Table of Contents

The Iowa Historical Review Editorial Board
   ii

Letter from the Editor
   iii

Divis Flats:
The Social and Political Implications of a Modern Housing Project
   in Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1968-1998
   by Megan Deirdre Roy
   1

The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel and
Static Pop Culture Ideas on Male Gender
   by Zane Scott-Tunkin
   45

The Coverage of World War I
   by the Radical Black Press, 1917-1919
   by Mary Hicks
   57

Filibustering to the Forefront of National Attention
   by Elliot Andrew Anderson
   83

Confronting the Perils of Globalization:
Nicaraguan Banana Workers’ Struggle for Justice
   by Ethan Grundberg
   96

Outside the Public Eye:
   How the Carter Administration Used “Quiet Diplomacy” to
   Impact Human Rights in Argentina
   by Julia LaBua
   131
The Iowa Historical Review Editorial Board

Seo-Young Lee
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Ashley Goulden
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The Iowa Historical Review is published once a semester and is available through the University of Iowa History Department website. A student-run publication, it accepts submissions from former and current undergraduate students at the University of Iowa. For more information, please contact us at iowa-history@uiowa.edu.
Letter from the Editor

I am pleased to present the inaugural issue of the *Iowa Historical Review*, the premier online undergraduate history journal at the University of Iowa. Founded in 2006, it is dedicated to providing a forum for undergraduate historians to share and celebrate their work.

This issue opens with an article by the recipient of the 2006 Stow Persons Prize for the best undergraduate honors thesis in the History Department on the social and political consequences of architecture and urban design on the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland from 1968 to 1998. It follows with essays on the impact of the Vietnam War on notions of male gender and the response of the black radical press to American involvement in World War I. The issue concludes with three essays on topics relating to US-Latin American relations, including an article by the winner of the 2007 undergraduate division of the Burns H. Weston International Human Rights Essay Prize from the UI Center for Human Rights.

I would like to thank the following members of the editorial board: John McCluskey, Ashley Goulden, Shannon Wenck, Timothy Winger, and Jessica Zuerner. In particular, I extend deep gratitude to Janelle Penny, our tireless copy editor and webmaster, without whom it would have been impossible to produce this issue. Mary Strottman, Jean Aikin, and Pat Goodwin, the staff of the History Department Office, have been of tremendous help in the launching of this issue. I also wish to acknowledge Professors Colin Gordon, Jeffrey Cox, and Johanna Schoen for their encouragement and advice. I first approached Professor Katherine Tachau last spring with the idea of starting an undergraduate history journal at Iowa. From the beginning, she has been most enthusiastic and supportive of the endeavor. And I and the other editors thank her.

I hope that this journal will contribute to the History Department’s continuing support of undergraduate research as students pursue a better understanding of the past and present.

Seo-Young Lee
May 2007
Divis Flats:
The Social and Political Implications of a Modern Housing Project in Belfast, Northern Ireland, 1968-1998

Megan Deirdre Roy

Contemporary architecture and, still more, urban planning are closely connected with social problems. We should keep abreast of these developments through our own investigations, but I strongly urge that we steer clear of political and social problems in our meetings. They are extremely complex and, moreover, raise further economic problems. We are not qualified to discuss these difficult subjects.¹

– Le Corbusier

To build city districts that are custom made for easy crime is idiotic, yet that is what we do.²

– Jane Jacobs

The Divis Flats, located at the bottom of the Falls Road in West Belfast, was a complex of 12 interconnected eight story deck access blocks and one 20 story tower, the top of which doubled as a base for the British Army. The complex was built between 1968 and 1972 by the John Laing Construction Company, right in the midst of a time defined by high modernist architecture and the Utopian visions of Le Corbusier’s modern machines-for-living. It housed roughly 2,400 residents amongst the 850 flats, of which 98 percent were self-identified Catholics.³ The structure was a steel frame with concrete in situ slabs for the floors and walls, internally insulated with asbestos boards and plaster.

