitzgerald, 120.

⁶⁶⁵ H.R. Rubenstein, “Welcoming Workers,” *Museum News* 68 no.6 (1990), 39-41: 39.

⁶⁶⁶ Wallace, “Progress Talk,” 79-80.

⁶⁶⁷ Cohen, 330-331.

once opened).⁶⁶⁸ This presentation of the history of the petroleum industry in America emphasized technological advancements, new oil field discoveries, and evolving distribution methods. The history of oil corporations *per se* did not appear except in the wholly benevolent role of developers of new technologies. Models and displays donated by oil companies specifically credited those companies that sponsored the exhibit with each particular innovation that the Smithsonian verified as essential to the development of modern energy systems.⁶⁶⁹

While most people undoubtedly understood the exhibit as a straightforward presentation of advances in the technology used in the oil industry, it also effectively naturalized the role of corporations in energy. Corporations discovered the sources of the fossil fuel, devised the machines to obtain, refine, and distribute it, and then sold the energy to consumers for profit. Notably absent was the *history* that might have explained *how* this particular system came into existence. Instead, it simply was.

Indians and Women Lead the Way

The first two exhibit halls to undergo modernization, the popular Indians and First Ladies Halls, firmly established the priority of style over substance and provided the blueprint for future renovations. Gala events and extraordinary publicity also distinguished these re-openings from anything that had been done at the Smithsonian

⁶⁶⁸ Smithsonian Institution, *Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution, 1959* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1959); SI, RU 276, Box 42, Folder 6, Manufacturing-Petroleum Exhibits, memo from Frank Taylor to P.W. Bishop, July 21, 1959.

⁶⁶⁹ SI, RU 623, Box 4, Folder Petroleum Hall; RU 276, Box 40, Growth of the United States, Petrol Drilling Hall; Smithsonian Institution, *Annual Report, 1959*, 49.

before. Suddenly, the Smithsonian became host to national and international dignitaries, including the President and First Lady.

Anthropology had been at the forefront of modernization efforts under Ewers and Head Curator F. M. Setzler, who in 1947 submitted a request to redesign the Indians exhibits. Renovations were finally made in the mid-50s, following the increase in funding, but the content and organization was not substantially changed from the William Henry Holmes-designed exhibit of the 1890s. Ewers was more concerned with the exhibit's effectiveness and he surveyed visitors to find out how to improve the displays' communicability. In response to visitors' complaints that they could not figure out the logic or order to the Indian displays, nor gain any real sense of Indian cultures, Ewers reorganized the displays to make them chronological. To make them more interesting, he used dioramas and three-layered displays on wheel-mounted cases that could be repositioned to make room for seasonal and special exhibitions.⁶⁷⁰ The Indians remained in the Museum of Natural History, though it would be wrong to read too much into this as that building housed exhibits from various fields, especially anything done by the Department of Anthropology (but also including, at times, some of the "historical" and fine arts collections).⁶⁷¹ Even so, as planning for the modernization and new museum went forward, no one seems to have considered making the Native American halls a part of the American history exhibits.

⁶⁷⁰ Cohen, 104-105.

⁶⁷¹ Cohen, 128-129. The postwar proposal for a Museum of Man nearly led to the departure of, not only the Indian Hall, but the entire Department of Anthropology from the Natural History Museum. This would have led to the combination of the anthropology, American history, and science and technology collections. Instead, since money for new wings to the Natural History Museum appeared before money for the proposed Museum of Man, the anthropologists and the Indians stayed where they were.

In retrospect, the Indian scripts seem dated and confused. “Tribes” that peacefully “settled down on a reservation” were depicted as more advanced and more successful than those that, like the Apaches, “continued their hostility against the whites” and resisted being “pacified.” The “desert peoples” script describes how southwestern tribes first irrigated the arid region, building great canal systems to grow cotton, corn, beans and squash. Yet the scene depicts a primitive-looking group of Cocopa Indians “gathered around a sun shelter on the top of which are a large, red jar, used for storing drinking water, and a crude basketry corn-crib. In the center of the foreground a man is teaching his young son to use a bow and arrow...” A woman “kneels to clean grass seed for food.” Thus, nothing connects the content of the written text to the three dimensional display.

The exhibit script presents a history of American Indians, but avoids judgment by circumscribing and hiding the role of white Americans. For example, “Two centuries of warfare and epidemics of disease greatly reduced the populations of the Woodland tribes [of the eastern seaboard].” Thus, “two centuries” bear responsibility for the damage. And, by the mid-nineteenth century, Indians “were placed upon reservations” (Were they the miniature plastic toy Indians?) to “make room” for the expanding American nation.⁶⁷²

⁶⁷² Scholars Sharon Macdonald, Henrietta Lidchi, and David Jenkins have recently described how museums served, in colonialist nations, to demonstrate mastery of “the Other.” The enclosure of cultural difference in imperial museum cases buttressed “claims of the capacity to know and govern” and also helped to demonstrate the technological superiority of the western powers. Looking at the Smithsonian’s anthropological (and historical) displays, the exhibitors’ implicit claim to superiority over the temporally and spatially distant reveals a similar essential logic, suitable for American transcontinental and global hegemony. Sharon Macdonald, “Museums National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities,” *Museum and Society* 1, no. 1, 1-16: 3; Lidchi, “Poetics and Politics”; David Jenkins, “Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays: Museum Exhibitions and the Making of American Anthropology,” in *Journal for the Comparative Study of Society and History* 36, no. 2, 242-70.

