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The Formation, Implementation, and Presentation of NSC 68 and its Role in Creating America’s Cold War Doctrine
by Joseph Berman

The Cold War was just beginning to take shape. After the failed Yalta and Potsdam conferences in 1945, it became clear that though World War II was coming to an end, another international conflict was just beginning. The Soviet Union, which had agreed to allow free elections in newly liberated Eastern European countries, was instead illegally placing Communist puppet regimes into power. A new United States foreign policy would have to be formulated and implemented in this new post World War environment.\[1\]

This new foreign policy had to take into account the state of turmoil present in Europe and Japan, while dealing with the nearly hegemonic power that the Soviet Union was now wielding in Eastern Europe. It became clear to President Truman that the USSR would be a major player and rival on the international scene. The Soviet Union’s communist beliefs, aggressive post war behaviors and expansionist foreign policy practices were of major concern to the United States. American fear of Soviet aggression was further heightened after the USSR successfully tested a nuclear weapon in 1949. Prior to this, nuclear supremacy was an effective and unequaled source of leverage for the United States.

To deal with this new threat, President Truman commissioned a panel, led by the State Department’s Director of Policy Planning Division Paul Nitze, to devise a new strategy for American foreign policy. This council’s analysis and study culminated with the publication of National Security Council Report 68 (NSC 68). The report advocated a policy of containment through conventional and nuclear military expansion as well as through increased foreign financial and military aid to US western allies. Thus, by defining the role of the US in the post war world, by painting the Soviets as monstrously efficient and bent purely on our destruction, and by focusing on a peacetime conventional military buildup, NSC 68 was able to shape US Cold War foreign policy.\[2\]

Furthermore, there were fears that Soviet territorial advances, which were considered to be inevitable, would lead to a domino effect on other countries in the region.\[4\] Kennan believed that intrinsic to Soviet communist ideology was a deep seeded, interwoven xenophobia. Russian history was filled with foreign powers invading from the Western front. Kennan was especially keen to the neuroses of the Soviet Union. In his “Long Telegram,” he stated that, "At the bottom of the Kremlin's neurotic view of world affairs is traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity,” which he argued could never be rectified.\[5\] The USSR, therefore, was incapable of adhering to agreements such as the Potsdam and Yalta agreements, which called for free elections in newly liberated countries, and would without a doubt seek to spread its ideologies to other countries.\[6\] This began with the creation of friendly regimes and governments in Eastern Europe. Next it was posited that the USSR would use these new “allies” as a staging ground for attacks on Western Europe. Following establishment of hegemony over Western Europe, the Soviet Union could begin an aerial campaign on the British Isles.\[7\] Finally, the Soviet Union would be able to stage a full attack on the continental United States. This “domino” effect had to be avoided at all costs and became the primary objective for NSC 68. As the sole superpower in
the Western world, the United States was responsible for buttressing its own, as well as its allies’ strength.

Thus, NSC 68 called for three main changes in policy. The first recommendation was that the United States increase the number and strength of its nuclear weapons. After the Soviet Union successfully tested its first nuclear weapon in 1949, the major United States advantage of nuclear retaliation ceased to exist. Every nuclear threat by the United States could now be met by a mutually assured nuclear attack by the Soviet Union. It was hypothesized by the NSC 68 commission that by 1954, the USSR would have the capability to strike major vital centers in the United States with nuclear weapons. Therefore, it was recommended that the US speed up research and creation of a thermonuclear weapon, more commonly known as a “Hydrogen bomb.” This would create, as previously quoted by Dean Acheson, a “situation of strength” for the United States and would allow the United States to pressure the Soviet Union into making concessions. If, on the other hand, the Soviet Union achieved thermonuclear weapons first, the opposite situation would occur with the Soviet Union gaining the upper hand and being able to dictate terms of negotiation.

Another aspect of combating possible nuclear attack was the continued construction of an air defense and early warning system. Weapon delivery systems of the time required an airplane to physically drop the bomb on its target. An advanced well-developed air defense system that blanketed the coasts of the United States could act as a capable deterrent against Soviet nuclear aggression.

The next suggestion that the commission made was for the buildup of the conventional armed forces. In 1950, the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the Soviet Union military to be large enough to overrun Western Europe should a war break out. To counteract the disparity in the sizes of the armed forces, the US had relied on the threat of nuclear obliteration to maintain an upper hand when dealing with the Soviet Union. This military advantage was nixed upon the successful trial of a Soviet nuclear weapon. It was decided that the only way to tip the military scales back in America’s favor was to expand and build up conventional military forces to a comparable size with the Soviet Union. This would require a large expansion of the defense budget from a post World War II low of 9 billion dollars in 1948. Nitze himself states that he estimated the budget would have to be raised to approximately 40 billion dollars. As our nuclear advantage continued to dissipate, more and more of our qualitative edge would have to rely on conventional military forces. Though our allies would continue to build up their forces, the United States would have to bear most of the burden.

The third suggestion was for an increase in aid to western allies through the Marshall Plan. The Marshall Plan was originally enacted in 1947 as a way of rebuilding Europe via American aid. Most policy makers understood that the ravaged European population provided a fertile ground for communist recruitment. US economic aid would provide the basis for economic and industrial growth and would help re habilitate the continent from its post-war state. The aid, while substantial, was just as effective a political tool as it was an economic one. Kennan points out that the aid becomes more effective as a sign that the United States is actively helping its allies. He uses the aid that was sent to Greece as an example of aid that was not accompanied by a strong political program. Though the equipment that the US sent was helpful and useful, it would have been even more useful had it been properly promoted and publicized. The aid that was being sent had the capability of being a deterrent in and of itself. Kennan suggests that American aid be shipped “all painted white with "Aid to Greece" on the sides, and to have the
first bags of wheat driven up to Athens in an American jeep with a Hollywood blonde on the radiator.”[16] Seeing this show of support by the Americans, the Soviet Union as well as other local communists might reconsider trying to destabilize a country. The appearance of strength and support was just as important as the strength itself. This financial and psychological aid was crucial in preventing any further Soviet advances. All of these implementations were needed for a successful execution of aggressive containment. As the report clearly states, "Without superior aggregate military strength, in being and readily mobilizable, a policy of "containment"…is no more than a policy of bluff.”[17] After putting the report into practice, Truman successfully expanded the defense budget almost six-fold from 9 billion dollars to just over 52 billion dollars in 1953. The defense budget rose from 5% of the national gross domestic product in 1950, the year the report was published, to 14.2% of national gross domestic product in 1953.[18] Though the budget fell slightly in the years following 1950, it never fell below the figure of 40 billion dollars that Nitze had earlier suggested. The increase in budget went towards the first peacetime military buildup in American history as well as towards the increase in nuclear research. These sizable increases to the budget showed the commitment with which the report was being implemented.

NSC 68 was also integral in painting the Soviet Union as a demonic entity hell bent on world hegemony. The very first section of NSC 68 states that the Soviet Union is "unlike previous aspirants to hegemony... animated by a new fanatic faith, antithetical to our own" and that unlike the United States and the rest of the free world, the Kremlin is able to “select whatever means are expedient in seeking to carry out its fundamental design.” This was crucial in garnering popular support from the war wary American people who had to be convinced that a peacetime military buildup was necessary. Therefore, NSC 68 described the situation in as dire a manner as possible. This was despite the fact that the United States’ gross domestic product and manufacturing capabilities were far larger than the Soviet Union’s.[19] The report was saying that no matter how productive the US was the Soviet Union would always be capable of being more efficient due to their apathy towards human rights and civil liberties.[20]

As previously mentioned, the Soviet Union was described as a paranoid country, which viewed itself as divinely inspired as well as being “messianic” in their goal of expansion.[21] During his years of service as Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Kennan studied Soviet culture and understood the neuroses inherent in the country. To further ensure the execution of the report, Assistant Secretary of State Norman Armour warned that implementation of this new, aggressive foreign policy was necessary to fight against the “evil system” of the Soviet Union. He insisted that further expansion of the Marshall Plan and related programs were the only effective measure against invasion by “the forces of totalitarianism.”[22] It was, as it had always been, the US’s duty to ensure the spread of liberty around the world. Implementation of NSC 68 would allow the US to continue doing just that.[23]

The depiction of the Soviet Union as being evil and a threat to Western Europe helped rally the American people behind NSC 68. Furthermore, Armour warned that if the government’s aid plans were not enacted, the United States would be faced with a surprise attack of Pearl Harbor-like proportions. This World War II imagery was stirring and effective. Though Armour did not realize it at the time, the threat of a surprise attack was even more dangerous during the Cold War period due to the introduction of nuclear weapons.

America’s depiction of an enemy that was pure evil was not new. It was not even new in the formation of American foreign policy. George Kennan once aptly stated that “we Americans
like our adversaries wholly inhuman: all-powerful, omniscient, monstrously efficient, unhampered by any serious problems of their own, and bent only on schemes for our destruction.”[24] Kennan and others realized that only by describing the enemy in this manner, could the government effectively persuade the American people that the budget expansion that they were asking for was necessary. As the aforementioned Armour and Kennan quotes show, government officials had no qualms about publicizing their beliefs.

Soviet ideology clearly stated that communism would always be at odds with Western thought. The suggestions made in NSC 68 were completely justified and necessary given the information available at the time. The idea of keeping a low defense budget in hopes of not escalating tensions was unrealistic. The Soviets were maintaining a large conventional force in addition to stockpiling and researching additional nuclear weapons. The Soviet threat was very real and had to be countered. The advisory committee formulated a cohesive plan to curb Soviet advances and to maintain a free Western Europe. To do this, they suggested a peacetime buildup of conventional, nuclear, and allied military forces. NSC 68 was a success because Western Europe remained free from communist control throughout the Soviet Union’s lifespan. Without the foresight of people like George Kennan and Paul Nitze, the Soviet Union may very well have been able to territorially expand its hegemony into Western Europe and Great Britain.

[4] On page 117 of In Measures Short of War, Kennan states that “the conception of the Russian state as an ideological entity destined eventually to spread to the utmost limits of the earth is reflected with almost baffling fidelity in the communist belief in the ultimate triumph of world revolution and in the resulting… infiltration into, and domination of, outside centers of military and political power beyond the borders of Russia itself.


[17] NSC 68, Section VI: A


[19] NSC 68, Section V: A

[20] NSC 68, Section IV: C


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Father and Son: The Lomaxes and Their Quest for American Folk Music
by Daniel Kohn

Alan Lomax spent much of his life in what he called the ‘field’—the countryside, small villages and towns, and in places of manual labor. He himself did not live out in the rural areas himself, but instead he visited them to learn as much as he could about other people, specifically about the kind of music they created. Lomax and his father, John Lomax, were both noted musicologists. They saw value in American music that went unnoticed by many urban Americans, and they dedicated most of their lives to collecting authentic folk music to share with the rest of the world. However, determining what exactly “authentic” music was (and by necessity what was “inauthentic”) became a challenging task. In the end, John and Alan Lomax developed their own ideas of what was true folk music was, and in doing so, changed how Americans perceive folk music to this very day, all without ever picking up a guitar.

As this study depends so heavily on the concept of folk music, it is important that it is clearly defined. When Alan Lomax and other folklorists (as well as the scholars who study them) use the term “folk music” they aim to distinguish music from two other major varieties: high culture music and popular music. Folk music is separate from any type of music associated with high culture; examples of this include opera and classical music. In the most general terms, high culture music signifies aristocratic music that is created by and for select people and not for society as a whole. This music, by its very nature, has a focused audience and excludes many people. Folk music is also distinct from popular music; music that is designed for the specific purpose of reaching as many people as possible. In the 1930s, Tin Pan Alley songwriters and Broadway music dominated the popular music scene. These songwriters and publishers did not exclude any potential consumers as it was largely a commercial effort, but popular music is inexorably linked with capitalism, mass market production, and consumption.

Instead, Folk music originates from the people of a particular locality, often passed on through oral tradition. This genre encompasses music that can serve an endless list of purposes (dance, works songs, or simply for entertainment) and is highly dependant on region, with most localities having their own unique instruments and style originating from their particular culture. An example of folk music would be banjo music from Appalachia or Gaelic music from Ireland. While Alan Lomax often used the term primitive music interchangeably with folk music, he did not mean it pejoratively.

Likewise, folk music is not ‘low culture’. On the contrary, Lomax dedicated much of his life to the music he called “our heritage as Americans.” He wrote that folk songs were “Wovenwoven in bright strands through the pattern of pioneer life, they are part of the American tradition of which we are so proud.”[1] In the 1930s, John and Alan Lomax were largely concerned with Black folk music from the South—namely Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, and this period serves as a good case study for their entire body of work.

While the focus of this study is Alan Lomax, it is impossible to discuss his work without touching upon his father, John. In the earliest years of field research, John Lomax and both of his sons worked together to collect folk music, but it was John and Alan that continued on together through much of the 1930s. Their methodology and tastes correlated greatly—they co-wrote several anthologies about their trips together. John ceased his field outings before World
War II, but Alan continued for most of his life, far outpacing his father both in recordings and literature. While the two shared a unique passion for American music, they were still father and son. On occasion during those long car rides, they would fight over ideological differences. This is an important topic that warrants later discussion.

Historian Benjamin Filene noted that John and Alan Lomax’s recording trips, “by today’s standards, seem part talent search, part sociological survey, and part safari.”[2] It must have been quite a sight to see a man in his mid-sixties and his teenage son driving in the deep South, bouncing between small towns, railroad tracks, and penitentiaries, all with hundreds of pounds of recording equipment. But why would they bother? Specifically, what would motivate the young Alan Lomax, who spent his childhood in Austin, Texas and received his Bachelor’s degree in Philosophy, to spend so much of his adult life collecting foreign music? From the various books and articles he wrote over the years, it becomes clear that Alan Lomax collected regional folk music out of fear that it would be lost forever. Lomax argued that folk music had unique qualities and was an artifact to be cherished, that it should be available for all Americans because it would enrich their lives.

First and foremost, Alan Lomax wanted to facilitate the dissemination of as much folk music as possible. As folk music is so strongly linked to local culture, overlap in song popularity between different regions was rare. In other words, a song handed down for generations in Appalachia would go completely unheard in central Louisiana or New York City, no matter how well known it was in its birthplace. As Benjamin Filene put it, “Lomax, among other things, was a popularizer. He consistently worked to bring the voice of the people to the masses.”[3] When he was not out in the field collecting music, Lomax worked to spread the music using a variety of methods—he hosted radio shows, concerts, and even produced commercial records for sale. Now music that was performed in Lexington, Mississippi by loggers or railroad workers was subsequently recorded and made available to anyone in range of a radio tower. The dissemination of folk music at this scale was unique up until the 1930s.