Modernist structures like Divis Flats were perceived as the rational answer to post-World War II housing shortages. However, in the context of brewing political conflict in Northern Ireland, the failures of such Modernism became quickly amplified. This same period of time saw the construction of mass housing throughout Europe and the U.S., and included such complexes as the notoriously crime-ridden Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis (whose 1972 demolition symbolized the “death of Modernism“⁴) and the Unité d’Habitation in Marseilles, France. In terms of architectural design, the Divis Flats in Belfast differed from its contemporaries in extremely striking ways, including the irregular arrangement of buildings, the presence of continuous terraces, and a lack of social amenities and landscaping. Such irregularities in design, which contributed to feelings of insecurity, can be
Iowa Historical Review

Megan Roy

better understood in the context of more than 30 years of conflict in Northern Ireland, as a minority Catholic population came under the watchful eye of the British state.

The 12 buildings of the Divis complex were accessible from three different levels of linked terraces: “walks,” “paths” and “rows.” Because the terraces were connected throughout the complex, an individual could potentially walk along the top row from St. Jude’s block all the way to St. Comgall’s block without having to go up or down stairs. While such design eliminated any sense of privacy or ownership for residents, it did make it easy for British troops to go on daily patrols throughout the complex. Additionally, a close analysis of the buildings reveals that nearly every front door was oriented toward the Army’s post on the top of Divis Tower. Because the British Army became viewed as the enemy to most Catholics after the rioting and violence of 1971, this design was perceived as a threat to, not insurer of, community security.

The residents of the flats came from mostly impoverished working class backgrounds. Unemployment rates consistently hovered around 68 percent in the Falls area (similar levels of unemployment were seen at Chicago’s South Side Taylor Homes in the 1980s), and a shocking 51 percent of Divis residents depended entirely on welfare assistance to provide for their families. Because Belfast’s shipping and textiles industries were on the periphery of the European market, the economy was quickly and disproportionately affected by the recessions of 1973 and 1979. By 1982, Northern Ireland had the highest unemployment rates in the United Kingdom with roughly 113,000 people in the province out of work, a staggering 19.7 percent of the population.

The 12 deck-access blocks of Divis Flats were completely demolished in 1993, following outcry from various residents groups, politicians and the media. However, the 20-floor tower remains standing to this day and was finally in the process of “demilitarization” in the summer of 2005. The tower has been an ominous presence on the lower Falls, maintaining a watchful eye over Belfast’s republican community for the last 35 years. Kevin “Count” McCormack, an employee at the Divis Community Center commented that “they’re probably listening in on our conversation right now, you know, with all their high-tech equipment. I’m sure that they saw you walk in here.” Whether or not the military still monitors the community to such an extent is certainly debatable, but the Panopticon-like paranoia that has become engrained in the minds of Falls residents is undeniable.

In examining the relationship between the Divis Flats and the violent “Troubles” of this area of Belfast, one must ask: is it mere coincidence that conflict first erupted the year after construction began? Or that a successful IRA cease-fire was declared and the Downing Street Agreement signed the very same year the blocks were demolished?

Many scholars dismiss architecture’s inherent role in shaping society, just as they dismiss the role that socio-economics play in causing conflict. Perhaps this denial is rooted in fears of moral obligation. However, in examining a case like the
Divis Flats

Divis Flats, which rapidly deteriorated into a trash-ridden, mold and rat-infested cesspool of vandalism, drug abuse and crime, one can clearly see that architectural design, specifically a lack of security and amenities, not only encouraged social ills, but simultaneously contributed to social unrest. In her essay “The Architecture of Deceit”, theorist Diane Ghirardo writes,

> The position that only formal elements matter in architecture bespeaks a monumental refusal to confront serious problems; it avoids a critique of the existing power structure, of the ways power is used, and of the identity of those whose interests power serves. To do otherwise might entail opening a Pandora’s box of far more complicated issues.\(^9\)

This article attempts to examine both the physical and psychological effects of the design of Divis Flats, within the context of Northern Ireland’s most violent era, in order to show that architecture was one of many contributors to civil unrest.