Visitors could also hear the Indians – a benefit of the emphasis in the 1950s on “multimedia” exhibits. For the audio tour, musical selections from Library of Congress and Folkways recordings that supported the tone and content of the new exhibit were added to enhance the experience. Curators chose carefully so that the audio evidence fit the broader narrative. A song that sounded like the singer might be drunk was rejected because “we should do nothing to encourage disparaging associations.” They selected a record of an Eskimo speaking with laughter at the end to demonstrate the “Eskimos’ sense of humor,” which might help to humanize the mannequins behind the glass. For the Creek they liked the “Stomp Dance” partly because of its “similarity to Negro Spirituals” (though another, “more ‘Indian-ish’” version of the Stomp Dance was also considered). First and foremost, however, the selections could not undermine the distinctiveness of Native Americans (just as they were kept apart from the MHT/MAH). Thus a Tlingit “Paddling Song” had to be reconsidered because “it sounds too modern.”

Indians at the Smithsonian were specifically not “modern.” As they had been for many decades by that point, Indians were “pacified,” “removed,” “long gone,” and “extinct,” but decidedly not contemporary.⁶⁷³ And neither they nor African Americans belonged in the American history exhibits. During the 1950s exhibits modernization, one of the most extensive projects was the creation of the Growth of the United States exhibit. As late as 1966, a single glass case devoted to Indians *and* Negroes in Colonial America remained in the planning stages, allotted just \$50 in the annual budget that year. The attitude of Smithsonian curators toward African

⁶⁷³ SI, RU 623, Box 1, Folder Audio Tours – Scripts and Development, Indians of the Americas, Hall 11, audio tour script.

America history may best be summed up by a phrase used to describe, and explain the exhibit's neglect of, Africa's contributions to the development of the United States: "hard to document."⁶⁷⁴ This began to change only at the very end of the 1960s.

The popularity of the First Ladies Hall led Taylor to suggest it as the other experiment in modernization. Curator Margaret Brown wrote the script and worked with Benjamin Lawless to refurbish the display cases, which until then had nothing in them except generic mannequins. When President and Mrs. Eisenhower opened the new hall on May 24, 1955, the cream of Washington society saw individualized models of First Ladies set in their own contemporary White House rooms.⁶⁷⁵ At the gala event, Secretary Carmichael declared that the exhibit "symbolizes the growth of the country step by step from General Washington to General Eisenhower" (how, he did not explain).⁶⁷⁶ While this may have been pandering in the presence of the then current President-General, the Secretary's phrase encapsulated the philosophy of the new and newly refurbished American history exhibits. They linked contemporary America to its past – its mythic or heroic past – but simultaneously reaffirmed the tremendous progress that the nation had made by the 1950s.

The 10,000 square feet set aside for the hall in the planned MHT made it one of the larger exhibits and it remained one of the most popular as well. But despite the rhetoric, formal dresses worn by the wives and daughters of presidents elucidate very little about the history of the United States. Yet because Americans wanted to see the gowns, this hall featured prominently in modernization plans, tours, and planning for

⁶⁷⁴ SI, RU 623, Box 7, Arts and Industries North Hall exhibits modernization.

⁶⁷⁵ Cohen, 93-94.

⁶⁷⁶ Ruth Shumaker, "First Ladies On View at Smithsonian: Mrs. Eisenhower Launches Historic Exhibit of Gowns," *The Washington Post* (May 25, 1955).

the MHT. Thus even at the height of creating “didactic exhibits” that would instruct as much as entertain, curators followed responded to public demand, in this hall at least.

The script for the “First Ladies Hall Teachers Guide” tried to emphasize the democratic nature of the American political system by characterizing the well-dressed mannequins as the “wives of planters, of farmers, lawyers, legislators, tradesmen, statesmen, frontiersman, soldiers, and of teachers – men from all walks of life who were called to act as leaders of our nation.” The ornate gowns on display somehow supported common men who became great through their patriotic service.

The script for the first case, which held Martha Washington’s dress, read, “After the constitution was accepted by the states, people asked, ‘Who shall be our first president?’ They all shouted together, ‘George Washington.’” Consensus reigned throughout the exhibit, as did the focus on the President rather than the woman who wore the dress on display. The Polk script was typical in its method of instruction and its almost complete dismissal of the woman supposedly portrayed therein:

“The next president was James Polk. You already know something of the history of Polk’s time because your friend, Davy Crockett, was going off to Congress and also becoming involved in *the war to free Texas from Mexico* [italics added] when he lost his life in the battle of the Alamo. Another important thing that happened while Polk was President was the discovery of gold in California. I’m sure most of you have heard about the gold rush haven’t you? And the men who went out to prospect for gold called themselves the ‘49ers which is a great help in remembering the date of the rush and part of Tyler’s administration. This blue silk dress was the dress worn by Mrs. Polk.”⁶⁷⁷

The script also contains more than a note of elitism, contradicting the stated intention to portray the first families as common folk. When “backwoodsmen and

⁶⁷⁷ SI, RU 623, Box 1, Docent Service 1955-56, Docent tour scripts.

soldiers” followed Jackson into the white house, “can you imagine how Andrew Jackson’s beautiful niece, Emily Donelson, here on the far left in the case, might have felt if one of those rough dirty men had brushed against this lovely gold satin dress that she wore to her uncle’s inauguration?”