In his goal to spread folk music as far as possible, Alan Lomax had a natural ally in the Library of Congress. The Library, specifically the Archive of Folk Song, commissioned much of his work until he left the organization in 1942.[4] The music and notes that Lomax collected on these journeys would belong to the Library of Congress, who would store and display the material as examples of traditional American life. His work was not limited to government archives, but he was also able to stage various concerts at the White House with Eleanor Roosevelt, all for the expressed purpose of sharing and disseminating American folk music. Therefore, Lomax used not only the private means available to him as a respected folklorist to accomplish his goals, but he also had the official support of the United States government.

The Roosevelt administration did not limit their enrichment activities to spreading the American folk music collected by Alan Lomax. In 1935, in continuance with Roosevelt’s New Deal, Congress created the Works Progress Administration (WPA). One important program under the WPA was the Federal Arts Project, which on a very practical level, put unemployed artists to work creating art for the Federal Government. Some artists created propaganda posters for the Roosevelt administration, but others were “redistributed” around the United States—a black painter in Harlem may be required to teach art in Ohio, for example.[5]

The loan artists of the WPA and the folk music Lomax collected served the same purpose. In both cases, the government used the cultural resources of its citizens (art and regional music, respectively) to break down old barriers and to spread creative works of cultural significance
around the country. Holger Cahill, the director of the Federal Arts Project, argued that it was imperative that art be brought down from its ivory tower and that art should be accessible to all citizens. Lomax echoed this argument himself. “Culture,” Lomax wrote, “is everyone’s creation. It belongs to the people.”[6] Both of these government programs sought to encourage the Democratic ideal, the notion that all people should have access to the same resources and opportunities regardless of their social status or location. In this case, the government fulfilled this by spreading units of culture and cultural enrichment around the United States.

These programs were funded largely from the New Deal, which in turn was passed to help relieve Americans of the crushing economic times. However, the Great Depression had wide-ranging effects on American life, including culture. Throughout the 1930s, many Americans were disenchanted with the modern lifestyle; after all, it had apparently failed them when the Stock Market crashed in 1929. Instead, Americans looked back through their own history to find America’s ‘cultural strength’ and in doing so they largely turned to the American roots, “that exemplified the country’s creativity and vitality.”[7]

This fascination with the past, this nostalgia for the American past, is apparent in cultural remains of the 1930s, more specifically, in the film Our Daily Bread, by King Vidor. In the film, the main character John is out of work and unable to pay any of his bills, including the rent which is overdue. Dissatisfied with urban life, John convinces his wife Mary that they need to get out of the city as soon as possible, and instead lead a quiet life in the rural farmland. Although they run into many problems throughout the course of the film, they eventually settle in to their new home and live a quaint life together. John is bland, white, and unassuming—He is the American worker, tired of the modern world and all of its problems, looking back in history for a simpler time.

Alan Lomax was not immune to this movement. He too was highly interested in music that reminded him of the past, and highly critical of modern America. Lomax opined that the “urban-conditioned consumer economy,” would bring about a “sterile and sleep-inducing,” culture for all Americans.[8] Similarly, he once noted that the folk music he collected in the field was better than the same songs recorded in studio because the performers were “away from the vile airs of the city.”[9]

Lomax linked the modern America of the 1930’s with many unsavory characteristics. First, he argued that consumerism and the race to produce music aimed at large populations would eventually end in a cultural catastrophe. Lomax is most likely referring to the Tin Pan Alley producers that dominated popular music during this period. Their endless effort to churn out hit after hit from a ‘factory’ of songwriters did not sit well with Lomax. To him, the music was at best unnoteworthy, and at worst, vapid and a hindrance to musical progress. Secondly, Lomax linked pollution with poor musical performance. The implication is that the best music comes from outside the city, just as John Sims believed that the best lifestyle one could live is out of the industrialized city, out in the country where America’s true strength lies.

While Lomax’s argument seems valid, it is counterintuitive in one regard; Alan Lomax loved technology. As a government-funded folklorists and record producer, he often had access to the best recording machines available. Lomax was initially very disappointed in the quality of the first recordings made in 1933, but soon found himself as “the owner of the first good portable tape machine to become available after World War Two.”[10] Likewise, as the decades passed, he made use of many different technologies to collect and distribute music, culminating in 1996 with the ‘Global Jukebox,’ an (unfinished) multimedia database for comparing folk music from
across the world. So in the end, industrialization may have left a bad taste in the mouth of Alan Lomax like it did for so many others, but he was not above using the products of the modern society in which he lived as long as it could help him accomplish his goals.

The final and most important reason Lomax dedicated his life to collecting folk music was his fear that it would be lost otherwise. Lomax and his contemporary peers argued that the 1930s brought about new threats to folk culture never before seen until that time. “Today,” he wrote, “almost too late we realize that they are in danger of disappearing.”[11] For Alan Lomax, American folk music faced a two-pronged attack that risked its extinction: apathy and radio.

Lomax expounded on this point in an article entitled “Music in your Own Back Yard.” The piece is very casual in tone, avoiding all of the anthropologic and musical jargon that fills his later work. In the piece, Lomax reminisced about some of his most colorful adventures while collecting American folk music, and encouraged other average people to do the same. Simplifying the process, Lomax writes, “You, and all Americans, can find them right in your own backyards. Somewhere in your neighborhood there may be an old man, or woman…who can sing you hundreds of ballads and work songs. Your own grandmother may remember some.”[12] By the 1930s, Alan Lomax understood that folk culture was losing the battle for its own relevance. As folk music depended so greatly on the oral tradition, it could only survive as long as the younger generation strived to keep it alive. Without any effort to save it, folk culture would eventually disappear simply because the resource, the songsters, would all die out. Lomax used this article to alert apathetic or unaware citizens to the plight of folk music, and to encourage them to preserve as much American culture as they could while they still had the opportunity.

The second threat was much more direct and momentous, and therefore more perilous to the music that Alan Lomax loved so much. The first commercial radio station, KDKA of Pittsburg, first broadcasted in late autumn 1920. However, over the next decade radio continued to grow until it became the seminal means of communicating ideas to large populations across the country. By the 1930s, radio was used to disseminate news, such as election results, talk radio programming, and of course music.

While radio was one of the most important technological breakthroughs of the twentieth century, Lomax saw it as a potential threat. Lomax lamented that radio was a “hard sell that is wiping the world slate clean of all non-conformist cultural patterns.” Similarly, Alan Lomax once yelled at an Italian radio director in a fit of uncharacteristic anger, blaming him for “killing folk music.” The musicologist did not limit his attacks to just radio; by the late 1930’s Lomax argued, “it is only natural that village folk musicians, after a certain amount of exposure to TV screens and loudspeakers…should begin to lose confidence in their tradition.”[13]

For Alan Lomax, radio in and of itself was not a threat to folk music—in fact he himself used radio and television to help spread the folk culture that he had collected over the decades. However, commercial radio and the music it promoted, the popular music of Tin Pan Alley and Broadway, threatened to overwrite the regional music available in folk communities. If that was the case, not only would the music be lost forever, but all Americans would be subject to the same music, the same national culture disseminated by radio and completely ‘wiping out’ individualistic multicultural offerings. For Lomax, this was a real threat to his personal hobby and passion.

Lomax was not the only American to notice this threat; in fact it was common theme of folklorists writing in the 1930s. In 1935, folklorist Zora Neale Hurston released Mules and Men,
a bestselling work of anthropology chronicling African American culture in the American South. Lomax noted the book was “the most engaging, genuine, and skillfully written book in the field of folklore.” Like Lomax, Hurston realized that regional folk culture, African ‘hoodoo’ in particular, was slowly disappearing and that it needed to be collected before it disappeared forever. ‘Hoodoo’ was not a strange, embarrassing cultural relic best left under the rug, but a deceptively sophisticated set of traditional African values that should be studied and cherished, just as Lomax argued American folk music should be.

Alan Lomax and his father collected folk music during their lifetime for a variety of reasons—partially because they desired to ‘democratize’ music and encourage the cultural enrichment of all American citizens and partially out of nostalgia for a simpler past, devoid of the mass consumption and consumerism of modern American capitalism. Most importantly, Alan Lomax wanted to ensure that folk music, the culture that Americans should be most proud of, survived the onslaught of a single, nationalized culture due to radio and television. In addition, each of these motivations are directly intertwined with the broader cultural movements of the 1930s. Alan Lomax and other folklorists of the 1930s were not immune to the social and intellectual attitudes of their day. On the contrary, Lomax’s ideals and those of others in the 1930s fed into one another just as the music he studied fed off of other cultures in its vicinity.

Now that Alan Lomax’s motivations for his recording trips have been determined, the next question is, naturally, what was to be recorded once he got there? As noted, ‘folk music’ is a broad term, and many scholars disagree on its proper definition. Folk music can include any genre, any instrument (from grand piano to homemade banjo), and even within a single region a given song can exist in numerous variations due to personal preferences and the individual choices made by the performer. Any folklorist intending to collect true folk music must wrestle with these questions, and this includes Lomax.

John and Alan Lomax were highly concerned with the authenticity of the music they recorded. Alan Lomax once wrote: "The popularization of a folk song [or the transformation of a traditional folk song into something more marketable], is in effect, a translation from one language to another, and as usual, something is lost in the process…this is not the musical idiom in which these songs were developed." That is not to say that the Lomaxes hated all popular influence in music. Not only could ‘popularized’ folk music be perfectly enjoyable music worthy of scholarly study, but it was also largely unavoidable, as cultures naturally interact with one another when given the opportunity. However, when it came to recording genuine ‘folk music,’ they did greatly favor compositions that developed within a folk region without outside influences that spoiled their original purpose or intent. Music that was changed too much during the course of its lifetime was, in a sense, corrupted because it was fundamentally different from its earliest form.

The ‘corruption’ of folk music was not uncommon in this period. During the 1930s and 40s, CBS ran an educational radio program entitled School of the Air. The program was used to teach American school children about any number of subjects, but Alan Lomax was involved specifically in the programs regarding folk music. CBS composers asked Lomax for important folk tunes and Lomax happily obliged. The composers would then take the traditional tunes and “[transmute them] by the magic of symphonic technique into big music” (emphasis in original). Lomax called the series a “colossal failure” that failed to capture the “spirit and the emotion” of true folk tradition.
It should come to no surprise that Alan Lomax hated the folk-symphonies of the *School of the Air* series, especially considering that the CBS executives who ran it had little appreciation for the music they were adapting. The radio creations were too far removed from the original source material to be considered truly ‘folk,’ but Lomax had exceptionally high standards for authentic folk music, standards that even very traditional music did not meet. In the article “The Plantation, the Lumber Camp, and the Barrel-House,” Lomax revealed his adventure in collecting the folk song “Stagolee” from a plantation in Huntsville, Texas. The folklorists eventually procured it by recording a black worker named Blue. What is most surprising is that Lomax had already “heard several versions of the song”, but continued to ask for it by name because he “wanted the correct one.”[17]

For Lomax, not only was CBS Radio’s symphonic version of folk music inferior to the original recordings, but so were the alternate versions of “Stagolee” floating around eastern Texas. The first recordings have all the components of authentic folk music, they were performed by regional musicians with traditional instruments on location in the South, and yet they were not authentic enough for Lomax at the time. He was so intent on finding the original that he continued to use resources to search for it, even while having several other copies on hand already. It seems clear that Lomax was not just a hobbyist, but a collector who was somewhat obsessed with finding the most pristine, valuable folk music he could.

As demonstrated, John and Alan Lomax had an exceptionally high standard of authenticity. They were very lucky to have found the artist who they called “one of the greatest folk artists we have ever come across.” Huddie Ledbetter was born in 1888, and spent much of his life either in trouble or running from it. He was a heavy drinker, easily provoked into fights, and usually in the company of either women, gin, or both. By the time Alan Lomax first met him, Leadbelly (nicknamed for his stout body and tough demeanor) had already been in prison three times and escaped at least once. Nevertheless, Leadbelly had a profound love for music, and learned both the accordion and twelve-string guitar, both of which he played for most of his life.[18]

The Lomaxes first met and recorded him playing at the Angola Prison in Louisiana in 1933, and by all accounts, Leadbelly blew them away. The Lomaxes jointly wrote that Leadbelly was “skillful with his guitar and his strong, baritone voice,” and that he “sung with an intensity and passion” that struck every listener. The Lomaxes were so enamored with Leadbelly that they recorded “about one hundred songs that seemed “folky,” from him alone.[19] Upon returning to Angola a year later, Leadbelly was released and became John Lomax’s personal driver as he continued to collect folk music from around the American South. When the two moved up north to New York, John Lomax set up a series of concerts for Leadbelly in an attempt to show his brand of authentic folk music to the world.

Why John and Alan Lomax liked Leadbelly so much is a complicated question that will be discussed in greater detail later, but a major reason they favored him was that they deemed him an appropriately authentic source. The folklorists chronicle their time with Huddie Ledbetter in *Negro Folk Songs as Sung by Lead Belly* (1936), and in this book they make it very clear that he was authentically folk. The book is divided into two parts, with the first half devoted to Leadbelly’s biography, and the second to the lyrics and musical notations to forty eight of his songs. Much of the biography is told in Lead Belly’s own words, with John Lomax giving the text an overall structure and filling in most of the holes. The Southern vernacular is preserved in Ledbetter’s sections (i.e. ‘mawn’n’” instead of morning, and ‘penitenshuh’ in place of
penitentiary). The Lomaxes even go as far as offering footnotes explaining the proper pronunciation of the phrases used most frequently by Leadbelly.

John and Alan Lomax also went to great lengths to preserve the authenticity of the musical compendium section of the book as well. Unable to properly denote the music themselves, they hired Professor George Herzog to write the musical notations. Before each song, the Lomaxes give a short introduction including all of the information necessary to truly appreciate it, often the story behind the song or in the case of “De Grey Goose” analysis of the music itself. The folklorists note that this particular “delightful ballad” can most likely be traced back all the way to slave music.[20]

Finally, The Lomaxes preserved Leadbelly’s authenticity by separating what they deemed as unsavory influences. The transcribed music in Negro Folk Songs is divided into seven sections, the last of which is “A Miscellany: White Influences; Pardon Songs”. In this section are Leadbelly’s most popular songs, “Irene,” “De Midnight Special,” and the two songs he wrote to persuade the governors of Texas and Louisiana to pardon him in the early 1930s. Furthermore, the forty eight songs transcribed in this book were not the only ones in his repertoire. The authors included only the music that they deemed most valuable and important. When Leadbelly played other songs, namely jazz and pop standards, the Lomaxes noted “we did not care for them. We held him to the singing of music that first attracted us to him in Louisiana.”[21]

Much of what Huddie Ledbetter sang fit in precisely with their concept of authenticity. The Lomaxes preserved the language and style of their source music whenever possible. On the other hand, they also tried to differentiate between Leadbelly’s authentic and inauthentic songs by segregating the “white influences” from the rest, or by simply omitting certain songs altogether. Through great care and tedious labor, the Lomaxes succeeded in creating a work that demonstrated music that fit their high standards of authenticity, while disseminating that music to other Americans around the country. It suited their goals perfectly.