The Troubles of Northern Ireland have continuously been labeled a sectarian conflict; a native Catholic minority pitted against a Protestant majority. Conflict has also been examined extensively within the context of national and cultural identity.\(^10\) However, such reductionist explanations overlook inherent questions of socio-economic inequity that were established over 400 years ago, through the British plantation system. The reality is that even today, two and a half times as many Catholics as Protestants are unemployed in Northern Ireland.\(^11\) And while civil conflict has been predominantly concentrated in the poverty-stricken neighborhoods of West Belfast, middle-class suburbs have remained comparatively peaceful. There, educated Protestants and Catholics live and work amongst each other. It is interesting to note that the primary social concern for individuals who live in these suburbs is, in fact, “The Troubles.” Meanwhile, for residents of the city’s western working-class districts, where pockets of Catholics and Protestants have become increasingly segregated in an attempt to find safety in numbers, the primary concerns have been low wages, unemployment and the high cost of living.\(^12\) This phenomenon will be addressed further, as it supports the argument that physiological and psychological insecurity have fueled civil unrest to a greater degree than political or national allegiance.

An examination of 30 years of conflict in West Belfast, particularly on the Lower Falls Road and at the Divis complex, exposes the insecure social conditions that have motivated impoverished young Catholic men to fight in order to protect their communities. Ultimately, the battle for security at the Divis Flats complex exposes a side to republicanism that has been largely ignored by the popular media: the Irish Republican Army’s fundamental role in community policing and defense, made necessary, in part, through poor architectural design.
The Evolution of Support for Irish Republicanism

A thorough examination of the course of conflict in Northern Ireland since 1969 exposes two distinct sources of republican paramilitary support: first is general lack of faith in the political system; second is fundamental need for security. It is this second source of allegiance toward the IRA and its various branches— including the Officials, the Provisionals, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), and more recently the “Real” IRA and the “Continuity” IRA, which is directly related to the built environment— which I examine.

Leaving Belfast’s city center and heading toward the western part of the city, one enters Divis Street and very quickly crosses over the M1 highway. This highway was completed in 1984 to accommodate residents of the ever-expanding suburbs who commute to work. But the M1 was initially planned in the early 1960s and went hand in hand with the massive “slum clearance” programs that saw the destruction of the tightly-knit Catholic Pound Loney neighborhood, and the subsequent building of the high-rise Divis Flats to house the masses at increased densities. Just past the highway, on the left side of Divis Street stands the imposing Divis Tower, with “Demilitarize Now” graffiti all over its walls. Across the street from the tower, a number of traditional terrace-style houses are being completed, and behind the tower are similar units. In fact, this area is now a series of intimate-feeling cul-de-sacs of row houses, with the Divis Community center remaining in the middle. Children ride their bikes in the back streets, dogs patrol the sidewalks, and gardens are planted in fenced-in front courtyards. But this neighborhood was not always so safe for its residents.

Today, the predominantly Catholic Falls Road lies just to the south of the predominantly Protestant Shankill Road, the two areas being physically divided by a “Peace Line” of corrugated steel and barbed wire. This barrier, which is actually one of 13 walls built in the late 1970s and early 1980s, can only be crossed along a number of thoroughfares, including Northumberland Street, only blocks from the Divis complex.

In the middle of the 19th century Belfast’s linen industry had rapidly developed in the Falls area, which had acquired its name from the streams that flowed from Table Mountain east toward the river Lagan, and which powered the mills. At this time, the Falls was home to a mix of Protestant and Catholic factory workers, all of whom lived in traditional two up-two down row houses. However, the city became progressively segregated as Belfast’s economy declined and competition for jobs increased. “At any time before 1969, the level of segregation in Belfast was directly proportional to the level of conflict in the city,” writes one urban planner. This conflict between the Catholic and Protestant working classes came about as the result of Catholic insistence on equality, at the perceived expense of Protestant economic advantage.
Beginning in the late 1960s, in the wake of marches and demonstrations by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), clashes between Protestants and Catholics in this interface area became increasingly violent. The leaders of NICRA had been directly inspired by the civil rights movement in the United States, and sought to bring attention to discrimination against Catholics in employment and housing. The organization utilized peaceful forms of protest, primarily marches, to convey their message of equality. However, the group was quickly viewed as a threat to working-class Protestants who perceived demonstrations as a front for republicanism. NICRA actually emerged in 1967 out of an organization called the Derry Housing Action Committee, led by a nationalist MP from County Tyrone, Austin Currie.