Only in the cases for Mrs. Hoover and Mrs. Roosevelt could one gather that the first ladies were real people themselves. The scripts praised both women for their own educational and professional accomplishments. This hall contrasts with an exhibit in the Arts and Industries Building called “Woman’s Rights.” Like the First Ladies, Susan B. Anthony stood in a case wearing a red shawl that also appeared in a photograph behind her. But the display also featured her inkstand, her newspaper, gavels from several conventions, and other objects related to the women’s rights movement, which served as evidence of her life’s work. No such tools accompanied the First Ladies (besides their dresses), who remained mere mannequins, even in their new surroundings. The refurbished exhibit placed the mannequins in recreated White House rooms, but made no other effort to contextualize the gowns or the First Ladies. This left the hall at odds with the other second floor exhibits in the MHT, which included Everyday Life in the American Past, Historic Americans, Growth of the United States, and American Costume (which at least considered the fashions of people outside of the Executive Mansion).⁶⁷⁸

History, American Style

⁶⁷⁸ SI, RU 190, Box 21, United States National Museum, Office of the Director, National Museum of History and Technology, Building Plans, 1965-1967.

Over the course of the 1950s, curators worked on a major new gallery, the “Growth of the United States.” This exhibit would be the centerpiece of the new MHT, telling the national story through its technical and material triumphs, “graphically communicat[ing] the character and contribution of each period.”⁶⁷⁹ Beginning with the first European settlements, tracing its colonial development as both “market” and “asylum,” through the “age of reason” and into the nineteenth century, objects on display ranged from Jefferson’s writing desk to a John Bull locomotive, a New England bedroom and Whitney’s cotton gin. Summarizing broadly, the late nineteenth century witnessed the “mechanization of American society,” the “emergence of the United States as a world power” and the “continued increase of the American democratic tradition.” In the planned “Growth” exhibit, and in a similar exhibit made up of much of the same material that was installed in the Arts and Industries Building in 1958, the mid-19th century marked a dramatic shift from a society that fostered individual achievement to a society dominated by “associations” (meaning incorporated organizations), which were in turn dominated by an industrial elite. The recent past would depict the “full force of the scientific revolution in American life, exemplified by recent advance in electronics, atomic power, biological research and the investigation of outer space.”⁶⁸⁰ Divided by type of industry, the exhibits again focused mainly on the technological progress of each era. For example, the Chemical Industries exhibit in the twentieth century section displayed objects such as aluminum from ALCOA and several examples of nylon

⁶⁷⁹ Cohen, 221, 284-285.

⁶⁸⁰ SI, RU 623, Box 8, Arts and Industries North Hall, Script for North Hall; Box 7, no folder, Growth of the United States scripts; Box 1, Photographs of Exhibits – Lists MHT, Peter C. Welsh memo to Frank Taylor, September 13, 1962.

donated by Du Pont (the familiar story of American history told through Du Pont research and development).

If political and cultural history were not ignored, they also were not treated with much insight. The Civil War exhibit epitomized the failure to ask any really difficult historical questions. “Initially a conflict of governmental activities,” read the script, “[the war] changed the American way of life – North and South.” At the end of the war, “the United States became a nation freed of the scourge of slavery.” Either the war itself acted to “change” the “way of life” or something just happened that cleansed the nation of its great sin. But no mention is made of responsibility or guilt (or even of victory and defeat). The exhibit might not offer much in the way of educative value, but it would at least be inoffensive. Secretary Carmichael stressed the need to “have careful regard for the sensitivity of our visitors – from schoolchildren to Congressmen,” and to avoid controversial displays whenever possible. As an example of how to do this, he suggested the figures representing the Civil War era might be confined to famous congressmen.⁶⁸¹

In contrast, a women’s history section celebrated individuals who dedicated their lives to the cause of women’s rights, demonstrating that, similar to the Freedom Train, the Smithsonian felt more comfortable with the issue of equal rights for women than with slavery and the Civil War. Mannequins of suffragists, nurses, professionals, and athletes wore the fashions that, in this story, helped women achieve “equality.” By 1945 women had “successfully competed with men in nearly every endeavor, from the factory to the military.” As in the First Ladies Hall, Eleanor Roosevelt stands here as the paragon of feminine achievement, a “symbol of

⁶⁸¹ SI, RU 623, Box 8, Historic Americans Hall, Memorandum by John C. Ewers, June 6, 1958.

women's responsibility in a mechanized world."⁶⁸² Perhaps the key difference was that these symbols of women's equality were contained within the glass cases, whereas a real history of the Civil War, necessarily replete with controversy, would inevitably spill out of the museum and create a political mess.

Other exhibit halls dealt with American history in a variety of different ways. "Power," suggested Frank Taylor, was the real key to American abundance and hegemony. Thus planning for a "Hall of Power" began in 1952. In addition to creating the "abundance of goods and the high standard of living which we enjoy," American power surpluses in the 1950s were "proving to be a solid material support for our campaign to win friends around the world."⁶⁸³ The dual meaning of the word power in both the hall's title and Taylor's communications seems to have elicited no further comments, but it is interesting that the National Museum decided at this particular moment in time to build a Hall of Power that would "explain" American success. Another power exhibit, "Atoms for Peace," made a brief stopover at the Smithsonian during the mid-fifties. Secretary Carmichael opened the exhibit at ten o'clock in the morning on July 30, 1956 after he decided to follow Frank Taylor's suggestion to downgrade the event from the now typical evening gala opening. Evidently the exhibit, created by the Atomic Energy Commission, fell far below the Smithsonian's rapidly rising standards, and senior staff wanted to disassociate the Institution from this amateurish "traveling exhibit."