While the Lomaxes would offer Huddie Ledbetter and Negro Folk Songs as fine examples of authentic or genuine American folk music, a closer examination leaves much more to be desired. According to Lomax, folk is personally enriching, worthy of scholarly study, and the most distinctly American music that all citizens of this country should be proud. On the other hand, popular music is not necessarily bad, but it tends toward the corrupted, the vapid, and the commercial. If Alan Lomax’s goal was to collect and disseminate only the truest of folk music, his own standards might have been his undoing. Several elements of Alan Lomax’s collection methods limited his ability to collect music that most exemplified ‘authentic’ American folk music.

First and foremost, the Lomaxes were limited by the recording equipment they had at their disposal. During their earliest trip to the South in 1933, John Lomax had the 350 pounds of recording equipment built into the trunk of his car.[22] (Lomax Sr. himself placed the weight of the equipment at 500 pounds. This may have been an attempt to dramatize his collection trips, but it is also possible that he included the two speakers weighing in at seventy-five pounds each). The sheer mass of the materials pertinent to the trip limited their ability to record properly. By necessity, the records were made outside and the duo were also limited in where they could go. Any recording place that was not hospitable to a car was out of the question, no matter what kind of treasure trove of authentic American folk music it housed.
The recording equipment itself was extremely archaic. The music itself was recorded on aluminum or celluloid disks, and the ones available for listening at the Library of Congress are of truly wretched quality. The music itself is almost drowned by the artifacts on the old records: cracks, fizzes and blank spots ruin most of the material. Alan Lomax himself hated the recordings: “the finest things we gathered for the Library of Congress are on those cursed aluminum disc records, complete with acoustic properties that render them unendurable for all but the hardest ears.”[23] Thankfully, the records of Leadbelly made at Angola Prison just one year later in 1934 are of much better quality.

Alan Lomax continued to have problems with record fidelity well into the 1950s. While collecting music for a series on European folk music, Lomax relied heavily on various contributors who already had experience or recorded music to offer him. Unfortunately, some of them did not have the technical expertise that he did regarding the complicated recording equipment available at the time. Lomax once lamented that one set of tapes he received of French folk music were so poorly recorded that the best sound engineers in Paris could not draw anything useful from them.[24]

No scholar can blame Lomax for the fidelity of either the early recordings, or those made by other people over the decades, but they did severely limit his attempt to capture true folk culture for the masses. By his own admission, the recordings made in the field in 1933 were of the highest quality and the preferred copies for those seeking authentic American music. However, due to their low quality, today they are little more than a historic curiosity. Similarly, the tapes from France may have contained the most beautiful and culturally relevant folk music ever to be recorded, but it did not matter because the medium failed to properly translate the material.

It is also important to keep in mind that almost all of the collection trips by both John and Alan Lomax were funded by the Library of Congress. The Lomaxes were given grants by the Archive of Folk Music to head out into the country to collect music, and in return the music would belong to the Archive. This arrangement amounted to a business transaction between the two parties, and with that understanding came benefits and shortcomings. On the positive side, Alan Lomax was truly grateful to have the opportunity to collect folk music at all. He felt proud that his government was “eager to keep in permanent form the songs of its people.”[25] Without the Library’s assistance, none of his research would have been possible. Secondly, the Lomaxes were extensions of the federal government while collecting music. Their credentials relating them to the officials at the Library often gave them a foot in the door, especially at locations that are traditionally difficult to enter, like penitentiaries.[26]

However, there were critical shortcomings of his relationship with the Library of Congress as well. The grants Lomax received were not unlimited. While the money was largely spent at his discretion with little oversight, it was up to him how to best allocate the limited resources he was given. It is unavoidable that the collector would have to cut corners in some regards.

A very prominent example is the places at which Lomax visited to record. From 1933 to 1935, Lomax visited dozens of cities in search of folk music, but the end result is quite clustered [see figure 1]. The collection tours of the mid-1930s were heavily based in Louisiana and Mississippi, with the vast majority of the recording sessions occurring in those two states. Lomax recorded in most other southern states during that period as well, but not nearly to the extent that he toured Louisiana and Mississippi. Georgia and South Carolina were almost completely ignored, with only three stops between them both. There was certainly black folk music from that area, but it would be unfeasible for Lomax to cover the entire south during his recording trips.
Alan Lomax also found himself limited in the amount of resources available while recording. In the early sessions of 1933, he noted that funds were especially tight, and that he often recorded fragments of songs instead of the entire piece in order to save money. “We were two [sic] hard-pressed for money to be prodigal with discs. Now, the recollection of all the full-bodied performances we cut short still gives me twinges of conscience,” he wrote. [27] Similarly in *Negro Folk Songs*, the Lomaxes noted that “last moment considerations of economy constrained us to cut certain songs.” [28]

Under perfect circumstances, Lomax would have been able to visit each of the southern states equally and collect a wealth of music from all of its inhabitants in completion, but instead he was subject to the realistic limitations of budgetary restraints. While the music he collected on these trips was still invaluable to the American folk canon, his work suffered from what he was unable
to collect. His obligations to the Library of Congress, at least in some ways, limited Alan Lomax’s ability to collect and deliver the truly authentic folk music that he desired.

Even more important than Lomax’s relationship with his benefactor, the Library of Congress, was his relationship with his sources. Collecting folklore is a two-way street, folklorists depend on their informants and resources for customs and the rationale behind them, and the informants need to be able to trust the folklorists to both treat the topic fairly and to not exploit the people involved. Lomax wrote that he was exceedingly skilled at collecting folklore and music from people. He felt that it was a mistake to enter a community and ask for songs, and instead learned about the region, and asked questions to “put them at ease and gain their confidence.”[29]

Lomax did collect an astonishing amount of music, but he was not successful in every attempt to do so. On the contrary, he recounted several times in which he failed to procure music from informants. In the south, he ran into a preacher who refused to sing any Negro spirituals because it conflicted with his religious beliefs. Another black man was perfectly capable of singing, but would not do it in front of a recorder. He was afraid that if his songs became too well known “nobody will ever wanter hear me play again ’cause den ev’-body’ll know de songs dat I knows…”[30] In other words, he was terrified his ability to live off of his music would be in jeopardy if his songs became commercialized.

Another man named One-Eyed Charlie was so petrified when asked to share his music that he claimed to not know any at all. Instead he pointed Lomax in another direction entirely in order to avoid the pressure of the situation.[31] Zora Neale Hurston was well aware of this problem as she had encountered it herself while collecting folklore in Eatonville, Florida. She argued that informants were often too intimidated by strangers to provide any useful folklore. Recognizing the problem was worse for the Lomaxes (as they were white men collecting music from black informants) she encouraged them to “blacken up” their faces in order to appear less foreign and unfamiliar to the folk.[32]

Again, Lomax was limited in his effort to collect true folk music. Folklorists are dependent on the folk for information, and sometimes they refused to cooperating for personal or political reasons. It is possible that there were dozens of other Huddie Ledbetters in the American south, informants that were able to live up to Lomax’s high standards of authenticity, but if they were unwilling to cooperate, than it was a moot point. When met with an unaccommodating informant, Alan Lomax had no choice but to move on to somewhere else, even if it meant his work suffered for it.

Each of the limitations discussed so far (the archaic recording equipment, the budgetary constraints, and obstructive folk artists) had a profound impact on the quality and degree of authenticity of Alan Lomax’s work, but none of them can be identified as his fault—they were simply unfortunate shortcomings one can expect when taking up a project of this magnitude. However, Alan Lomax also had personal shortcomings that also affected his output, and in turn shaped the way that Americans think about folk music to this very day.

John and Alan Lomax considered themselves unbiased collectors of folk music. Their job was simply to track down valuable sources, convince them to play traditional music, and run the recording equipment. None of this would affect the artists or the music he or she played. However, this is a shortsighted conclusion. The Lomaxes greatly affected the music they distributed because they framed the entire tour around what they deemed authentic. Benjamin Filene wrote that the duo “made judgments about what constituted America’s true musical traditions, helped shape what ‘mainstream’ audiences recognized as authentic, and, inevitably,
transformed the music that the folk performers offered.”[33] Based on the writings of Alan Lomax and the sheer amount of material he collected in the South, it seems natural to conclude that he had a preference for black folk music. This preference affected his repertoire and his credibility as a folklorist.

At this point, it is important to clarify that claiming Alan Lomax had a ‘bias’ towards black music is an erroneous overstatement. Lomax was, first and foremost, a multiculturalist. It is true that he spend many years of his life collecting black folk music, but he also spent almost the entire decade of the 1950s in Europe working with other famous folklorists to catalog European folk music. He relied on other anthropologists to collect music from the British Isles and Eastern Europe, but he himself went on collection tours in Spain and Italy. Furthermore, Lomax spent much of the early 1960s collecting Caribbean music, most notably in Haiti.[34] All of this was for the Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music, which would consist of a planned thirty volumes of music, aiming to chronicle “traditional music of all regions of the world.”[35] Over the years, Lomax did gravitate towards black American music, but more than anything else, he loved music from cultures that were different from his own.

Alan Lomax’s love for black music is most apparent from how he treated it in comparison to other non-black music. In the later decades of his career, Lomax made a number of short educational documentaries, each one aimed at a different genre of American folk music and the people who performed it. These movies contained some narration (provided by Lomax) as well as short interview clips with the folk, but they mostly consisted of performers and their music. Two noteworthy documentaries central to this argument are The Land Where the Blues Began and Appalachian Journey.

In the introduction to The Land Where the Blues Began, Lomax made a strong case that the current genre of blues emerged from the tradition of Negro slave songs, calling it the “poetry of a hard pressed people.” Most of the performers played traditional work songs, often while on boats or working on railroad tracks. Others are much more inventive, playing music with homemade instruments—one performer simply tightens a wire on a doorframe and plucks it like a bass guitar. Lomax’s narrative interludes mostly consist of praise for the artists, calling the music “haunting” and mentioning the that music “can never be forgotten.”[36] He makes it clear that he has a great appreciation for the music in question.

Lomax’s documentary Appalachian Journey is similar in design, but not in execution. This movie focuses largely on the banjo music and tall tales that play such a huge part in Appalachian culture. Lomax treats the subject fairly and is impressed with the virtuosity of the performers. He also gives the viewer the sense that the genre is worthy of study, but he does not smother it with praise as he does in The Land Where the Blues Began. Even more illustrative, halfway through the documentary Lomax switches focus and concentrates on the black influences in present day mountain music, specifically the syncopated rhythms common in banjo and dance music. In a documentary about traditional Appalachian folk, Lomax emphasizes that these were communities where “blacks and whites lived as neighbors, swapped favors and stole each other’s music.”[37] Comparing these two documentaries side by side, it becomes very clear which genre of American folk music Alan Lomax preferred. However, once one can take the argument one a step further and contend that Lomax favored a specific brand of blues music, one that was closely related to what Huddie Ledbetter could offer him.

In an interview for the Down Home Radio Show hosted by Henrietta Yurcheno in the 1960s, Lomax recapitulated his first meeting with Leadbelly. In the twenty-six minute interview, Lomax
heaped Leadbelly in praise, calling him, “powerful, feral, quick of the eye and light of the foot,” with an “Indian gleam of independence and unbeatable vitality in his face.” He went on to say that when he played, Leadbelly had “a wild look in his eye” and was, “so powerful, so fiery,” that the entire audience felt his presence, even if they could not understand his lyrics. Finally, he noted that his music stemmed from the long tradition of blues work songs, and that the music was so powerful because Leadbelly was able to convey a sense of entrapment that resonated with him.[38]

From this interview it is clear what Alan Lomax loved so much about the blues. For him, the blues were primal, intense, unbound, and perhaps a little violent. Blues was built on a strong sense of history and was largely about breaking free from oppression or utilizing the strength inside to work through tough times. For Lomax, these were the qualities of true, authentic African-American folk music, and as. Since Leadbelly perfectly encapsulated these qualities, both in his music and in his life, Lomax and his father proudly espoused him as an authentic folk artist, an accurate representative of the genre as a whole. The Lomaxes were so enthralled by Leadbelly because he, “confirmed their most basic assumptions about American Folk Song.”[39]

As noted, the Lomaxes did have a large influence on the folk music they collected. After all, whether a certain song was recorded, or whether a certain piece of music was included in a compendium of folk music, largely came down to the personal opinion of the collectors. However, as demonstrated, the Lomaxes had very specific ideas about what entailed authentic folk music. It is only natural for them to include music that fulfills those criteria, and to omit music that does not. As such, the African-American folk music the Lomaxes collected is weighed heavily in one direction.

The Lomaxes found and collected most of their music in the South from black penitentiaries. In *Negro Folk Songs*, the Lomaxes note that they felt Negro convicts had the “greatest number, variety, and purity” of traditional African-American folk music. Furthermore, penitentiaries had the added benefit of being secluded from society. Inside the jail, convicts were severely limited in their ability to mix with other cultures; Negro folk songs would stay Negro folk songs because the artists were “cut off from both the phonograph and the radio.”[40] If Penitentiaries truly did contain a wealth of unspoiled material, it would be a treasure trove for any musical folklorist.

Jailed black folk artists also appealed to the Lomaxes because they fit the ‘primal’ trait that they looked for in blues music. Again in *Negro Folk Songs*, the Lomaxes emphasized Leadbelly’s criminal past and violent tendencies, his twin passions for gin and women, his propensity to lie, and his obsession with money. Most of the other convicts were in jail for violent crimes as well, so they were potentially authentic blues as well, at least according to the Lomaxes. Finally, the penitentiary was also perfectly linked to the historic tradition of slave songs. Of their efforts to look in black jails, Lomax Sr. wrote, “Alan and I were looking particularly for the song of the Negro Laborer, the words of which sometimes reflect the tragedies of imprisonment, cold, hunger, heat, the injustices of white men.”[41]

Alan Lomax and his father were so drawn to black penitentiaries in the south because they were the perfect amalgamation of everything they held to be ‘authentic,’ ‘black,’ and ‘folk.’ The music was plentiful and unspoiled by outside influences, namely Tin Pan Alley popular music, but also other forms of regional folk music from the area. It was sufficiently ‘primal’ and ‘intense,’ simply because it was performed by black convicts, and it was connected to a strong tradition of slave music, as the penitentiaries were a modern area where black work songs could
flourish in the same way they did in the antebellum period. The alignment is impossible to ignore, southern jails were a great resource for the kind of black folk music that Alan Lomax and his father deemed authentic.