The first civil rights marches indirectly brought about the resurgence of the Irish Republican Army. The IRA had been largely inactive since the border campaigns of the 1950s, and its leaders in Dublin were thought to be out of touch with the problems Catholics faced up north. On October 5, 1968, rioting first broke out in Northern Ireland when a NICRA march in Derry was stopped by the RUC. A number of marchers were beaten back by the police, and Catholics became enraged when the violent footage was aired on television.

The burning of over 80 Catholic homes around Clonard Monastery and Bombay Street following NICRA marches in August of 1969 drove many in the nationalist community to seek safety at the new Divis Flats. Belfast geographer Frederick Boal explains that, “the narrow zone of residential mixing along Cupar Street disappeared – it might be said that the buffer zone within the frontier had collapsed to a line.” From 1969 to 1976, it's estimated that anywhere from 35,000 to 60,000 Catholics were displaced from their homes. The trend toward increased sectarian segregation continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with a patchwork of insular neighborhoods, including the Catholic New Lodge, Ardoyne and Short Strand, and the Protestant Sandy Row and Donegall Pass developing.

It could be said that the birth of the Provisional IRA took place on the very night of rioting, August 15, 1969. It was then that three masked men took guns to the roof of St. Comgall’s school near Divis Flats and held off a loyalist mob. Unfortunately, that night also saw the first casualty of the modern Troubles, when nine-year-old Patrick Rooney was killed by RUC machine gun fire while laying in his bed at St. Brendan’s Row in Divis Flats. The first known Protestant to be killed was a 26-year-old bystander named Herbert Roy, who was shot by an unknown source on the Crumlin Road.

The rioting and violence of 1969 galvanized support for the republican movement and the “Provisional” IRA, under the leadership of Sean MacStiofain, broke with the Marxist and more political “Official” IRA leadership in Dublin. In fact, this initial departure from political republicanism was the direct result of a perceived need for militant protection on the Falls road. While the Provisionals immediately perceived the British Army, brought in to replace the RUC as
peacekeepers, as a legitimate target, the majority of Catholic residents did not feel similarly. It was not until a series of injuries in 1971 and 1972, at the hands of the Army, that public opinion began to change. So, while the Catholic community largely supported the IRA’s defensive role in policing and protection, they did not always support their aggressive tactics.

Following a series of riots by frustrated Catholics in 1970, rubber bullets were introduced by the British Army in 1971. Their purpose was to break up the large crowds without potentially lethal force; however, it was quickly learned that a direct blow to the head at close range could easily kill an individual, especially a child. In August of 1971 the British government introduced a policy of internment for political prisoners, a vast majority of whom were Catholic nationalists. Under internment, a prisoner could be held for one week, with no access to a lawyer for the first 48 hours, and was subjected to 12 hours of interrogation a day. This treatment obviously caused a backlash in the Catholic community, who saw the measure as a sign of further repression and discrimination. Because an individual could be held on mere suspicion of or vague association with republicanism, it also meant feelings of greater alienation from British troops.

The events of 1972 caused an even greater rift between the Catholic community and the state when, on January 30, a NICRA march in Derry’s Bogside resulted in the shooting deaths of 13 men. This event, commonly known as “Bloody Sunday,” continues to be investigated; however, testimony that there was an armed IRA presence on that day is readily disputed. None of the men who were shot by the B-Specials, a specially trained paratroop unit, were found to have had weapons. In fact, many of them were shot in the back or with their hands on their heads in surrender. In the first government inquiry, Lord Widgery wrote that,

At one end of the scale some soldiers showed a high degree of responsibility; at the other, notably in Glenfada Park [where James Wray, Gerald Donaghy, William McKinney, and Gerald McKinney were shot] firing bordered on the reckless. These distinctions reflect differences in the character of the soldiers concerned. . . None of the deceased or wounded is proved to have been shot whilst handling a firearm or bomb.17