The new exhibits related American history as the story of technological progress and the growth of industry, but they also presented the nation's development

⁶⁸² SI, RU 279, Box 6, Folder 7, Teachers' Aids, Women's History Hall.

⁶⁸³ SI, RU 623, Box 7, no folder, Memo from Frank Taylor to Dr. Herbert Freidmann, Dec. 18, 1952, Re: Exhibits Modernization, with attached "justification" for Power Exhibit Hall.

through the “History of the Armed Forces.”⁶⁸⁴ Or, more accurately, the exhibit presented the history of a nation of citizen-soldiers. This hall, at 33,000 square feet one of the largest when it moved to the MHT in 1965, consisted of uniforms, weapons, flags, ship models, maps, as well as numerous personal effects of military heroes, from George Washington’s epaulets to General Philip Sheridan’s horse. The “main attraction,” however, was the gunboat *Philadelphia*, part of the American fleet commanded by Benedict Arnold at the Battle of Valcour Island in 1776. One glass case near the boat memorialized the crew and another remembered the battle. In spirit and substance the *Philadelphia* display resembled an older *U.S.S. Maine* display from the Hall of Naval History in the Arts and Industries Building. The *Maine* was also prominently featured and framed the military adventures of the turn of the century within the contextual theme of sacrifice.

Entering the hall, unless immediately exiting again, visitors were more or less confined to the route that led from the colonial era through the present.⁶⁸⁵ This followed the museum-wide effort to reconfigure exhibit layouts so that visitors would “progress along a generally chronological path,” rather than moving randomly from one display case to another.⁶⁸⁶ The tour through the hall offered a military explanation of American development and an education designed to help visitors “better appreciate the contribution” of the military.⁶⁸⁷ The first panel depicted the earliest English colonists, “more than half” of whom were soldiers, who “came

⁶⁸⁴ SI, RU 623, Military History, News Release, undated, announcing the opening of the exhibit on June 12, 1958. Just as corporations helped to create their relevant exhibits, the Department of the Army advised and constructed dioramas for the military history hall.

⁶⁸⁵ SI, RU 276, Box 86, Folder 7, Hall of Armed Forces History – General – 1958-1966, “Working Floor Plan”; RU 190, Box 21, Outline of Requirements – MHT, March 1958. The First Ladies Hall, in contrast, used 10,000 square feet. .

⁶⁸⁶ SI, RU 276, Box 40, Everyday Life in the American Past, 1965-73, conceptual script for the exhibit.

⁶⁸⁷ SI, RU 276, Box 86, Hall of Armed Forces – General, 1958-1966, “Preliminary Statement.”

equipped to hold their ground against Spaniard or Indian.” An illustration depicted these colonist-soldiers under attack by larger and more muscular Indians. America grew along with its armed forces, through the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars, the “development” of the west (where the “Army took the lead in exploring” and held the new ground by force “as the westward streams grew broader and the treaties made with the Indians were ruthlessly violated”), “new frontiers” in the Philippines, Hawaii, China, and Cuba (Roughriders are present in this panel; Black soldiers are not), and into the global conflicts of the twentieth century. The Wright brothers “opened a vast new horizon for military activity” just two display cases away from the mushroom cloud over Hiroshima, which was the largest photograph in the World War II display. The bomb (always singular, though dropped on two different cities) “brought the war in the Pacific to an end.” For the Armed Forces, the bomb marked the “completion of another phase of its continuing mission to defend the United States” (a proposed exhibit on Hiroshima in 1970 was disapproved because Americans, then at war in Vietnam, “are really a peace loving people and the Hiroshima exhibit is too gruesome for us to expose to the general public”).⁶⁸⁸ Finally came contemporary “Free World Leadership,” which featured a rifle next to a map of Korea of identical length, and “New Horizons,” a display of the nuclear missiles currently deployed or under development. The exhibit showed how the military also engaged in generally less destructive work, controlling the nation’s rivers and developing its natural resources. When Americans “needed aid or disaster struck, the

⁶⁸⁸ SI, RU 276, Box 44, Political History (1959-60, 1964, 1968-70), Ladd E. Hamilton to Lloyd E. Herman, April 16, 1970.

Army was there to help,” and during the Depression, the Army even organized the CCC camps.

This long story of the armed forces emphasized that throughout American history the military had been a dynamic and essential force in the nation’s development. But the exhibit ended with propaganda for the present and future, which threatened to make a disastrous break with the attractively displayed militarized past. Now the public was making a mistake by demanding “heavy cuts” and forcing the armed services to “return almost to peacetime strength with a resultant loss of combat effectiveness.” This at a time when the communists had, “despite the aid we had given them during their fight with Germany and Japan,” launched numerous assaults against democracies. In Korea, the United States armed forces had been “rushed into the breach “ to “save the free peoples of the world,” but with budget cuts, who knew what might happen in the future.⁶⁸⁹

A Museum for the Age

In the early 1950s, a Smithsonian brochure described the institution’s work thus: “The importance of this curatorial task lies in the fact that these specimens, many of them unique, enable the American people of today to study and know their country’s past, to apply the experience of the past to the problems of the present, and to substantiate their thinking concerning the future with facts instead of fancies.”⁶⁹⁰

“Patriotism is a word that is sometimes misused,” said Secretary Carmichael shortly

⁶⁸⁹ SI, RU 623, Box 3, Folder Armed Forces history.