This bias towards the type of blues music typically found in black jailhouses may seem harmless, but it harmed Lomax’s credibility in two major ways. Firstly, both Lomaxes polluted their pool of resources by encouraging their performers to play the music that they were looking for. In 1934, Leadbelly drove for John Lomax, as his son Alan was sick and was not well enough to travel on collection trips. As the pair moved from one penitentiary to another, Lomax Sr. asked Leadbelly to sing in order to “show what kind of music John A. Lomax and the Library of Congress recording machine wanted to collect.”[42] Similarly, on a recording trip Alan made with his wife in 1939, “Mr. Lomax explained to the [convicts] the purpose of his trip and what kind of songs he wished to record.”[43]

This was a grave mistake by both John and Alan Lomax. If they truly wanted to collect authentic black folk music, it would have been best to simply record whatever the convicts offered. Instead, they put forth the music that they wanted to hear, encouraging the informants to play songs that included the aforementioned traits that they held so strongly. The Lomaxes contaminated their own pool of music by creating a self-fulfilling prophecy—they inadvertently asked for a certain type of folk music, and then afterward were able to claim it as ‘authentic’ because that is what they collected. These methodical mistakes most likely affected their entire catalog of black folk recordings, and they could have made similar mistakes while recording any other number of genres.

Secondly, John and Alan Lomax took their preference with prison folk music to a grotesque degree in the late 1930’s. The Lomaxes were eager to bring Leadbelly to New York and spread his music to the masses through a series of lectures and concert dates. Leadbelly, eager to make a name for himself (and make himself a buck in the process) jumped at the opportunity. Once in New York, John Lomax primarily acted as his personal manager, scheduling public events, pressuring him to do well at the concerts, dissuading him from spending the night out whenever possible, and encouraging him to play certain songs over others. John Lomax’s timetable of concerts continued long after Leadbelly had become gloomy and lost interest in the affair.[44]

Unbeknownst to them, the Lomaxes had become one of the things that they hated the most in musical culture. On the one hand they exploited Leadbelly, the artist that they cherished above all others, to the point where even he did not want to continue to perform. John Lomax’s actions were comparable to any commercial music producer, even though the Lomaxes had such distaste for those profit-seeking men. Secondly, the Lomaxes encouraged Leadbelly to fit in a certain mold, the mold they viewed as authentically folk. John would routinely ask Leadbelly to wear his old black and white striped convict clothes while in concert to help create the proper atmosphere.[45] It seemed as if the Lomaxes were so obsessed with their strict view of authentic and ‘real’ folk music that they forced Leadbelly to create a false persona in order to match it. Not even their pride and joy could consistently meet the standards they laid out for true folk music.

The Lomax’s Lomaxes’ bias towards prison music hurt their attempts to collect the most authentic black folk music possible. Due to their personal failings and shortsightedness, the Lomax’s Lomaxes’ encouraged the spread of one specific type of folk music, one that they saw best distilled in Huddie Ledbetter, instead of allowing for a more natural, organic dissemination. The only question for the historian remains is why—why would Alan Lomax
have such a bias in the first place? What were the elements of his psyche or upbringing that would lead him to enjoy one type of music over another, and then allow this preference to so affect his body of work?

On an extremely superficial level, Alan Lomax enjoyed black folk music more than most other genres—it had sonic qualities that were especially appealing to him. This is quite apparent in the aforementioned documentary, The Land Where the Blues Began. Lomax emphasizes the virtuosity of the musicians (or, their ability to play difficult and complex melodies on their chosen instruments) the ingenuity of those able to make homemade instruments, and the sheer emotional depth and power of the blues. For Lomax, the music was not primitive or simple; it was as rich and sophisticated as any music on earth.

Alan Lomax also appreciated the blues (and Ledbetter’s) ability to bring many different people together. In the interview with Henrietta Yurchenco, Lomax noted that Leadbelly’s songs could win over him, his racially conservative father, and two governors, not to mention the countless people who saw him in concert, demanding more music while filling his hat to the brim with nickels. For Lomax, the blues had a certain character, a certain heart to it that was missing from other music.

Most importantly, Alan Lomax was attracted to black music because of his personal politics. As noted, John Lomax was quite conservative, and in the long car rides during collection trips, they could not help but fight on occasion—Lomax Sr. often reprimanded his son for mingling with “communist friends.” Throughout his writing, Alan Lomax made it clear he had a certain distaste for conservative politics: he once ridiculed a budget hawk that once cut millions of dollars out of the Folk Song Archive, arguing that it was a pittance for the cultural benefit the program provides. Lomax left the Library of Congress soon after.

Throughout his career, Alan Lomax also encouraged folk artists to write “topical songs,” or songs about pressing issues such as “unions, civil rights, and a progressive political agenda.” Similarly, Lomax agreed to be the music director of Henry Wallace’s Progressive Party campaign in 1948. His attitude towards conservative agenda and his political actions as a professional music producer align him with the political left of his day. As a Progressive man of the 1930’s, Lomax was much more sensitive to the plight of minorities, especially blacks in America. As such, it is likely that his appreciation for black music, especially music so steeped in past racial injustice, was due at least in part to his political ideology.

Alan Lomax was one of America’s most prominent folklorists. His passion for music and respect for the people of his country is unmatched. Lomax understood the importance of how enriching American music can be. His major goal was to preserve as much of that music as possible, and he was successful. Thousands of folk songs, examples of traditional American music, would have been completely lost without his effort. However, while his work was prolific, he like all humans, had personal shortcomings. Over the years, Lomax and his father builded a preconceived idea of what true black folk music was, and, due to that bias, gravitated towards a certain brand of music that skewed their overall body of work. Still, Alan Lomax’s contributions to American history and culture are countless. He was one of the great humanists of the twentieth century. There is no higher praise than that.
[12] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[21] Ibid 52.
[22] Filene, Romancing the Folk, 49-50.
[24] Ibid.
[26] Filene, Romancing the Folk, 56.
[27] Lomax, “Saga of a Folksong Hunter.”
[29] Lomax, “Music in Your Own Backyard.”
[31] Ibid.
[33] Filene, *Romancing the Folk* 56; 3.
[38] Yurchenco.
[40] Lomax, *Negro Folk Songs*, ix, xiii.
[41] Ibid, ix.
[42] Yurchenco.
[45] Ibid, 52-64.
“To boldly go where no man has gone before.” Captain James T. Kirk’s now famous words were what greeted fans of the 1960s television series *Star Trek*. *Star Trek* was the brainchild of Gene Roddenberry and told the story of the starship Enterprise crew exploring the universe in a distant future. *Star Trek* was fairly successful in its time, however, the true potential of the show was yet to be realized. Decades later, *Star Trek* has achieved worldwide recognition and is an American cultural icon. It has also spawned several iterations, each reflecting the society in which they were created. In particular, the various *Star Trek* series have chronicled the advancement of women in terms of power and responsibility in American society. As women gained importance and respect in the United States, female characters in the opus began to change. *Star Trek (TOS)*, 1966, *Star Trek: The Next Generation (TNG)*, 1987, and *Star Trek: Voyager*, 1995, reflect the growing empowerment of women in American society from second-class citizens to equals with of men.

The original airdate of *TOS* (1966), coincided with the emergence of second-wave feminism which began in the 1950s and continued until the 1990s.[1] Second-wave feminist mainly fought to achieve gender equality in the workplace and the home. The major struggles of second-wave feminism focused on the Equal Rights Act, abortion policies, and the Equal Rights Amendment.[2] Third-wave feminism took over the fight when it began in the early 1990s, paying special attention to the plight of racial minority women as well as Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender causes.[3] These two major female movements occurred in America between the first *TOS* episode and the final *Voyager* episode and will therefore be used to compare the females of *Star Trek* to the women of American society.

*TOS*, created in 1966 by Gene Roddenberry, entered American pop-culture at a time when second-wave feminism was gaining ground. The series was based on Roddenberry’s utopic vision of the future, which was quite different from the world at the time. Only a decade earlier in America, men had returned from World War II and the idea of the working woman made popular during the war soon changed: “At war’s end, the government reversed campaign tactics, and asked women to return home to their kitchens and children, to make way for the returning soldiers who would need their jobs.”[4] By the time of *TOS*, second-wave feminism had been hard at work to bring women back into the professional world, but very few employment opportunities were available that allowed for an equal partnership between men and women.[5] Roddenberry’s vision was groundbreaking in that it placed men and women of different races side-by-side, working together to explore the vast reaches of space.[6] At the time *Star Trek* was being created, second-wave feminism spawned the National Women’s Organization, which almost certainly had some influence on the development process. This group was created to support females in the work place and the advancement of females in the professional world.[7]

Rodenberry understood the state of women in society and what they hoped to achieve and, therefore, wanted to have his first officer, the person directly beneath the captain, to be female.[8] However, the networks objected and Roddenberry was forced to cast a male in this role. In fact, the network did not want any non-white, non-male characters to appear on the
command bridge at all, which Roddenberry reveals in an interview on Good Morning America where he explains, “When I brought in a mixed racial crew both the network and dizzy-lou studios said ‘What are you doing, you’re going to ruin us?’” Roddenberry, however, did not waver, “and then when I insisted on it the advertisers and agencies came in and said ‘if you show this black girl as an officer dealing with white people under that basis your going to be barraged with hate letters and whole areas of the country will refuse to handle your show.’” Roddenberry rejected these warnings and choose to push forward with his utopic vision of the future and casted Nichelle Nichols, an African American woman, in the role of Lieutenant Nyota Uhura, and Majel Barrett, a white woman, in the role of Nurse Christine Chapel. Over the course of TOS, Roddenberry also frequently casted women in guest star roles as weekly villains.

Lieutenant Nyota Uhura was the communications officer in TOS. She was the only female officer to work on the bridge. “Although she was an officer, her function was most often reduced to little more than the starship receptionist. Female operators had been at telephone switchboards since the 1880s, and this was a career dominated by women.” This statement explains that while Uhura was on the command bridge her role was extremely limited and stereotypically feminine. The uniform that Uhura and the other females aboard the Enterprise wore was short, tight fitting mini-dresses, which also portrayed a masculine vision of how females should appear. The fact that all females on the Enterprise were required to wear these highly sexualized uniforms reflects the societal idea that women’s sexuality was directly linked to their work. This view was prevalent in most industries of the 1960s, but it was most exemplified by the airline industry where there was a “no marriage/out by 32 rule” for all flight attendants. This is because “female flight attendants had to be young, unmarried, and attractive to project an image of ‘freshness,’ and ‘[t]he saying among airline executives had been, 'Use them 'til their smiley wear out; then get a new bunch.’” Uhura’s outfit and age demonstrates that even Rodenberry was influenced by the idea that a woman’s position in the working world was tied to her appearance.

Uhura addressed her status aboard the Enterprise early in the first season in the episode “Mantrap”. This episode pitted the crew of the Enterprise against a shape-shifting alien who killed its victims by draining them of salt. This alien used sex appeal as a weapon by changing its appearance to become the ideal “women” for each of its victims, once again making a female’s sexuality the defining aspect of her personality. In this episode, Uhura and the first officer, Spock, had an altercation. Uhura proclaimed, “I’m an illogical woman who's beginning to feel too much a part of that communications console.” Here, Uhura voiced her dissatisfaction with her role on the Enterprise because though she was a member of the crew, her rank and importance was below all the men serving on the bridge. Uhura’s subordinate standing relative to her male co-workers was nothing foreign to the audiences of the day, “According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the ratio of women’s to men’s earnings…for full-time workers employed year-round…in 1960 was 60.7…the wage ratio was virtually unchanged over the 1960s and 1970s.” This ratio shows women were regarded as inferior to men in the work place during the 1960s and 1970s. Nichelle Nichols grew dissatisfied over the limitations of her role on TOS and had decided to leave the series before Martin Luther King Jr. stepped in: "The manner in which you have created that role, with dignity and character, makes it imperative that you stay... There is a door that has opened that can never be closed again, and more importantly, not only for little black children or for women, but for everybody who sees us as we are
supposed to be--on an equal basis, functioning as intelligent human beings... You have the first non-stereotypical role on television."[19] This statement from Dr. King shows that despite the limitations of Nichelle’s character on TOS, it was still an extremely important leap forward in the struggle for equal rights of women and minorities.

The second major female character on TOS was Nurse Christine Chapel. The actress who played Nurse Chapel was originally casted by Roddenberry to play the first officer, but after the network rejected this idea Majel Barrett was re-casted in the nurse role. Chapel played the role of head nurse aboard the Enterprise. However, she was not the highest-ranking medical personnel on the ship, this title went to Doctor Jack McCoy. Chapel was not placed in the role of doctor, but rather, the expected role for women in the medical world, a nurse. This discrimination can best be seen in the U.S. military of the 1960s in which women’s only two employment opportunities were as secretaries or nurses.[20]

Nurse Chapel’s other role was to provide a love interest for First Officer Spock. Chapel was portrayed as longing to get close to a man who she would never be able to attain, primarily because Spock repressed his emotions. This role is apparent in the season three episode, “Plato’s Stepchildreern”, in which Chapel tells Spock right before they are forced to kiss by a telekinetic alien, “For so long I've wanted to be close to you. Now all I want to do is crawl away and die.”[21] Providing a love interest for Spock was Chapel’s actual primary function during the series rather then her professional role as a nurse. This left all the major medical aspects of the show to be handled by the male Dr. McCoy.

Though only aired between 1966 and 1969, TOS accurately reflected the gender roles of the late 1960s. The two main female characters on the series reflected the two major positions of women. Uhura represented the workingwoman. She was able to work with men, but was not their equal. Chapel represented the domestic side of women, who provided support to stronger male figures and longed for the affection and love of strong men. On TOS, Chapel represented domestic women and Uhura represented the women in the workplace in 1960s America.

Although the only major Star Trek developments in the 1970s were the TOS movies, which will not be discussed in this paper because the focus is the Star Trek television series, some information about the feminism movements during this decade must be understood. Fights over abortion, equality in the workplace, discrimination in hiring, promotion, and pay based on sex, Vietnam, and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) were all major battles that women’s groups fought in during this decade.[22] For this paper, the 1970s should be understood as a time when the causes and institutions begun by women in the 1960s were strengthened and their support increased in numbers.

The Next Generation (TNG) was the second major Star Trek series to be produced. First aired in 1987, TNG enjoyed greater success than TOS, and ran until 1994. TNG was created after second-wave feminists had begun to have success in their struggle for gender equality. TNG, like its predecessor, had two major female characters, Deanna Troi, played by Marina Sirtis and Beverly Crusher, played by Gates McFadden.[23] Unlike TOS, however, these two women were powerful senior officers who were critical to the functioning of the Enterprise.