This event sparked a wave of rioting in Catholic districts all over Northern Ireland, and meant an increase in support for the IRA. In April of 1972, an eleven-year-old named Francis Rowntree was accidentally killed by a rubber bullet at the Divis Flats. As tragic as this event was it was, it was the number of premeditated murders that made 1972 the bloodiest year of in the entire conflict. There were 121 victims of sectarian assassination that year, and a shocking 80 of them came at the hands
Divis Flats

of the recently formed Ulster Defense Association, led by ex-British soldier John White. One of his victims was local Irish folk singer Rose McCartney, who was abducted, tortured and machine-gunned with a friend on July 22. Journalist Jack Holland writes that:

White’s theory about “terrorizing the terrorist” at least worked insofar as it terrified the population that supported the Provisional IRA. But since working-class Catholics did not trust the security forces to protect them – between July 31 and December 31 only three Protestants were charged with murder – sectarian killings may have enhanced the position of the IRA. 18

That same year, 20-year-old Divis schoolteacher Patrick McGee was mistakenly shot and killed by troops, while 80-year-old pensioner Paddy Donaghy was also killed in Divis Tower by Army gunfire. It’s important to note that the elderly have always occupied Divis Tower, as they are naturally perceived as less of a threat to British forces. Although the particular acts of violence committed by Loyalist paramilitaries and the British Army were vastly different, support for the Provisionals was hardened by both threats. One resident of Divis flats explained, “when you’ve seen people shot or killed with plastic bullets, and when you’ve been harassed or arrested, you become a rebel – and there’s plenty of Brit terror in Divis to make people rebels.” 19

Ironically, the suspension of the Northern Irish government at Stormont in 1973 -a result of the mayhem of the previous year - was interpreted by the IRA as a political victory. They saw this as a sign that the British government was giving in to the pressures of the conflict; however, the Emergency Provisions Act, which was simultaneously implemented, was certainly not a good thing for republicans. It meant greater power to the RUC and Army in arresting and interrogating suspected IRA men. Loyalists also feared that the British government was giving in, and so the suspension of Stormont also resulted in the formation of a more radical unit of the UDA called the Ulster Freedom Fighters. The UFF’s goal was to specifically target nationalist politicians. They intended to abduct SDLP leader Gerry Fitt in June of 1973, but ended up grabbing city councilor Paddy Wilson and his companion Irene Andrews instead. The two were eventually shot by members of the UFF, but not before they were each stabbed over 20 times, with Wilson’s neck cut ear to ear. The IRA’s way of answering attacks like this continued to be the targeting of the British state, and in July a booby trap killed three members of an Army patrol unit in Divis flats. However, attacks such as these did anything but protect the Catholic community, as the perception that all Divis residents were a threat to the Army became continually reinforced. Militant IRA activity, which threatened residents’
security, meant a corollary loss in support for the republican movement.

In November of 1973 17-year-old Michael Hutchinson was shot dead by a patrol unit at Divis Flats when he fled the scene of a pipe bomb incident. Around the same time the killing of two local Catholic postmen in Divis Street by Loyalist assassins resulted in heightened feelings of fear and mistrust within the Divis community. At this time it became very difficult for Catholics to differentiate between the threats of loyalists and those of the military. Catholics continued to rally around the republican movement in an attempt to ensure security, but while they were largely disillusioned by the physical chaos of the proceeding months they were simultaneously being marginalized from the political process (the only other means of resolution).

In December of 1973, the landmark Sunningdale Agreement was signed between the British and Irish governments. Unfortunately, politicians from the north, including even those of the more moderate Nationalist SDLP and Unionist UDP, were absent from the talks. An agreement was hammered out making the Council of Ireland a fourteen-member body responsible mainly for economic and social matters. In return, the Irish government agreed to recognize the right of the majority in Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom for as long as they wished. Britain undertook to review internment and release more prisoners by Christmas, and to make the RUC more acceptable to Catholics. The Irish agreed to intensify the offensive against the Provisionals.²²⁰

It seemed, for a time at least, that the violence in Northern Ireland would end. By December of 1973, 75 loyalists and over 500 republicans had been interned without trial. In the immediate wake of Sunningdale there was only one sectarian murder in Belfast. Unfortunately the peace was short-lived, and by February of 1974 there was heavy rioting and sniper fire at the Divis flats in continued reaction to internment without trial. That month, a pipe bomb in a stairwell intended for a patrol unit accidentally injured 11 residents. Faith in the political process was further compromised when the power-sharing agreement fell apart in May of 1974, under pressure from a Unionist Workers Coalition strike. The UWC, aided by the UDA, essentially shut down the state, including factories, shops and a power plant near Larne, in protest of the power-sharing executive. On May 17 the Ulster Volunteer Force sent four cars packed full of explosives to Dublin. Thirty-three people died, making that day the single bloodiest in the history of the Troubles. Soon after, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, William Faulkner, resigned, and power sharing collapsed, along with the Catholic minority’s faith in the political process.