⁶⁹⁰ SI, Accession T90006, Box 8, SI – Description of Its Work, 1947, 1950, 1951, “The Smithsonian Institution: A Description of Its Work,” January 1951.

thereafter, “but who can doubt that any American citizen becomes more truly patriotic when he has knowledge of the basic natural resources of his country and of how these resources have been and are now being used in the growth and maintenance of our modern life?”⁶⁹¹

The fast-growing Smithsonian of the 1950s represented American history in celebratory fashion. It also promoted a pro-corporate and pro-military agenda. In doing so, curators, administrators, and designers joined their political, corporate and military liaisons in accepting the dominant ideology of postwar America. The new version of history that visitors came to see at their renovated national museum sought to legitimate a growing corporate hegemony based at least in part on the corporation’s historical naturalization (and historical benevolence). As Mike Wallace has written about museums in general (following Gramsci), the “unexamined assumptions undergird the legitimacy of a social system...far more effectively than crude ideological cudgeling.”⁶⁹²

Generalizing about the role and position of museums in American society, Ivan Karp distinguishes between political society and civil society, arguing that museums are institutions of the latter. The Smithsonian, though, has a special relationship to the national state, as illustrated, not only by its patriotic, nationalistic content, but also by its location between the Washington Monument, the White House, and the Capitol – not to mention the high level of involvement in its affairs by congress and other members of the political and financial elite. Thus the Smithsonian wields more persuasive power than most other institutions of civil society, even if this

⁶⁹¹ RU 623, Box 1, MHT, News Release, October 11, 1961.

⁶⁹² Wallace, 83.

power is confined to the realms of ideas and history. While these institutions can either “support or resist definitions imposed by the more coercive organs of the state,” in the emergent Smithsonian of the 1950s, very little ambiguity existed.⁶⁹³

Of the many sources of history offered to the American public in the 1950s, the Smithsonian most clearly represents the State, its authority and its interests, as it narrowly defined them. Moreover, the very limited perspective offered to postwar Smithsonian visitors represented only a small fraction of American history, which was the story that the museum purported to tell. From the elected officials and CEOs that served on the Board of Regents, to the curators linked to corporate research, many of those involved in (re)presenting the past had personal connections with the military-industrial system that the exhibits implicitly promoted. More important, the museum constructed and displayed a distinct national history for American citizens to see and comprehend as their own unique (and superior) heritage. And to the rest of the world, the MHT staked the American claim to global leadership.

However, in spite of curators and designers’ efforts to the contrary, visitors to museums can, to some extent, pick and choose what they want to see – disrupting the limited view offered to them. Curators did what they could to make visitors follow the designated routes (constructing temporary walls, offering guided and self-guided tours, and establishing information desks and signs), but no one could force visitors to stop and read every panel or see every exhibit. While to a certain extent this suggests visitors’ empowerment, it also increases the museum’s flexibility to disseminate ideas. In other words, when television viewers lose interest in *Cavalcade of America* or *You Are There*, they turn the program off completely, but at the museum, they can

⁶⁹³ Karp, 4-5.

turn their gaze elsewhere without exiting the building. The bored or dissatisfied visitor has several options short of rejecting the museum outright, and if there is any ideological consistency to the various displays, the lessons may still get through. Once they have made the decision to enter the building, visitors are unlikely to reject the exhibits completely. After all, it is the flexibility of the system that makes hegemonic power so enduring.

Conclusions

Problems with Popular Representations of the Past

When we venture into the past we engage in a sort of time travel. One of the sacred myths of science fiction is that time travelers can alter the course of history, but only in unpredictable ways. When we venture into the past through “authentic” historical dramas like *Cavalcade of America*, or visit the “real” historical objects displayed at the Museum of American History, the point is rather different. We can in these cases travel through time, but we never risk altering the natural flow of American history – not because we are imperceptible, but because no alternative history seems possible. Every detail – the dress, the buttons, the clocks, the rifles – is precisely correct, leaving little space for imagining alternate pasts or interpretations. It follows then that no alternative to the present can exist (unless one is willing and able to discard this past).⁶⁹⁴ From this perspective the past looks different from the present, to be sure, but people, institutions, and structures are fundamentally the same across the centuries, and what was true in another time is equally true for the present. The supposition that truth never changes is what so heavily weights popular history with meaning. In this formula, followed in each of the cases profiled in this dissertation, the power to define the past clearly amounts to the power to define the present because the two are portrayed as essentially the same. Thus the need in the 1960s for a break with this limited past: a rupture from the narrowly defined heritage of the previous decade. As for “authenticity,” the attention to historical detail, and

⁶⁹⁴ Lowenthal notes how “sham accuracy” or “verisimilitude” in historical representations like those of heritage sites or Disney films can conceal “major bias.”

the insistence on “facts” – these things that elicited critical praise for representing good *history* on *Cavalcade* and *You Are There* – in the end they are merely the means by which we see just how easy it is to travel into the past – or to link the past with the present. On the other hand, historical distance and contexts are extremely difficult to imagine, *especially* when our senses are confronted with “authentic” recreations.