TNG addressed the issues facing women in the 1980s in terms of both work and family. This was achieved by having the new Enterprise house crewmember’s families. This is a reflection of a change in society. A survey in 1965 stated that 70% of women planned to stop working after childbirth and that 43% of women planned not to return to work even after their children were over the age of 12.[24] By the time TNG aired, however, women’s groups such as the National
Organization of Women (NOW) had made the idea of a working women with children acceptable in the eyes of most American households and businesses. While family did play a role in TNG, the main focus of the female characters was their professional lives. The public acceptance of women as equals in the workplace was clearly growing in the 1980s as is evident with the Equal Rights Amendment, which only narrowly missed passing three years prior to TNG, “1983: The U.S. House of Representatives fails to pass the ERA by a vote of 278 for the ERA and 147 against the ERA, only 6 votes short of the required 2/3 majority for passage.”[25]

Deanna Troi was the Enterprise’s counselor. Initially, Troi wore a form-fitting, sexualized uniform different from any of her co-workers. For this reason, Troi, like Uhura, stood out from the other bridge officers, both male and female. This changed over the course of the series, because Troi was not an officer and, therefore, did not have to follow uniform regulations. As a result, not all of Troi’s outfits on TNG were highly sexual, a departure from the women of TOS. Troi’s role as a counselor also placed her in a stereotypical female job as the nurturer of the entire ship. While at face value the roles of Uhura and Troi seem to be similar, Troi had a lot more influence and power aboard the Enterprise. Troi had a doctorate of psychology and was empathic. As a result, she was and is constantly consulted by the Captain for advice.[26] As a valued asset, Troi had a seat directly next to the Captain’s chair on the command bridge, instead of in the background like Uhura’s station. Troi was not a woman trapped by her career; rather she was an influential woman who did not hide her femininity. This is evidenced by the fact that she had a healthy sexual appetite, participated in weekly officer poker night, and expressed her emotions instead of trying to suppress them.[27]

Troi frequently drove the plots on TNG and rarely appeared in a supporting role, like had the women of TOS. In the episode “Best of Both Worlds” an alien group known as the Borg captures the Captain. The Borg transforms Captain Picard into a robotic entity. When the crew rescued Picard, Troi was able to discover that his humanity still remained inside of him, “No, it's not. It's Picard…Troi to the bridge Data has made first contact with Picard…It is Captain Picard speaking, not Locutus.”[28] In this particular episode, Troi was able to locate Picard’s humanity and help contact it, showing that a strong female could be a hero and positively impact her working community just as well, if not better, and then a male could. Like women in 1980s America, Troi was asserting herself as a valuable member of the workforce.

Troi was an empowered woman but she was still limited by her gender. She was not included in the chain of command and she did not give orders due to the fact that she was not given the status of officer. She was a valuable member of the Enterprise, but she did not have any power in its system of command.[29] Troi however, was a strong woman female figure who dealt with serious issues. In one episode Troi, was raped at the hands of an alien lifeform. She fights back and ends up defeating her attacker and overcoming the incidentassaulter.[30] This was definitely a concern among women of the time. A survey of female naval employees found that 40-65% had experience some form of sexual harassment at work.[31] The Navy was a similar working environment in comparison with that of Star Trek, in that it is mostly male dominated, highly organized and based around military hierarchy, as were the various ships in the Star Trek series.

The other major female character on TNG was Beverly Crusher. Crusher was the chief medical officer on the Enterprise, shedding the nursing role. Crusher, like Troi, was a powerful, highly educated, professional woman who was not afraid to display her femininity. Crusher has a son onboard the Enterprise and balanced running the medical facilities, being a single mother, having a love life, and participating in recreational activities such as weekly poker nights.[32]
Crusher also frequently drove the plot. Like Troi, Crusher deals with rape at the hands of an alien and over comes it over the course of the series. She was able to move on, not allowing the event to cripple her or dominate her future, and in doing so displayed great strength and perseverance.[33]

In the episode, “Best of Both Worlds” Crusher has to keep the Captain alive and rescue him from his robotic state. “Life signs are stable. The DNA around the microcircuit fiber implants is returning to normal…We'll get you to Sickbay. We won't have any trouble getting these implants out now.”[34] Crusher delivers this line while operating scientific instruments and taking charge of the situation. She shows scientific knowledge and then displays confidence as she assures everyone that she can perform the operation successfully. This confidence and intelligence that Crusher exudes at this point in the episode are traits that are typical of male heroes. Crusher is successful in treating Picard, making her and Troi the major reasons that the rescue mission was a success. In this particular episode the two female characters play major roles in saving the Captain. By portraying the female characters as heroes, TNG shows that women can be positive leaders and play vital roles in the working world.

Crusher and Troi represent a major step forward for the women of Star Trek. While they both remained in traditional female roles of nurturers and healers, they possess more power and influence than the women of TOS. Though they were often still viewed as sexual objects, Troi and Crusher accepted this and incorporated it into their lives. They both displayed traits such as physical beauty, sexuality, understanding, patience, and a desire to nurture, and they used these traits to perform their duties aboard the Enterprise.[35] Troi and Crusher had influence and power aboard the Enterprise in TNG, but the society in which this Star Trek was created was not ready for a female to take a leadership role. It was acceptable for women to excel in the working world and to even obtain prestigious and powerful positions, but American society was still not ready to accept that women could hold top leadership positions. This is evident when looking at Congressional statistics from 1985-1993. During this time period the most women serving in the House of Representatives was 30 out of 435 and the most women in the Senate was 3 out of 100, both occurring in 1993. These numbers clearly show that America was not willing to place women in highest leadership positions.[36] As second-wave feminism continued its fight into the early 1990s females in leadership roles would become a reality. As second-wave feminism ended and third-wave began, a new Star Trek would address the ideas of females in command and the new issues raised by third-wave feminism.[37]

Star Trek: Voyager ran from 1995 to 2001, coinciding with the development of third-wave feminism. As such, Voyager reflected an American society that had experienced the successes of second-wave feminism. Women and men were becoming more equal in the working environment which with each passing year and a person’s gender did not limit them from pursuing leadership positions.[38] Voyager mirrored this change by placing three prominent female characters on its cast. Voyager not only expressed the newfound power of women in the workplace, but it also addressed certain issues brought up by third-wave feminism. An important aspect of third-wave feminism addressed how white women had benefitted at the expense of women of color and mixed gender women.[39] Voyager addressed these issues through Kate Mulgrew’s Captain Kathryn Janeway, Roxann Dawson’s B’Elanna Torres, and Jeri Ryan’s Seven of Nine.[40]

Captain Kathryn Janeway was the first female captain in the Star Trek universe. Janeway represented the progression of females in American society by holding the highest leadership
position on the starship.[41] It is interesting to note, however, that Janeway was not given command of the flagship, Enterprise, as Kirk and Picard were, which may reflect a reluctance in American society to place women in the highest offices of power, for example the Presidency. Regardless, Janeway was an extremely strong woman, as is evident in the first episode of Voyager. She negotiates with a man, “You help us find that ship, we help you at your next outmeet review…officially you’d be a Starfleet observer during the mission…You’ll be an observer. When it’s over, you’re cut loose.”[42] From this exchange, it is easy to see that Janeway is dedicated to her job and uses the power available to her to its fullest.

From this initial exchange in the pilot, Janeway appeared to be a cold disciplinarian. While it is true that being distant and harsh was part of her leadership style,[43] Janeway also embodied the caring, mother figure from time to time when she felt it was best for her crew.[44] Janeway had the ability to switch between a more stereotypically masculine approach to her work or a feminine approach, which gave her a great deal of flexibility and resourcefulness.[45] This idea that powerful women did not have to surrender their femininity was something that women of second-and-third wave feminist movement fought hard to achieve.[46]

Moral issues that the commanding officers had to overcome traditionally drove Star Trek plots. These issues often contained questions of what constitutes a life and when to interfere in an underdeveloped world. Voyager was no different in this regard, except for the fact that many of the commanding officers who faced these issues were women. Janeway and the other females drove the plots and debated the issues that the crew faced.[47] This is the first time that women had such a large say in the moral compass of a Star Trek crew. In TOS, the major decisions were left up to the trio of Kirk, Spock, and McCoy. In TNG, Picard and Riker debated most of the issues amongst themselves, and while the rest of the crew had input, the final say rested in the hands of men. By having Janeway lead the crew in these situations, with the help of Torres and Seven, Voyager reinforced the idea that women are perfectly capable of holding leadership positions and make important decisions.

Janeway’s primary leadership role was supplemented by motherly characteristics that were largely expressed towards another female character on Voyager, Seven of Nine.[48] Seven was a half human, half robotic human woman rescued during season four (1999). Seven was introduced to a completely new world and therefore formed a strong connection with Janeway.[49]

Besides giving Janeway an outlet to express motherly and feminine characteristics, Seven’s other major role on Voyager was to provide sex appeal.[50] Seven wore a tight, form fitting uniform and exuded sexuality. Her status as a sex symbol was heightened by the fact that she was unattainable to all the men aboard the starship because of her part robot, part human physiology.[51] Some scholars argue that Seven was a “throwback” to the old days of TOS, when women were little more then sex-symbols.[52]

However, to classify Seven as purely a sex symbol would be unfair to the third-wave feminist traits she possessed. Seven was in many ways was, bi-gendered. She was female biologically, but her personality traits were often masculine as a result of her robotic nature, which gave her great strength, repressed emotions, and no interest in family life, nurturing or caring for others.[53] Seven’s gender confusion connected her to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities that third-wave feminism sought to include. Seven was not relegated to a supporting role as a result of her confused identity, but rather was a central voice to most
decisions that Janeway made, clearly illustrating the influence of third-wave feminism in *Voyager.*[54]

While Janeway turned to Seven for scientific decisions, it was to her chief engineer B’Elanna Torres, that she turned to for moral ones.[55] The character Seven of Nine may or may not of been seen as progress for female characters, however, Torres was always viewed in a positive light.[56] Torres was half Klingon (alien race) and half human. In terms of American society and the third-wave movement, she represented minority women’s struggle to obtain the equality that the white women of the second-wave had achieved.[57] Torres was a strong, determined, warrior figure on *Voyager* who was not afraid to speak her mind or to challenge superiors when she felt she was correct.[58] These are the same traits that third-wave feminists championed as part of the path to respect and equality in the workplace for minorities.

The leadership qualities of determination, intelligence, and courage were traits that both Janeway and Torres possessed and displayed in the season two episode, “Dreadnought”. This episode involved a self-aware super weapon that was en route to destroy a populated planet. The weapon cannot be destroyed by conventional means, but it turned out that Torres was the person who originally programmed the weapon years before. Janeway inquires what can be done about the threat, “So how do we stop this weapon before it causes any more damage?” and Torres convinces her that she can disarm it, “I get back inside it. I know all the security codes, I installed them myself.”[59] As a precaution, Janeway left her crew behind and piloted herself and Torres to the weapon. When Torres failed to disarm the weapon and the weapon’s AI proclaims, “All key systems have been secured. You will not gain access… Life support has been terminated. It is advisable for you to return to your ship”[60] Janeway makes a decision that shows her selflessness, “Computer, initiate the self-destruct sequence, authorization Janeway pi one one zero. Set it at twenty minutes.”[61] Janeway then tries to get Torres to leave the weapon and bored an escape pod, “This is your last chance to get back here. I have to launch the last escape pods.”[62] However, it is Torres turn to display her bravery, “I may be able to detonate the warhead from here… I understand, Captain. I’m almost finished. Let me stay.”[63] Torres is able to get the weapon to destroy itself and Janeway is able to rescue her from the explosion and halt the self-destruction of her own ship.[64] These traits of bravery and selflessness that Janeway and Torres displayed are traits that have come to be expected in classic male heroes, but are manifested in the two women in the *Voyager* series.

“To boldly go where no one has gone before.” These are the words of Captain Jean-Luc Picard and, today in the post-Voyager world they, not Kirk’s words, ring true. What began as a male-driven science fiction adventure in the 1960s has transformed with society and has reflected the changes in female standing in American society over time. *Star Trek (1966)* portrayed women such as Uhura and Chapel, as valuable members of the crew, but clearly limited by their gender and subservient to men. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* portrayed women in a different light, with the characters Troi and Crusher. Troi and Crusher were powerful female characters aboard their Enterprise. However, these women were left out of the chain of command. *Voyager* did what none of the previous *Star Treks* could and placed women in leadership roles. Janeway, Torres, and Seven of Nine were all major female characters that held leadership positions. Rather then place the females in traditionally female roles; *Voyager* had its females in the roles of the captain, the engineer, and the scientist. *Voyager* made it clear that women were just as capable as men in the work place by
having the traditional triad leadership structure, started by Kirk, Spock, and McCoy on TOS, filled by three women.

Over the course of the Star Trek series, it is clear that as women gained power and respect in American society, the female characters in the Star Trek universe gained in these areas as well. When Star Trek began, women were just beginning to assert themselves in the working world of American society, but, by the time Voyager had run its course, American women had proven to be every bit the equals of their male coworkers.

[17] Ibid.
Henderson, 52.
[23] CBS Interactive.
[27] Ibid, 111.
[31] Feminist, “Feminist Majority.”
[33] Roberts, 175.
[34] Vids.TV, “Best of Both Worlds.”
[37] Head, 1.
[38] Feminist, “Feminist Majority.”
[40] CBS Interactive.
[41] Helford, 6.
[43] Ginn, 118.


[49] Sobstyl, 121.


[52] Ginn, 120.


[56] Helford, 6.

[57] Roberts,”Science, Gender & Race,” 207.

[58] Ginn, 119.


[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.
World War II, The Federal Government, and the University of Maryland: War-Related Administrative Expansion
By Riley Paterson

World War II caused unprecedented growth in the United States federal government. The multitude of tasks required for total war necessitated an administrative capability that the U.S. government had never before achieved. The government grew to such an extent that officials were concerned about the rate of expansion because bureaus functioned with increasing ineffectiveness.[1] On April 29, 1942, Senator Millard E. Tydings addressed the National Chamber of Commerce on wartime economic adjustments. He stated that Washington had grown so significantly that congressmen were struggling to stay informed and that there was considerable bureaucratic overlap, reducing efficiency.[2] Wartime federal administrative expansion was characterized by three distinct types of growth: bureaucratization, centralization, and general oversight. Bureaucratization is any addition in personnel or division that adds to the chain of command. Centralization is the tendency to use a single department or individual as a strong source of authority. Finally, oversight is the ability of an institution to observe and control.

The prosecution of the war effort considerably affected the University of Maryland (UMD), an institution that was closely monitored and utilized by Washington during WWII. The university’s conversion to total war, under federal oversight, caused the campus administration to rapidly expand during the war. The process of converting the campus to full mobilization caused the university administration to become more bureaucratized and centralized and to exercise more general oversight. A discussion of the nature of federal growth will serve as a framework for understanding the growth that occurred at UMD.

Trends in Federal Growth

The years leading up to WWII were characterized by growth in the federal government under New Deal policies, which were meant to put an end to the Great Depression. By 1937, however, the New Deal had failed to end the depression and fewer administrative reforms were taking place under the Roosevelt administration.[3] In his article, “The ‘Good War’: The Second World War and Postwar American Society,” Historian Neil A. Wynn argues that while the New Deal policies positively affected American government, it was the tribulations of WWII that forced America to become a fully modern bureaucratized state.[4] The need to produce and distribute enormous amounts of military materiel under the Lend-Lease Act necessitated the creation of numerous government bureaus. Heavy administrative centralization occurred due to the need to facilitate large-scale military research and development. Finally, the need to monitor domestic and international resources and labor led to an increase in general oversight.