In September and October of 1974, violence again erupted when 11 Catholics were killed by loyalist paramilitaries, including two young men, Eric Morgan and Michael Loughran, who were shot on the corner of Northumberland Street near Divis Flats. Then, in March of 1975, a schoolteacher who lived at the Divis Flats, John Connolly, was stabbed to death in East Belfast. The result of this sudden increase in violence was the emergence of the Irish National Liberation Army and
Divis Flats

its political wing the Irish National Socialist Party (IRSP), who, much like the Provisionals, had become disillusioned by the failing rhetoric of the Official IRA, and preferred to focus instead on the armed struggle. During an ensuing feud at the Divis Flats between the INLA and the “Sticks,” as the Officials were called, two men were killed. Eventually, Divis came to be known as an INLA stronghold, commonly referred to as “Planet of the Urps,” a colloquialism for the IRSP.

In August, the anniversary of the introduction of internment was marked by massive demonstrations and rioting at Divis Flats. Loyalists from the Shankill clashed with the demonstrating nationalists, and the Army was once again forced to intervene. Unfortunately, after the INLA joined the army in returning fire, and the loyalists subsequently withdrew, the army began engaging with the republican gunmen. Three republicans were wounded, and Jeffery Sluka notes that it was the first action taken against the British army by the newly formed INLA. 21 This series of events typifies the confusion of guerilla warfare. The Army had been rightly protecting Divis residents from a mob, but the intervention of the INLA complicated the situation, putting residents in further harm’s way. Sluka explains, “the IRA later claimed to have defended the community from a joint attack by the British army and loyalist paramilitary groups.”

Because the success of Irish Republicanism depends entirely on their ability to hide within the general population, innocent Catholics often paid the price, like 10-year-old Stephen Geddis, who was killed when a plastic bullet fired by a soldier hit him in the head during a small riot in the complex that August, 1975. It is interesting to note that the paramilitaries depended on the protection of the community as much (if not more than) the community depended on them. “Our Volunteers operating in Nationalist areas are like fish in friendly waters and it is this close relationship between the IRA and the people that dogs all counterinsurgency attempts at defeating us,” wrote one IRA spokesman.23 It would seem that the Divis community was willing to accept the presence of the INLA because they felt that in the end they did more to protect residents than they did to harm them; however, this perception was often supported by INLA and IRA propaganda. Perhaps the paramilitaries used their role in community policing to ultimately gain support for their military action? In the early 1990s, Chicago’s Black Kings gang made attempts to “better the community” at the Robert Taylor Homes, serving their economic interests and gaining them favor within the project.24

The IRA propaganda machine was greatly fueled by the 1976 Prevention of Terrorism Act, which effectively took away the government’s classification of political prisoners. Until this point prisoners had been allowed to wear their own clothes, were held in units away from the general prison population, and were granted frequent visitations and access to lawyers once convicted of a crime. In the long run this tactic by the British government, meant to discredit paramilitaries, actually became a propaganda victory for the republican movement. Kieran Nugent and others began the Blanket, or “Dirty” protests, refusing to wash themselves or
wear the prison uniforms of common criminals.

The immediate effect of internment, coupled with the strict new Prevention of Terrorism Act was that the IRA and INLA significantly reduced their military operations from 1976 to 1981. This reduction in violence opened the way for alternative means of resolution. In August of 1976 the non-violent Women’s Peace Movement, started by Nobel Peace Prize winners Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams, united Catholics and Protestants. The group, which was started after Corrigan’s sister and her young children were killed on the Falls road by a car whose driver had been shot by a soldier, later became known as the Peace People. Its rallies consistently attracted up to 20,000 people, and gave Divis residents an alternative to violence and hope for the future.