Lack of distance is one kind of problem; choosing to examine only the events that support a particular argument is another (one not confined merely to *popular* history). Abraham Polonsky later said of *You Are There*, “We were making history comprehensible in terms of what we thought was significant at that time – without distorting history to do it!” He further defended the series, explaining, “The show was deliberately political – but it was not political propaganda. (...) In propaganda you deliberately and consciously have a message that you want people to understand and for which you find illustrations. What we did was political interpretation. And in the interpretation you try to make it dramatically flow out of the natural historical conflict.”⁶⁹⁵ Likely, none of the authors of these popular histories thought of what they were doing as propaganda, or as distortions of history. Yet each, in their own way, achieved both ends.

In some sense, all of the cases studied in this dissertation succeeded only for a limited time, which coincided with the particular relationship between mid-century Americans and the past. By the 1960s, their time had clearly passed. The Smithsonian Museum of American History and the History Book Club both continue to operate, but their radically changed forms support the conclusion that all of these

⁶⁹⁵ Quoted in Schultheiss, “A Season of Fear,” 13.

efforts had their moment – and could only have had their moment – in the earlier period.

The HBC is now part of a conglomerate of 40 book clubs run by “the premier direct marketer of general interest and specialty book clubs.”⁶⁹⁶ History has been commercialized and absorbed into the mass of books and other consumer products sold by this conglomerate. Besides the discounted prices, the primary draw is the “vast selection” available to subscribers (hardly a benefit in a world of unlimited sources). Direct mail advertisements emphasize the diversity of subjects, but feature presumably popular topics most prominently. The front cover of a fall 2008 mailer highlighted books on Abraham Lincoln, the Continental Army at Valley Forge, Hitler, the “saints, scoundrels, and other characters” of the Bible, and Richard Nixon: all familiar “historical” subjects.⁶⁹⁷ Original historical interpretations can be found within the cornucopia of new titles, but for the most part, the club’s selections represent an attempt to appeal to popular historical memory.

The MAH has better balanced historical scholarship with appeals to popular memory. Beginning in the 1970s, the museum gradually incorporated more critical history, as well as a much broader understanding of who belongs in the national story. Thus exhibits reflect trends in the historical profession toward social, cultural, and subaltern history, but they also cover just enough of everything that different types of

⁶⁹⁶ <http://www.historybookclub.com>, accessed February 5, 2009.

⁶⁹⁷ History Book Club advertising catalog no. HBC08100W-01 (Indianapolis: Direct Brands, Inc., 2008). The books are: Harold Holzer, *Lincoln President Elect: Abraham Lincoln and the Great Secession Winter, 1860-1861* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008); Paul Lockhardt, *The Drillmaster of Valley Forge: The Baron de Steuben and the Making of the American Army* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008); Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 2008); Richard R. Losch, *All the People in the Bible: An A-Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdsman Publishing, 2008); Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise and of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008).

visitors would insist upon seeing. Vietnam War memorabilia, the lunch counter from the first sit-in in Greensboro, Japanese American's letters from World War II internment camps, race cars, locomotives – each display is offered as a concession to a particular subset of the population. Catering to contemporary tastes for an inclusive history in which everyone can find some part of a usable past, the museum sacrificed coherent narrative to gain the approval of diverse audiences.

The museum reopened in November 2008 after a two-year renovation project. The main entrance, where the Star Spangled Banner once hung, vertically, has been redone with a wavy, horizontal, metallic replica in place of the flag. Behind the replica, in a quiet (except for the sound of exploding shells, kept at a *pianissimo* volume), darkened hall, the real flag is now laid out on a slight incline, behind a large glass window. Benches line the wall opposite, so that visitors may sit and contemplate the oversized banner. It appears that the long desired reverent atmosphere has finally been achieved. Exiting the hall, audio recordings of different versions of the anthem play in a continuous loop. The last of the few explanatory signs begins, “The Star Spangled Banner is a National Treasure.” The historical exhortation to patriotic reverence has remained.

The Past in the Present, Then, Later, and Now

“Tradition in America had to be labored,” wrote Henry Steele Commager, “for it was not born into the young.” Precisely because the American past “could not be absorbed from childhood on in the art and architecture of every town and village, in song and story and nursery rhyme, in novel and history, in the names of streets and

squares and town,” it had to be invented, “kept up to date,” and transmitted via other, less organic means.⁶⁹⁸ In the middle decades of the 20th century, the American public increasingly learned history through new mass communication technologies. Even at the Smithsonian (where Frank Taylor observed, “Of the many media now employed for the popular interpretation of history, science, and art, the museum remains unique in its ability to show the public actual objects illustrative of these fields”), at mid-century the curators sought to “exploit the potentialities” of exciting new methods of display, especially new media.⁶⁹⁹

Overwhelmingly, the currents between the public and the past were regulated by the powerful and resourceful, especially corporate America. Much of capital’s attempt to define the heritage of contemporary Americans consisted of limiting the more democratic elements in public history. Lamot du Pont spoke frequently of a need to distinguish between “democracy,” a term he disliked and thought inappropriate, and “republic,” which “is used in our Constitution.”⁷⁰⁰ Du Pont’s *Cavalcade* reflected the family’s perspective (Irénée’s feelings toward democracy were even more negative than Lamot’s⁷⁰¹) that the potential force of popular movements needed to be contained, and the series’ historical lessons tried to limit awareness of such disruptions to hierarchy in the past.⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁸ Henry Steele Commager, “The Search for a Usable Past,” 23, in *The Search for a Usable Past and Other Essays in Historiography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 3-27.