Full prosecution of the war effort required Washington to grow bureaucratically in order to control large-scale production and distribution of materiel. To accomplish this feat the federal government created numerous new departments to handle the administrative stress. Historian Alan Brinkley notes that despite the growth of the 1930s, “No administrative mechanisms within the government [were] capable of [handling] the enormous new tasks the war had
imposed.”[5] The first signs of federal war-related bureaucratic growth came in 1939 with the creation of the War Resources Board (WRB), which was intended to “draft plans for full-scale economic mobilization.”[6] However, the President rejected the reports prepared by the WRB, leading to its abolition soon after. The failure of the WRB led to the creation of two new war-related bureaus, the Office of Emergency Management, and the National Defense Advisory Commission. However, both of these offices failed to adequately handle the pressures of wartime mobilization and were disbanded within six months of their creation.[7]

When the Lend-Lease Act passed in March of 1941, the U.S. was obligated to supply Great Britain and other allies with large amounts of materiel.[8] Full prosecution of production under Lend-Lease led to further expansion of Washington’s bureaucratic capabilities. By the end of 1941, two major bureaus had been established to manage the scale of production, the Office of Production Management, and the Supply Priorities and Allocations Board.[9] Further, by February 1943, the U.S. Maritime Commission, the War-Shipping Administration, the War Risk Insurance Bureau, and the Meyers Tariff Bureau were all working towards fully implementing the goals of the Lend-Lease program.[10] The enormous expansion of the federal government’s bureaucracy led some officials to desire a centralized command structure.[11]

While the scale of the Lend-Lease administration prevented it from being fully centralized, the federal government was able to heavily centralize its scientific research. In his article, “The Counterproductive Management of Science in the Second World War: Vannevar Bush and the Office of Scientific Research and Development,” Historian Larry Owens discusses how the Office of Scientific Research and Development (OSRD) functioned after its creation on June 27, 1940.[12] The defining characteristic of the OSRD was not the quality of its research, but rather the intense centralization of administration and management. Research projects were allocated by contract to different regions of the country, while management and administration remained centralized in Washington at all times. Vannevar Bush, the director of the OSRD, desired centralized administration in order to closely observe the funding of his department and the progress of research contracts. The result was a fully centralized management that created strong bonds between scientific research and the federal government.[13]

Washington’s tendency to centralize administration during WWII is also exhibited by the role of the National Youth Administration (NYA) in the war effort. The NYA was originally a New Deal organization created on June 26, 1935 under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and was meant to employ youth between the ages of 16 and 24.[14] An October 1939 memorandum from Washington explained that the NYA program was offered on a decentralized basis, “each state having an Administrator who [had] major responsibility for planning and running the program in that state in accordance with general policies established in Washington.”[15] Decentralized management allowed each state to use the NYA for its particular needs. The federal government initially attempted to incorporate the NYA into the war effort,[16] but the need to fully centralize wartime administration led to its abolition in 1943.[17] The outbreak of the war made military training and production an overriding priority, negating state-specific goals, and making the decentralized administration of the NYA obsolete.

Having become heavily bureaucratic and centralized, Washington was able to exert strong domestic and international oversight. Domestically, the Office of War Information (OWI) was created to collect and analyze information pertinent to national mobilization. Internationally, the U.S. became responsible for monitoring the scientific research of Germany in the postwar years.
In her article, “Information for the Allies: Office of War Information Libraries in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa,” Library Scientist Pamela Spence Richards writes on the origin and existence of the OWI. Richards reports that during and immediately after the war the United States was the only nation capable of collecting and distributing large amounts of information.\[18\] This was possible through the creation of the OWI, which was intended to “increase domestic understanding of America’s war effort and to facilitate the flow of American information overseas.”\[19\] The creation of an institution meant solely for gathering data greatly increased the ability of Washington to oversee the nation.

During the war, U.S. oversight became so powerful that immediately following victory Congress was responsible for determining the proper way to monitor Germany in the postwar years. On July 12, 1945, Helmut Landsberg, Professor of Meteorology at UMD, wrote to Senator Harley Kilgore. Landsberg reported that he had recently written on the role of science and technology in modern warfare, and asserted, “Effective control measures of scientific research work should be an integral part of the postwar supervisory scheme for Germany.”\[20\] Thus, WWII allowed the federal government to exert greater domestic and international oversight than ever before.

Therefore, by fully committing to the war effort the federal government grew bureaucratically, became increasingly centralized, and expanded its general oversight. Rapid federal growth caused more and more institutions to become a part of the conversion to total war, and the nation’s colleges and universities were no exception. In fact, On December 5, 1942, President Roosevelt issued an order for the War Manpower Commission to fully utilize America’s institutions of higher education for the prosecution of the war effort. By November 1943, Washington had contracts with more than five hundred schools for either training or production programs.\[21\] Due to its proximity to the nation’s capital, the federal government used the University of Maryland as a major part of the war effort.

**Federal-University Interaction**

The University of Maryland regularly aided Washington in war-related projects prior to the U.S. declaration of war in December 1941. However, the university’s contribution to the war effort drastically increased once war had been declared. By May of 1942, “no project [operated at UMD that did] not contribute directly to the war effort, and after July 1942 only War Training projects [would be permitted].”\[22\] The federal government’s use of UMD for the war effort manifested itself in two ways. First, the university became a source of personnel through specialized training programs and general recruitment. Second, the university became a source of materiel through military production programs, and through use of the university’s housing and technical facilities. In order to handle the rigorous demands of the federal government, the university administration grew bureaucratically, became increasingly centralized, and began exercising strong oversight.

The federal government’s use of the university as a source of personnel began even prior to the U.S. declaration of war in December 1941. On March 3, 1939, the school newspaper, the *Diamondback*, printed an article indicating that the Navy was recruiting officer candidates on campus through film screenings.\[23\] At these screenings, Naval officials presented the “official Navy sound motion picture ‘Wings of Gold’” in order to “interest members of the Maryland senior class in entering [a] government training course which [would lead] to a commission in
the naval reserve.”[24] More active use of the university as a source of personnel can be seen as early as January 2, 1940. On this date the federal government informed the Military Department of the university that it would be required to train approximately 1,200 students over the next three semesters for the Army Air Corps.[25] Aviation courses continued to be offered at the university, and in May 1940, the Diamondback noted that advanced flight courses might be introduced as well.[26]

Washington began to extensively rely on the university for personnel after the declaration of war in December 1941. The Navy continued to use the campus as a source of officers, allowing juniors and seniors to receive an officer’s commission upon completing a special training program offered by the university.[27] Moreover, the Army used the school newspaper as a means of recruitment through advertisement, declaring, “We need every college man in officers’ training.”[28] The university was utilized further as a source of personnel when the Army Air Forces’ demand for weather officers necessitated the establishment of a “comprehensive training program in meteorology.”[29] The Army Air Force also contacted the university in order to obtain the names of all men under forty-five years of age who could qualify as physical trainers.[30] Further, the school of engineering switched to year-round courses in order to supply the Army with enough capable engineers.[31] Washington was even able to use the university to train fifty civilians from “seven states and the District of Columbia” in methods of air raid defense.[32]

Prior to the declaration of war, the federal government also began using the university for production programs, and housing and technical facilities. For example, in late 1940 the engineering college was engaged in airplane manufacturing, and the agricultural departments were preparing for greater food production.[33] However, the federal government began to heavily use the university for materiel and facilities once engaged in full wartime mobilization. On May 1, 1942, the Diamondback reported that the university would soon be opening its production training shops. These shops would teach students to use machinery, weld, assemble, “and [learn] other trades vital to war industries.”[34] In December 1942, needing space to “instruct and house its growing strength,” the Army conducted a comprehensive survey of all “instruction-room, housing, dining and recreational facilities” available for use at the university.[35] Moreover, by February of 1943 soldiers occupied male dormitories and the pharmacy, dentistry and engineering facilities were all being utilized by the military.[36]

The extent to which the federal government made use of UMD during the war significantly affected the campus, and profoundly influenced its administration. Washington utilized the nation’s universities so heavily that student run organizations struggled to function. In fact, the American chapter of the International Student Service (ISS) actually decided to temporarily cease its involvement with the Parent organization. On February 2, 1943, the chairman of the U.S. committee of the ISS wrote, “The exigencies of the war and the control which the Army and Navy are exercising over the colleges and universities make this an unfavorable time to carry on our work.”[38] While many colleges and universities were under federal control during the war, UMD in particular was able to earn the title of “essential military college” by offering a “joint Army-Navy Specialized Training Program.”[39] Historian George Callcott reports that the program “brought 1,400 men to campus, … and marched [them] to classes with what remained of the civilian students.”[40] Further, the Diamondback stated, “Admittedly, the Army program does involve a [loss] of academic freedom, and it will be up to us, after the war, to make sure that it is only a temporary one. But for the present, we must concern ourselves primarily with
winning the conflict.”[41] The enormous demand of the war effort is the primary reason the campus administration grew so rapidly during WWII. To handle the stress of the war effort, the university administration became increasingly bureaucratic, heavily centralized, and exerted more general oversight.

**Trends in University Growth**

The wartime administrative growth of the University of Maryland exhibited the same trends as federal growth, namely, an increase in bureaucratization, centralization, and general oversight. Bureaucratization occurred when new courses, committees, and departments were created to handle wartime and postwar problems. Administrative centralization occurred in order to combat the inefficiencies inherent in large-scale administrative expansion. Finally, the administration began exercising strong oversight to ensure that the campus was contributing the utmost to the war effort.

The bureaucratic expansion of the university administration was characterized by the addition of educational courses and departments meant to further the war effort and by the expansion of the university plans for emergency defense of the campus. In the months approaching the U.S. declaration of war, the university added new courses and faculty, indicating some measure of bureaucratic growth.[42] The official declaration of war in December 1941, however, caused the university to heavily expand its bureaucracy in order to meet the demands of Washington.

The university expanded bureaucratically through the addition of numerous military training departments, which was partially a result of interaction with the U.S. Navy. After a Naval officer visited the campus, President Harry Clifton Byrd announced that the university would tailor courses specifically to the needs of the Navy and ordered the Dean of Engineering to be in contact with Naval officials.[43] The Military Department of the university also created new courses for government service, establishing a school of aerial intelligence in January 1942.[44] Further, on March 26, 1942, the Committee on New Courses approved sixty-eight newly developed courses for the upcoming semesters. The list included courses relevant to the war such as metal-working, sociology of war, and military German.[45] The *Diamondback* reported on January 26, 1943, that the military German course was meant to “acquaint the students… with the Nazi military terminology and to enable them to read German military books and articles not translated into English.”[46]

As the war progressed, the university administration continued to grow bureaucratically in order to contribute to the war effort. The first half of 1942 saw the creation of numerous administrative committees meant to dictate the role of night and summer classes and to determine which courses best served the war effort.[47] In 1943, President Byrd continued to plan bureaucratic expansion. The *Diamondback* reported on February 16, 1943, that Byrd was creating new courses meant to lay the foundation for an “Institute for World Economics and Politics, or Institute for World Affairs.” This new program was meant specifically to train students “for foreign administrative posts in the postwar world.”[48] By the end of 1944, the university administration was still reorganizing and expanding its bureaucracy. For example, President Byrd created new departments of science, government, and American studies.[49] Byrd even established a committee to deal with the issue of postwar education.[50] Bureaucratic expansion at the university during the war is partially attributable to
the need for new war-related courses and departments. However, the need to prepare the university for emergency defense also spurred bureaucratic growth.

The Committee on University Defense was established on December 13, 1941, in order to prepare the campus for emergency defense. The committee’s main goal was to coordinate the resources of the university for “adequate defense of [its] personnel and property… in case of an emergency.”[51] The committee quickly set about preparing the campus for possible bombings. Members determined the best way to use each building as an air raid shelter, appointed an air raid warden to each building, and estimated the approximate costs of preparing the campus for defense.[52] This level of organization was achieved by creating a master chart showing the entire bureaucratic layout of the University Civilian Defense Organization, (see appendix). The chart displays essential services such as first aid, food, evacuation, and police, all under the control of the Chief Air Raid Warden, Harvey Casbarian. [53] The size of the university’s bureaucracy during the war made it difficult to effectively coordinate tasks and resources. In order to combat the inefficiencies of large bureaucracies the university administration became heavily centralized.

The university administration became heavily centralized in order to handle the substantial growth caused by the war effort. Casbarian and President Byrd served as lead coordinators and decision makers in order to properly manage administrative growth. Upon the establishment of the Committee on University Defense, Casbarian was named the Chief Air Raid Warden and given the duty of managing all departments established under the committee. This meant that the bureaus of plant utilities, first aid, food services, evacuation, rescue, police, fire protection, morale, and information all reported to Casbarian. When it met for the second time on December 20, 1941, the committee designated responsibility for air raid defense, warning signals, medical services, and other vital tasks. It explicitly made clear that “all personnel shall report to [Casbarian] and be directly responsible to him.” Further, the committee actually ceded all power to Casbarian, agreeing to “serve in an advisory capacity.”[54] Casbarian also served as an intermediary between the university and all outside organizations that had buildings on the campus.[55]

While Casbarian strongly influenced the university’s preparation for emergency defense, President Byrd served as an even stronger source of centralized authority. He monitored numerous bureaus, while also serving as a central point of contact for the military and the federal government. After the outbreak of the war, many of the new departments created fell under President Byrd’s authority. [56] Numerous correspondences show that President Byrd was in frequent contact with every dean at UMD, including the colleges located in Baltimore. [57] In fact, a letter from the Baltimore school of Dentistry shows that the University of Maryland at College Park and Byrd served as a central point for federal contact.[58] The level of authority exerted by Byrd can be attributed to the fact that only “the President [was] in a position to know the overall picture of the institution.”[59] Thus, Casbarian and Byrd served as centralized sources of authority in the university’s expanding wartime administration.

The university administration also began to rigorously oversee the campus in order to maximize its contribution to the war effort. During the war, the university administration was able to closely monitor both the faculty and the student body. The administration placed considerable demands on the faculty, resulting in a loss of academic and professional freedom. The administration also closely monitored student opinions, student-run events and publications, and general graduation requirements.
The loss of freedom experienced by the faculty initially presented itself through the intense need for war-related courses. The pressure placed on university teachers is exemplified by a correspondence between A.G. Dumez, Dean of the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy, and James H. Reid, acting Dean of Men at UMD in 1943. On November 9, 1943, Dumez wrote, “I do not see how we can do any more…. During the past year, none of our teachers have taken more than two weeks’ vacation.”[60] In addition to rigorous job hours, faculty also experienced restrictions on their rights to patent their professional ideas. On April 17, 1945, the General Administrative Board held its third meeting of the academic year. One item discussed was a bill passed by the Maryland legislature, which “authorized the university to take out and sell patents. Members of the faculty [would] no longer take out patents under their own names.”[61] Therefore, the war effort allowed the university administration to closely monitor the labor of their employees, and by the end of the war the university was able to own the professional ideas of the faculty. During WWII, the campus administration also closely observed the activity of the student body.