The decline in support for militancy can be seen as proportional to a community’s trust in the political process and sense of social inclusion, and 1976 turned out to be a year of renewed faith. In September, Secretary of State Roy Mason declared, “unemployment, little new investment, too many businesses closing down, these are the questions that must receive priority,” recognizing that economic hardship was a root cause of the ongoing conflict. This admission led to the introduction of the Fair Employment Act in December of 1976. However, discrimination and inequities in housing conditions remained largely unaddressed by the government.

As paramilitaries struggled to regain control, most of the violence of 1977 came about because of internal feuds between the UDA and UVF and the Officials and Provisionals. September of 1977 was the first month since 1968 that there were no civilian casualties in Northern Ireland. This reduction in violence is also attributable to the new Emergency Protections Act, which sought to:

- Provide a system for the arrest, prosecution and imprisonment of those suspected of involvement in terrorist activity, and as a replacement for internment without trial, which did so much to alienate the Catholic population between 1971 and 1975.

The Provisionals had regrouped by December 1978, beginning a massive bombing campaign. However, by this time the UDA and UVF had started to refrain from their reactionary practices of targeting Catholics after every IRA attack. The UDA’s chairman, Andy Tyrie, explained that this was because, “the organization no longer targeted ordinary Catholics, but was more selective.” This action, along with the February 1979 conviction of 11 of the Shankill Butchers for 19 murders, meant a consequent reduction in support for the IRA and INLA, as the Catholic community began to feel less terrorized. Support for republicanism hit a low point after the August 27, 1979 assassination of the Queen’s cousin, Lord Mountbatten and his young nephew, on a boat off the western coast of Ireland. Following the
international recession of 1979, the economy in Northern Ireland had seriously deteriorated, and unemployment levels skyrocketed as a result of the Thatcher government’s cuts in welfare expenditure. This meant that, at least temporarily, most residents in west Belfast were more preoccupied with job security than physical security. The Provisional IRA did not regain its position in the Catholic community until late in 1980, when the Blanket Protests gained media attention and there was resurgence in republican sentiment.

In March of 1981, a young Falls Road republican prisoner named Bobby Sands declared that he would go on a hunger strike to protest the loss of political prisoner status. The charismatic Sands was elected to the British Parliament before his death on May 5, 1981. His funeral was attended by over 100,000 people, and Sands became the single biggest martyr for the republican community. 28 Nine other IRA and INLA men lost their lives during the hunger strike, and after the deaths of every single striker, rioting erupted at Divis Flats. On May 12, only hours after the death of IRA volunteer Francis Hughes, INLA member Emmanual McLarnon fired on British troops in Divis flats and was killed by return fire from Divis Tower. Interestingly, the hunger strike rioting and bonfires were condemned by the IRA because they were seen as being destructive to the Catholic community. A leaflet was distributed around Divis flats, which read:

Irish Republican Army        Belfast Brigade

We have been approached in recent days by local residents of the Divis Flats about the rioting going on in the area. To avoid any confusion or misunderstanding, we wish to make our position crystal clear in respect of rioting. We are not opposed to street conflict directed at the Brits or RUC provided it is organized, disciplined, creates the minimum amount of inconvenience [sic] to local residents and inflicts physical casualties or propaganda defeats on the British forces.

Recent rioting in Divis Flats has fulfilled none of the above criteria. It has been sporadic, undisciplined, has inflicted no physical casualties on the Brits or RUC and has only placed greater hardship on the residents of the flats. Moreover, we have seen how the RUC have been attempting to use the situation - a situation which they encourage to their advantage by trying to improve their image and convince people that they are what they are obviously not, i.e. a police force.

The hijacking of private vehicles, the
destruction of personal property, and the hardship suffered by the residents are totally unacceptable to us. We have made it clear to young people involved that, if caught, they will be punished. We are aware that there is a group in the flats actively encouraging this rioting for personal gain and we intend to inflict the severest punishment we can on them.

To this end we would appeal to local residents to give us their complete support. In the past some residents, a tiny minority, have obstructed Volunteers in the course of taking action against the hoods. If we are to successfully deal with this situation we need your complete support. Given that, we shall certainly do all in our power to overcome this problem.