⁶⁹⁹ SI, RU 623, Box 8, Folder “Museum Philosophy,” Frank Taylor to John C. Ewers, “Thoughts Regarding Museum Standards,” April 5, 1958.

⁷⁰⁰ HL, Accession 1662, Box 54, Folder “NAM 6/40-12/40,” Lamot du Pont to H.W. Prentis, Jr., President of the National Association of Manufacturers, September 24, 1940.

⁷⁰¹ Colby, 344-345.

⁷⁰² Thomas Cochran notes that, “because of American traditions,” business faced “a particular vulnerability to democratic attack.” Thomas Cochran, *The Uses of History* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1973), 25.

However, by the late 1950s, American society began to move in a different direction. A significant number of people actively sought to increase democratic participation. When they looked at the contemporary United States they saw a need for change, not continuity. If they looked to the past at all, they looked beyond the narrowly conceived history presented by our sponsors to the mostly unexplored, usable but still untapped histories of the groups and individuals left out of the American “cavalcade.” Only a few glimpses of this kind of history appear anywhere in these five cases. The first History Book Club board selected some neo-progressive histories that emphasized class conflict in American history, but these contained little working class, labor, or social history of the kind that gained stature in the profession in the 1960s. *You Are There* went a little further, occasionally covering African American history and culture, social movements, and ordinary folk in the midst of great events. Of the five cases studied, these two ventures, at least in their original forms, persisted for the shortest lengths of time. Both succumbed to commercial pressures quickly. The other three cases – Du Pont’s *Cavalcade*, the Smithsonian, and the Freedom Train – made no effort to enlarge the social picture of American history, until the Smithsonian began to do so at the close of the 1960s. And then, the newfound past at the museum mythologized previously forgotten Americans more than it historicized them.

Similarly, CBS brought *You Are There* back in 1971 as a more inclusive and more sentimentalized story of the American past than its first incarnation. For example, an episode on the Underground Railroad featured a saintly Harriet Tubman, accompanied by maudlin music, heroically leading slaves to freedom. Close ups of

her face freeze her expressions as if she stopped to pose for a memorial statue, which in the end, is exactly what the episode was. Walter Bernstein wrote a few episodes for the series (perhaps out of a sense of nostalgic gratitude) but the shows were, in his words, “no good.” The producers were “frightened at the very idea that you might deal with conflict.” Bernstein thought “the irony was that during this supposedly liberated time when they could have been more daring – they weren’t. They were scared to death.”⁷⁰³ Perhaps they recognized, on some level, that the age of controlled historical perspectives had passed. The challenging subjects confronted by the original *You Are There* would be too contested in the more democratic society that emerged in the 1960s. In that environment, CBS risked inciting protest or losing viewers if the series contended with complex, controversial subjects and irresolvable moral dilemmas.

In 1969, Martin Marty wrote, “At times in history people sense their place in a stream of events; the past speaks clearly and is obviously useful.” However, “At other times they feel cut off.”⁷⁰⁴ The first situation describes the early postwar period, when the disruptions caused by depression and war led, not to a rupture with the past, but to searches for a past that could provide some answers to contemporary questions. That changed by the time that Marty described his contemporaries as “cut off” from the past. By then, many Americans either rejected history completely or sought to rewrite it to such an extent that the old past was no longer recognizable.

People have often sought to reinterpret the past to suit new needs and objectives, but a significant change in approach differentiates the searches for a

⁷⁰³ Quoted in Schultheiss, “A Season of Fear: Abraham Polonsky, *You Are There*, and the Blacklist,” in Polonsky, *Teleplays*, 34n.

⁷⁰⁴ Martin E. Marty, *The Search for a Usable Future* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 12.

usable past in the 1940s and 50s from those of the mid-1960s onward. The approach of the earlier period was firmly rooted in existing and acknowledged traditions, whether the reimagined past challenged older interpretations or followed a more conservative line. In contrast, the later historical revisions exploded those traditions – or ignored them while looking for usable pasts in alternative communities, among outsider groups both domestic and international. Despite some important differences between them, the interpretations of history expressed in the preceding chapters all maintained their place in the western tradition, even while they attempted to take custody of that heritage.

Most of the popular histories prominent in postwar American life depicted the contemporary United States as the “end of history,” to borrow a later phrase. Later, as Cold War aims became muddled, and numerous and previously submerged domestic tensions boiled to the surface, that storyline contained too many noticeable discrepancies to be left alone. When, in 1995, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich complained that from the settlement of Jamestown until about 1965 “there was one continuous civilization built around a set of commonly accepted legal and cultural principles,” he, in a sense, merely overstated his case about a decline from tradition.⁷⁰⁵ Protestors challenged the official history that accompanied the Freedom Train, DeVoto’s “boys” scouted for books that would make readers think critically about American history, and *You Are There* brought the sorrier aspects of the past to light, but they all worked from similar assumptions about the relevance of the nation’s traditions and the basic truth of its founding principles. The efforts to link

⁷⁰⁵ Mary Caputi, *A Kinder, Gentler America: Melancholia and the Mythical 1950s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 8.

present to past in the postwar era were characterized by the belief that the present *was* linked to the past. Because of that, what happened in the past (which depended on who defined it) suggested particular possibilities in the present.