The university administration closely monitored student opinion, events, and publications. The administration’s concern with student opinion began shortly after the U.S. declaration of war, when President Byrd gave a speech in order to clarify misconceptions about the conflict. Byrd wanted to be certain that every student would do his or her best for the war effort.[62] The administration also intervened in the recreational affairs of students. Four major student events, including All-University Night and Maryland Day, were cancelled[63] in order to “cooperate with the defense effort as much as possible by eliminating the time spent in preparation for the programs and also eliminating the public use of automobiles for such affairs.”[64] The administration also closely monitored student publications during the war. On February 19, 1943, the Diamondback reported that the Dean of Men, James H. Reid, wanted to discontinue two student publications entirely and reduce the Diamondback to a weekly rather than bi-weekly status. Again, the administration’s motivation was to reduce all activity that was “non-essential” to the war effort.[65] The administration was certainly aware of the extent to which it was overseeing the student body. This is evident in a letter from December 21, 1942, in which Reid wrote, “Student activities and social life have been greatly reduced in keeping with war conditions.”[66]

The university administration also exerted oversight by changing the pace of education and closely monitoring graduation requirements. Between 1942 and 1945, in order to rapidly train personnel, the university converted to a trimester system in which three full semesters would be completed in a single year.[67] Graduation requirements were changed when Byrd was informed that one quarter of the students taking the War Production Course were failing due to consistent absence. President Byrd “reaffirmed his previous statement that this course [would] definitely be required for graduation.”[68]

Therefore, the war effort caused notable growth in the university’s administration. Bureaucratic growth occurred as a result of war related courses, departments, and committees. Administration became highly centralized when Casbarian and President Byrd became leading sources of authority. Finally, the administration began to exercise strong oversight in order to maximize its contribution to the war effort.

Conclusion
WWII demanded substantial growth of the federal government. The need for training, production, and distribution created significant bureaucratization, centralization, and oversight. As institutions intended for training and production, the nation’s colleges and universities played an integral role in the war effort. The University of Maryland in particular, changed and grew significantly in order to meet the needs of Washington. On January 16, 1942, President Byrd stated that in light of the war, the university had two major goals: to train personnel to fulfill the nation’s urgent needs and “to devote itself to cooperation with the Government so that it may help the Government put forth the maximum effort in the crisis now facing the country.”[69] Through the full prosecution of the war effort, the university administration was forced to mirror federal growth, becoming increasingly bureaucratic and centralized, while enforcing rigid oversight on the campus. Just as the American federal government came into its full form during WWII, the war effort also propelled UMD into a modern, expanded existence. The creation of numerous bureaus, committees, and courses led to an expanded academic curriculum. The centralization of the administration strengthened the role of the university’s President. Finally, growth in oversight gave the administration the power to radically alter the campus. After the war, the G.I. Bill flooded the campus with veterans seeking higher education. The administrative expansion of WWII certainly prepared the campus for the postwar influx of students.

The wartime growth of the University of Maryland is indicative of a general trend that emerged during the war, namely, that total wars are above all administrative tasks. Similar administrative growth may have occurred in other educational institutions, and in any institutions that significantly committed to the war effort. It is important to maintain an awareness of how WWII shaped the current state of the world, and UMD is a strong example of war-related growth. Further research on the role of America’s colleges and universities during WWII would certainly provide insight into the development of post-war American educational institutions. Additionally, further research on the era could illuminate the current state of many institutions, which may have administrative practices that originated in WWII.

Appendix

The image shown below is the University of Maryland Civilian Defense Organization Master Chart. The Committee on University Defense created the chart in December 1941, in order to properly manage the university’s resources in case of an emergency. The chart displays essential wartime bureaus, all under the direct command of Harvey T. Casbarian, the Chief Air Raid Warden. It serves as a strong example of the intense bureaucratization and centralization that occurred at UMD as a result of WWII.
[2] Millard E. Tydings, Address to the Chamber of Commerce, April 29, 1942, Papers of Millard E. Tydings, Series 2.1, Box 2, Folder 13, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.
[10] Correspondence, Maurice B. Mumford to Congressman J.M. Vorys, February 18, 1943, Papers of Millard E. Tydings, Series 3.1, Box 3, Folder 4, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

[15] Federal Security Agency Memorandum, October 1939, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 7, Folder 4, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

[16] Correspondence, Glen D. Brown, NYA State Administrator of Maryland, to James H. Reid, Dean of Men, UMD, December 5, 1941, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 7, Folder 8, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.


[19] Ibid., 325.

[20] Correspondence, Helmut Landsberg to Senator Harley Kilgore, July 12, 1945, Papers of Helmut Landsberg, Series 1.2, Box 6, Folder 12, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

[21] Correspondence, Paul V. McNutt to Harry Clifton Byrd, November 20, 1943, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 12, Folder 5, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

[22] Minutes of the Advisory Committee, University of Maryland War Production Training Program, May 14, 1942, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 12, Folder 6, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.


[24] Ibid.

[25] Notice, Military Department, University of Maryland, “Flying Cadet Training of The Army Air Corps,” January 2, 1940, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series I, Box 1, Folder 12, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.


[29] Correspondence, Jos B. McCall Jr. to James H. Reid, January 23, 1943, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

[30] Correspondence, Merwin E. Potter to Director of Physical Education, Director of Athletics, and Director of Placement Bureau, June 28, 1942, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 12, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.


[34] “NYA Shop Will Start Training Program Soon,” *Diamondback*, May 1, 1942.

[35] Correspondence, Captain C.J. Blair to Harry Clifton Byrd, December 9, 1942, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 9, Folder 3, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.


Correspondence, Alvin Johnson, Chairman of the U.S. Committee of ISS, to ISS Headquarters, February 2, 1943, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 10, Folder 9, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.


Callcott, 77.


“Dr. Byrd Appoints Fourteen New Members to University Faculty,” *Diamondback*, September 26, 1941; “Engineering College Adds Two Courses To Defense Training,” *Diamondback*, November 14, 1941.

Minutes from the fourth meeting of the General Administrative Board, January 5, 1942, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 6, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

Ibid.

Committee on New Courses, March 26, 1942, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 6, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

“Ibid.”

Minutes of the first meeting of the General Administrative Board, December 8, 1944, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 7, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

“Ibid.”


Administrative Board Docket, April 9, 1942, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 6, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

“Newly Added Military German Course Gaining in Popularity,” *Diamondback*, January 26, 1943.

Progress Report of Committee on University Defense, December 20, 1941, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 5, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

“Ibid.”

University of Maryland Civilian Defense Organization Master Chart, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 5; Progress Report of Committee On University Defense, December 20, 1941, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 5, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

“Ibid., Italics added.

“Ibid.”

Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 4, Folders 5, 6 and 7, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

Papers of Geary Eppley, Series I, Box 12, Folder 5, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.
Correspondence, Ben Robinson to James H. Reid, November 16, 1943, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 12, Folder 5, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

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Correspondence, A.G. Dumez to James H. Reid, November 9, 1943, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 12, Folder 5, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

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Notes from fourth meeting of the General Administrative Board, January 5, 1942, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 4, Folder 6, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

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“Dean Reid Suggests Curtailing Of Publications as Non-Essential,” Diamondback, February 19, 1943

Correspondence, James H. Reid to Harry Clifton Byrd, December 21, 1942, Papers of Geary Eppley, Series 1, Box 9, Folder 8, University Archives, University of Maryland, College Park, MD.

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In her years of travel in the United States, from 1930 to 1933, Frida Kahlo developed a complex reaction to her environment. She was intrigued by the scenery of San Francisco, both interested in and disgusted by the overbearing machinery of Detroit, and flirtatious with yet critical of New York high society. Herrera comments, “By the time the Riveras’ stay in Manhattan was nearing its end, Frida was no longer the shy, reclusive creature she had been when she arrived. Though she still complained about many aspects of Gringolandia she was now caught up in an active and glamorous life.”[1]

While Frida was attempting to pass judgment on American society, she was also contemplating her own place within society both as a woman and as a Mexican. She may not have been accepting of the ‘American’ way of life (at least the picture she garnered from high society) from the moment she entered the country, with their obsession with “ambition” and frequent parties in the midst of the Depression, but her personal experiences while in America also shaped her view. Her miscarriage in 1932 led her to a distinct, and revolutionary, contemplation of a woman’s pain and a lack of ability to express the emotions created by these experiences. Also, in the midst of extreme physical and emotional pain, she hungered to return to her natural, agrarian and idealistic, albeit conflicted, Mexican homeland. Frida’s works during this period are even more complex than her reactions; they show her response to both her American environment and her personal tumult stemming from her miscarriage, the death of her mother and homesickness.

In her work during this period, Frida challenges the gender stereotypes of women through recording her own personal experiences; in works such as Henry Ford Hospital, My Birth and Frida and the Abortion, Frida portrays formerly taboo and women-specific subjects, creating a gender-specific ‘pictographic’ language that flies in the face of the male artistic conception of women. Through her homesickness Frida finds both her ultimate definition of Mexico, a nature enshrouded ruined but fruitful land of extremes (male-female, dark-night, colonial-modern), and her critique of the United States, a hypocritical spiritless land of machines and capitalism. Much about her work in this time is also revolutionary on multiple planes – her emerging personal identity, one of a strong yet vulnerable, self-created and self-possessed decidedly Mexican woman –, is a challenge to the idealistic and docile women portrayed in male art and desired in Mexican post-revolutionary society; her art itself inher art’s depiction of depicting miscarriage, stillbirth, Catholic irony and soiled nudes is revolutionary for the time as these subjects were never before considered acceptable high art; and, as seen mainly in My Dress Hangs Here, her cynical observations regarding the need for a proletariat revolution yet the waste of the workers efforts in the hierarchy of American capitalism.

Frida began her work in America with portraits, a far cry from the in-depth emotional works that she would paint in 1932, but nonetheless important to note in terms of her developing personal identity and her growing understanding of American life as well as the importance of her Mexican heritage. The first portrait she painted was of Dr. Leo Eloesser, most likely as payment for his care and a sign of their friendship. “Frida painted [Dr. Leo Eloesser] […]
dressed in a somber suit and a white shirt with an impeccably starched high collar […] the
drawing signed “D. Rivera” that hangs on the bare wall […] The pose is standard for full-length
portraits of men in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Mexico, and the extreme primitivism
of the style suggests that Frida had in mind a naive portrait […] In Portrait of Dr. Leo Eloesser,
she has substituted Mexico’s naïve provincial portraiture […] for Riveras murals and portraits as
her chief source of inspiration.”[2]

Frida’s first work of art in America is thus a portrait of an American heavily influenced, albeit
superficially, by Mexico; already she sees Mexican national identity as a key part of her style as
an artist and the environment with which she should surround her friends (rather than the
America that is actually the surroundings). She painted a few more portraits of her friends in
San Francisco and in each one, despite the fact that the work was a picture of someone else, she
intertwined her own vision, something that her later works would come to focus on. Herrera
states, “the personal link between artist and patron or subject affected the look and meaning of
her work: Frida’s portraits echo her style of sociability, which was direct, unpretentious, witty,
and astute in its judgments of others.”[3] One of Frida’s most telling portraits, and in stark
contrast to that of Leo Eloesser, was of Jean Wight, the wife of Rivera’s chief assistant. Simple,
“It is a bland, conventional portrait.”[4] The fact that Wight is backed by a San Francisco
skyline, blunt America instead of Mexican flavors, is telling of Frida’s evolving opinion of
America as a place of superficiality and general distaste. Kahlo later described Wight, saying,
“she talks all day of ‘fashions’ and of stupidities that don’t amount to anything, and not only that,
but in addition she does it with a pretentiousness that leaves one cold.”[5] Clearly Frida is
beginning to make judgments regarding what the national identity of America is all about;
“fashions” and “stupidities.”

As she continued her work in California, Frida painted Luther Burbank, a portrait that was a
precursor to the ‘Surrealist’ works she would complete in the years to come. Burbank is
depicted with his legs turned into a tree trunk that is rooted in a human skeleton. Herrera notes,
“Burbank, with his two feet (turned tree trunk) quite literally in the grave, is the first instance in
Frida’s painting of what would become a favorite theme: life-death duality and the fertilization
of life by death.”[6] While she continued to be inspired by her Rivera (he utilized the human
tree imagery in one of his earlier murals), Frida was still drawing upon distinctly Mexican
themes even when painting an American. The contrasting images of life and death (and their
interconnectedness) are prevalent in ancient Aztec cultural, Catholicism and Mexican popular
culture, all the foundations of the Mexican national identity that she would continue to praise and
come to critique. Her black humor and wit were also beginning to emerge in her blunt,
practically casual, depiction of fruit bearing plants juxtaposed with a decayed skeleton on the
same canvas.

This same striking depiction, albeit less morbid, is utilized by Frida in Frida and Diego
Rivera. Like the painting of Luther Burbank, this work shows Frida’s emerging personal identity
as a woman who can, ironically, be both the subservient Mexican wife and a strong, magnetic
woman. Here, too, she continues to use Mexican colonial painting techniques such as a painted
ribbon with an inscription in the upper right corner. Frida mocks the way Americans saw her and
her husband, as a strange match of a beast of a man with a blossom of a wife (i.e. superficially).
She also portrays herself in two roles, the first of which being the “genius’s adoring wife,” small,
fragile and elegant like a doll.[7] The second role, Herrera describes, is practically paradoxical,
“Frida’s penetrating gaze has a note of demonic humor and gritty strength […] she is self-
possessed. The portrait depicts a young woman presenting – perhaps with a certain becoming diffidence but also with pride in her “catch” – her new mate to the world.”[8] This paradox itself is decidedly Mexican, but there is also a hint of something else, of Frida’s desire to be amusing and in that way becoming “Rivera’s woman.” Frida, thus, from the beginning of her time in America, desired, whether consciously or unconsciously, to become something bigger than just a typical Mexican wife and woman, but also at once both a possessor and the possessed. This self-possessed and self-aware identity would come quickly in the rest of her years in the United States, motivated by both her foreign surroundings and personal anguish.

In July of 1932 Frida suffered a miscarriage that would bring the themes of personal identity, national identity, gender and revolution to the forefront of her art; she was no longer the meek portrait painter she played in San Francisco. It is clear that Frida wished to draw her lost fetus in order to commemorate her loss, and it is also clear that in high art, already a male dominated field, this has not happened before. Rivera says of the painting that would commemorate her miscarriage, Henry Ford Hospital, “Frida began work on a series of masterpieces which had no precedent in the history of art – paintings which exalted the feminine qualities of endurance of truth, reality, cruelty, and suffering. Never before had a women put such agonized poetry on canvas.”[9] The subject, despite being from an onlookers point of view, is, like many of her paintings to come, portrayed in a uniquely feminine way. The first of which is the “unflattering depiction of her body,” which lies in a pool of blood (the miscarriage), crying and still bloated from pregnancy.[10] The symbols she surrounds herself with, too, are reminiscent of her miscarriage and also able to be understood by women who have also gone through similar experiences. The anatomically correct fetus, connected to Frida with a ribbon-like ‘umbilical cord,’ the torso pedestal that plays out the “drama of conception,” and the image of the pelvis are all decidedly feminine symbols.[11] They are also medical images, a source for images that Frida would come to utilize often, which were also not previously considered a source for original art. The other images are uniquely Frida, showing her emerging creativity as an artist in an attempt to document her own feelings, another action rarely executed by female artists in that day and age. The snail, which has been interpreted to represent the slowness of the miscarriage or to evoke biblical imagery; the ambiguous piece of machinery, possibly an “iron vise,” another representative of hips, “the mechanical part of the whole business, or simply a statement of “bad luck or pain;” and the orchid, which is at once sexual and anatomical, all are Frida’s evolving way of representing both herself and the feminine. She has taken symbols from flora, fauna and the masculine world of machines and has given them a new definition from her own emotions. The setting of the painting, too, signifies her strengthening identity. “Frida’s bed floats beneath a blue sky in an immense, barren plain; she said that she painted the ground beneath the bed earth color because she was trying to express solitude and loneliness. But, she added in a seeming contradiction, “Earth to me is Mexico, people around, and everything, so it was a help to me, when I had nothing.”[12] Even when she is in Detroit and experiences this horrific event, her heart is in her homeland of Mexico, which is at once both barren and a comfort; Frida is coming to rely upon herself and her identity as a Mexican woman to create her strength. Frida also portrays herself as extremely vulnerable while at the same time strong enough to express her horrific experience, a dichotomy she would utilize again, showing that she is self-assured enough to offer her body and soul to the viewer so that they might attempt to understand her pain.

To match the personal revolution that Frida is embarking on, this painting is, indeed, revolutionary to the portrayal of women in art, destroying artistic gender boundaries, and aligns
Frida away from the United States as a Mexican woman. “It is commonplace to describe artistic creation using metaphors of gestation and birth, yet actually to depict such events is tacitly proscribed. Scenes of childbirth are rarely portrayed in Western art and miscarriage never – they have been hived off into medical texts.”[13] In addition to redefining what subjects are and are not art, she is creating a visionary language for women that did not exist before hand. David Lomas describes, “Kahlo conveys poignantly enough the feeling of being a hapless victim of an event beyond her control. Yet her state of helpless isolation is partly due to, and certainly underscored by, the absence of a visual language adequate to render the experience. […] It is the gaps and silences of Henry Ford Hospital that register more acutely than pain and anguish of her loss.”[14] Contrary to Lomas’ thought, Frida, while unable to control her miscarriage, does not portray herself as a victim per se, but rather an empowered expressionist of her own reality which, she feels, is important. In finding this new artistic language, Frida feels free to depict herself as a soiled nude, negating the shames of miscarriage as she does not attempt to silence her grief; her pain regarding the failure of motherhood does not render her, too, a failure.[15] This flies in the face of female stereotypes in both America and Mexico. Most likely at Diego’s suggestion, Frida chose to record her miscarriage on sheet metal in a way that is modeled after a retablo, but at the same time contradictory of this Mexican style of recording religious miracles by representing a calamity and a decided ungodly event. Aligning with Mexico, despite its barrenness and ideal of Catholic feminine purity, Frida seems to be saying that the Industrial Revolution brings little except for bad luck and more marginalization of women, and that all of the factories of Detroit could not prevent her personal hell.

Her next work, *Frida and the Abortion*, although not a painting, is just as important as her major works in that it shows her further dealing with the female image of miscarriage, her literal invasion of the male-dominated world of art and her affirmation that Mexico is her nurturing homeland steeped in the natural cycle of life and death. Frida stands inertly in between the image of cells developing into a fetus and a more complicated combination of both male and Mexican related images. The fetus, which is at once in her womb and on her right side, connected again by a vein symbolizing an umbilical cord, represents her lost child. Herrera continues, “Two tears fall on her cheeks, and the hemorrhage that ended her pregnancy is depicted in droplets of blood that run down the inside of her leg and into an earth that is both a grave and a garden. In contrast to Frida, the earth is fertile: its plants, nourished by Frida’s blood, have grown into shapes that echo the eyes, hands, and genitals of her male fetus. Frida’s body is divided into light and dark halves, as it to reveal the light and dark halves of her psyche, the presence within her of life and death. On her dark side is a weeping moon, and a third arm which hold a palette shaped rather like the fetus, implying, perhaps, that painting is an antidote to maternal failure, that for Frida, making art must take the place of making children.”[16] Here again is the presence of life-death, light-dark duality that is in the roots of Frida’s Mexican heritage and portrayed first in Luther Burbank. Also Mexico again is portrayed as fertile soil from which the proper cycle of nature is continues. This image of roots and plants representative of fertility, nature and motherhood would continue to be depicted in Frida’s future works; Mexico was both her mother and the mother she could not be. Her third arm in this work seems to be representative literally of the fact that for her painting must replace bearing children but also figuratively of the fact that while Frida could not procreate (the woman’s job) she could still maintain her femininity in the male-dominated art world. Thus this work is an expression of Frida’s newly affirmed personal identity of a woman who has suffered as a female from her lack
of physical creation but who has also come to recognize her own birth as a strong Mexican woman who participates in the natural cycle of life and death.

Frida’s next full-scale painting, *Self-Portrait on the Borderline Between Mexico and the United States*, is an expansion on the themes she touched upon in both *Luther Burbank* and *Frida and the Abortion*, describing how she sees herself caught between Mexico and America as well as her critique of both of them. Frida herself, uncharacteristically portrayed in a European-style dress rather than her typical Mexican costume, is dressed for America but at the same time she holds a cigarette, defying proper etiquette, and holding a Mexican flag, showing that she may be dressed for high society but it not where her essence lies. Like in the lithograph, the sun and moon are placed opposed to each other on the Mexican side of the painting. Herrera adds, “[They] represent the unity of cosmic and terrestrial forces, the Aztec notion of an eternal war between light and dark, the preoccupation in Mexican culture with the idea of duality: life-death, light-dark, past-present, day-night, male-female […] The juxtaposed sun and moon also refer to the idea that all nature mourns Christ’s death.”[17] Through the sun, masculinity and fertilizer, and the moon, feminine mother, Kahlo notes the Mexican cultural contention of man and woman as well as Mexico’s spiritual heritage. The temple on the Mexican side denotes Mexico’s ancient history as opposed to America’s lack of foundational history (overtaken by and born via machines), but she also comments, like in *Henry Ford Hospital*, on Mexico’s earthy fertility yet unmistakable emptiness. The plants, rooted in the Mexican soil like in *Frida and the Abortion*, are juxtaposed to the American “plant,” machines with cords underground, and one of the machines attempts to become a plant, united with one of the roots on the Mexican side. The ‘Ford’ smokestacks, too, are placed opposing the Mexican pre-Columbian idols, again denoting America’s focus on machines and the future instead of culture and history.[18] It is clear that Frida prefers Mexico to America (even commenting on America’s use of Mexico in the industrial revolution with a generator plugged into her pedestal), that she feels costumed in America (it is her Mexican costume which is most natural), and that she has come into a new sense of herself. She critiques both Mexico and America, showing them as two opposing sides, but she also seems to be showing two sides of herself as both involved and admittedly interested in America (almost peering at it out of the corner of her eyes) but a decidedly Mexican woman.

While Frida dealt heavily with national identity in *Self Portrait on the Borderline…*, she reaffirmed her own burgeoning self-identity in *My Birth*, creating herself yet again as a vulnerable woman, but also again revolutionary in her graphic depiction and the notion that one to give birth to oneself and still decidedly identified with but critical of Mexican culture. Herrera explains, “It is one of the most awesome images of childbirth ever made. We see the infant’s large head emerging between the mother’s spread legs from the doctor’s vantage point. Blood covers the inert, drooping head and skinny neck. The baby looks dead. A sheet covering the women’s head and chest, as if she had died in childbirth, emphasize the total exposure of delivery. As a substitute for the mother’s head, on the wall directly above her is a painting of another grieving mother, the Virgin of Sorrows pierced by swords, bleeding and weeping.”[19] In the style of *Henry Ford Hospital*, Frida uses the *retablo* structure, showing both her use and defiance of Mexican folkloric painting. Here, too, she recognizes the cycle of life and death, emphasizing their connectedness. “Kahlo has captured the proximity of the relationship between the experiences of birth and death […] Symbolically, birth implies the death of the woman’s pregnant self, of the physical bond with the fetus. In Kahlo’s painting physical death becomes the symbolic expression of the artist’s unresolved identity.”[20] Kahlo’s mother, who died
recently and who’s pregnant “self” would have died after the birthing process, is the woman under the sheet, but Frida, too, is that woman, both giving birth to her lost fetus and giving birth to herself, her new identity opposite of motherhood that culturally in Mexico might be considered “useless” or stillborn – the feminine that does not reproduce. Mirkin continues, “Kahlo’s awareness of her inability to follow her own mother into motherhood symbolically gave birth to her new identity as an artist who “gave birth to herself.” In this way the culturally learned desire to give birth continued to inform Kahlo’s art and life, filling it with a fruitful tension between creativity and procreativity.”[21] Again, Frida is revolutionary in her depiction of this graphic moment from both an artistic and Mexican standpoint. The painting recalls the Aztec sculpture of Tlazolteotl who is depicted as squatting in birth, grimacing in pain. Mirkin describes the origin of the statue, saying, “As is common among patriarchal societies, the Aztecs, in consolidating male dominance, most likely transformed, symbolically, taboos related to menstruation and childbirth into "unclean," "shameful," and "dangerous" acts, all of which entered religious ritual. Women's creative powers were thus diminished, with females considered as mere procreators whose primary role was to produce warriors.”[22] Frida, however, reworks the image to give birth not to a male warrior, but to herself, an unclean yet bold event; Frida, unlike the traditionally male-dominated conception of women, is grasping for her own identity that she can control. The presence of the Mater Dolorosa also serves to critique Mexican standards as Frida both feels the pain of the Mother of Sorrows and rejects her standpoint of purity. By placing the picture above the bed as if it is the mother’s head, although Frida claims it was just a memory, Frida shows that the clean Mater Dolorosa has, by proxy, given birth to the unclean Frida; the product of Mexico despite its Catholic colonial upbringing.

In her last painting begun in America, Frida returns to a more solid critique of American society while affirming herself with the Tehuana costume, at once coming to fully disdain her present environment, consolidating her identity of herself as a Mexican woman and seeming to prod the masses into a literal proletarian revolution. Herrera describes, “Frida mocks the North American obsession with efficient plumbing and the national preoccupation with competitive sports by setting upon pedestals a monumental toilet and a golden golf trophy. Business, religion, and the drastic eclecticism of U.S. taste are targets too. Snaking around the cross in the stained-glass window of Trinity Church is a large red S that turns the crucifix into a dollar sign; a red ribbon links the church’s gothic tower with a Wall Street Doric temple, Federal Hall; and instead of Federal Hall’s marble steps, Frida has pasted on her canvas a graph showing “Weekly Sales in Millions”: in July 1933, big business appeared to be doing fine, but the masses – tiny, swarming figures at the bottom of the painting – were not the beneficiaries.”[23] She mocks the hypocrisy of America, with its rich captains of industry and yet the destruction of the worker, lost at the bottom of a hierarchy that is supposedly representing liberty (as indicated by the Statue of Liberty at the top of the painting). Herrera continues, “she has something serious to say as well about human waste and wasted human beings in a capitalist society: a garbage pail overflows with a hot-water bottle, daises, a stuffed toy rabbit, a liquor bottle – and a frilly cloth smeared with blood, a bone, globs of entrails, an object that looks like a human heart, and most horrific of all, a bloody human hand.”[24] The masses seem to have bared down upon Wall Street, which is on fire, and due to the smoke the values of America, represented by Mae West, are also smoldering.

In the midst of American criticism and revolutionary undertones, Frida presents a more refined sense of self simply with the presence of her dress, a powerful image because, despite the lack of
her actual body, the viewer clearly knows that it is Frida and her essence. Herrera explains, “Flanked by cold, anonymous skyscrapers with endless blank windows in regular rows, and hanging on a power-blue hanger hooked over a powder-blue ribbon, the embroidered maroon blouse and pea-great skirt with pink ribbons and white ruffles looks exotic, intimate, and feminine. By absenting herself from her dress, Frida is saying that her dress may hang in Manhattan, but she is elsewhere; she does not want any part of “Gringolandia.”[25] It is true that Frida does not want to be part of America any longer as she has come to be disgusted by the American identity of hypocrisy and wealth, trapped in between the excrement and hypocritical attitude of a sterile and mechanized society that she thinks is America (signified by the toilet) and their never ending ambition to nowhere but the destruction of liberty (signified by the golf trophy). But Frida’s dress symbolizes much more than a wish not to be present. The dress itself is a Tehuana costume, one that “opposes the nihilism of traditional feminisations of colonial trauma, and asserts the potential of a dignified cultural resistance.”[26] The feeling of being torn between two identities suggested by *Self Portrait on the Borderline* . . . is gone, replaced by a feeling of being stuck in some place that is not her own but has to make do. Frida is feminine yet feminist, using her elegant dress as a symbol is strength and solidarity against this putrid (and decidedly male-dominated) environment in a masculine act of defiance. Frida has thus, through her travels in America, solidified herself as critical, free-thinking, strong and culturally Mexican but also her own woman, experiencing her own pain and seeing her environments, both in Mexico and America, through the lens she has built herself through these experiences.

The themes of gender, national and personal identity and revolution acquire complex legacies during Frida’s time in the United States. As a woman, she frequently destroyed the boundaries of “male” art, painting graphic scenes of miscarriage, birth and abortion and placed herself above any particular male influence – in each of her paintings Frida chose who she portrayed and how she did so. She stereotyped her vision of American national identity, but she also created fruitful juxtaposition of her American environment and Mexican heritage. Her Mexican national identity blossomed in her works as she both glorified her heritage and showed Mexico as a fertile ground full of spirituality and culture and critiqued the dichotomies such as male-female, past-present and light-dark. Frida was revolutionary in many senses from emerging as a female artist who broke into the male-dominated art world with her intense emotion and taboo subjects, as well as depicting the oppression of the American masses, to her reworking of birth and miscarriage into a previously nonexistent female language.

[9] Rivera qtd. in Herrera, 144.
Bibliography