In the early sixties, “fomented in part by the very contradiction between history portrayed and the history lived,” a new generation just coming of age still referenced Jefferson’s words, but only to point out the disconnect between the nation’s foundational myths and reality.⁷⁰⁶ Perhaps, for the young children who watched *Cavalcade* on television in the 1950s, and matured in the 1960s, the lessons that stressed America’s promises of fairness, equality, and opportunity, along with obligations of participation and citizenship, encouraged exactly the kind of political and social disruptions Du Pont hoped to discourage. On the other hand, later conservative efforts that tried to reawaken the belief in America’s mythic past, which often idealized the 1950s, harkened back to the popular histories produced during that decade which celebrated American history as a victory – a victory that could only be lost, but not improved upon.

In a speech in January 1974, Ronald Reagan invoked the past to remind Americans of their nation’s destiny as a “shining city upon a hill.” Reagan used several historical examples in that speech, each time introducing it with phrases like these: “I confess, I never researched or made an effort to verify it. Perhaps it is only legend.”⁷⁰⁷ Myth and history were interchangeable for Reagan; he saw no reason to try to sort them out. Before the 2009 presidential inauguration, a group of atheists

⁷⁰⁶ Harvey Kaye, *Why Do Ruling Classes Fear History? And Other Questions* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1997), 20; Students for a Democratic Society, “Port Huron Statement,” June 15, 1962.

⁷⁰⁷ Ronald Reagan, “The Shining City Upon a Hill,” Delivered to the First Conservative Political Action Conference, January 25, 1974, available at http://reagan2020.us/speeches/City_Upon_A_Hill.asp, accessed February 5, 2009.

who wanted Barack Obama to take the presidential oath of office without the words “so help me God” filed a lawsuit to that effect. Supporters of the status quo argued that abandoning or altering the tradition portended disaster, even though they knew that the historical evidence suggested that not every president – and certainly not George Washington – said those four controversial words. But heritage mattered more than history. Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott said, “When people are forced to turn away from their previously acknowledged heritage, there begins the unraveling of the society.”⁷⁰⁸ Undoubtedly, many of those Americans who feel some connection to the past view the relationship in similar terms.

As this dissertation has demonstrated, popular encounters with the past tend toward myth, iconography, and memory rather than history. Even during a period of relatively high interest in the past, most Americans learned about history through mediums that readily sacrificed historical approaches in favor of more popular appeals. Nevertheless, postwar Americans did interact with history in many ways, and we have seen how, through some of the most popular mediators of historical information, politics, ideology, religion, and economics mixed with and distorted public history.

Contemporary American society is more inclusive, both in the past and the present, but iconographic or mythic history continues to retain a prominent place in collective memory. It may now be even more difficult to challenge popular historical memory than during the early postwar period – not in spite of, but because of increased possibilities for communication. DeVoto’s wonder at the great

⁷⁰⁸ Dan Zak, “In the Beginning: The Oath Is a President's First Act, But Everyone's Not on the Same Page,” *The Washington Post*, January 18, 2009.

proliferation of history in 1947 led him into his failed effort to provide scholarly guidance. Today there are millions more sources of information (and misinformation) about the past, relatively few of which hail from academic or other non-commercial sources. Even if something approaching history makes it onto the public's radar, it is unlikely to reach more than a small fraction of the population, and it is likely to make every effort to avoid controversy by declining to upset existing popular historical memories. The Smithsonian history exhibits certainly error on the safe side of controversy (the *Enola Gay* exception proves the rule), but the best example of this might be the documentaries of Ken Burns.⁷⁰⁹ Taking the five cases examined in this dissertation as representative of the way that history reached the public in the mid-20th century, and then looking at Burns's films, and the contemporary HBC and MAH as representative of current mediators in that relationship, it is clear that the impetus has shifted from elite direction to popular or commercial demand.

Having brushed aside the guidance offered by postwar elites who tried to focus attention on certain aspects of history, the American public lacks both mediators and connections with the past. For all of their limitations, at least a possibility of communicating ideas to the people existed in each of the five historical enterprises, which was precisely what made them exciting to the people involved. Though flawed and heavily politicized, postwar popular histories carried some earlier traditions through a tumultuous period and helped preserve a sense of the past in American society. Some apparent interest from the public was necessary, but the

⁷⁰⁹ Gary Edgerton, "Mediating Thomas Jefferson: Ken Burns as Popular Historian," in *Television Histories: Shaping Collective Memory in the Media Age*, ed. Gary R. Edgerton and Peter C. Rollins (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 157-58.

various methods of communication (their limitations as much as their capabilities) that allowed for the promulgation of these ideas played the key role. Today, just as the Freedom Train would no longer be able to visit but a small proportion of the communities where it stopped 60 years ago, so no effort to communicate ideas about history could now hope to speak to as large an audience, proportionally, as these “historians” sought to persuade.

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Abbreviations used for archival collections:

HL Hagley Library, Wilmington, DE
LC Library of Congress, Washington, DC
NARA National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD
NYPL New York Public Library, Performing Arts Library, New York, NY
BDV Bernard DeVoto Collection at Stanford University Library, Palo Alto, CA
WHS Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI

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