Belfast Brigade

This letter clearly reflects the IRA’s dual role in community policing and politically motivated militancy. Unfortunately, many young people at Divis Flats felt that they were contributing to the political struggle by rioting, and many others saw events like the Hunger Strikes as an excuse to express their social frustrations and resentment.

At this period in time over 30 percent of Divis residents actively supported Sinn Fein, while an additional seven percent favored the IRSP. 32 percent of the population was opposed to violence as a way of achieving political goals, with 28 percent of those people supporting the moderate nationalist SDLP. However, it is interesting to note that an additional 30 percent of the population supported no party at all.

The public outrage and political currency of May 1981 eventually deteriorated, and from 1982 to 1986 there was, yet again, another reduction in support for republican paramilitaries. The phenomenon of “supergrasses,” who were high-level informants, resulted in the convictions of over 50 members of the IRA and INLA, including INLA leader Gerard Steenson in 1982. Most of these convictions were overturned by 1986, but the temporary result was that only a handful of active IRA men remained on the Falls road.

At the same time, a group of disillusioned residents in Divis Flats were forming both the Divis Residents’ Association and the Divis Demolition Committee. While the Residents’ Association attempted to raise public awareness through publications and studies, the Demolition Committee took a more militant approach, closing up vacant apartments with cinderblocks, and calling for the demolition of the entire complex. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive brought in a number of architects to assess the conditions of Divis Flats, and the end result was the demolition of Whitehall, Farset, Pound, St. Brendan’s and part of Cullingtree block. Interestingly, Pound and St. Brendan’s were found to be in the worst condition,
but because Whitehall and Cullingtree interfered with the government’s proposed M1 highway, and Farset was difficult to monitor from the top of Divis Tower, those structures were also scheduled for demolition. Regardless of the ulterior motivations of the Housing Executive and Department of the Environment, these initial demolitions were perceived as a victory for the residents of Divis.

Yet another political victory was the Nov 15, 1985, signing of the Anglo-Irish agreement. Article 1 states that the two governments “affirm that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.” This left open the possibility of a future united Ireland, as birth rates among Catholics have always outnumbered Protestants. Loyalists felt largely betrayed by the British government’s willingness to compromise. However, they were somewhat reassured by the political climate of the United States, where President Reagan, a close ally of Margaret Thatcher’s and proponent of her free-market economic plan, “relentlessly hounded IRA supporters in the United States and initiated a series of extradition hearings against IRA men who had fled to the U.S.”

On November 8, 1987, the IRA and Sinn Fein took a massive blow, losing much public support when a bomb in the northern town of Enniskillen killed 11 civilians. A year later, in December of 1988, the Fair Employment Bill was reintroduced, after British government figures report unemployment of Catholic men at twice the rate of Protestant men. However, in the previous 10 years unemployment across all demographics had risen from 5.7 percent to 18.3 percent, and issues of job security continued to overshadow political frustration in Northern Ireland until the early 1990s. Commenting on the persistent poverty at the complex and its connections to crime, Sluka writes,

Divis Flats is known for the high level of antisocial behaviour among its young people, but is this the result of a breakdown in respect for law and order resulting from the troubles, or is it the result of the fact that young people living in the complex are poor, bored, and frustrated both by their social, economic, and housing conditions, and by the bleakness of their prospects for the future?

Despite October of 1993 being the bloodiest month of the Troubles since 1976, during which time 27 civilians died, and for the first time loyalists killed more people than republicans, the future for most Catholics in West Belfast began to look a little more promising. During the summer of 1993 the remaining eight blocks of Divis Flats were finally demolished. For many, this physical act symbolized a step toward greater social equality for Catholics, as residents would be re-housed in new row and terrace structures. It also represented the elimination of perceived
repression by the British government, with residents essentially set free from their psychological prisons.

Also in the summer of 1993, Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams and SDLP leader John Hume began meeting together regularly to discuss a united nationalist agenda. In December of that year, while the IRA held its cease-fire, they both participated in the signing of the Downing Street Declaration, which reinstated the power-sharing executive. Many Loyalists were outraged by this compromise and retaliated by killing Catholics, but the Provisional IRA had become at least temporarily marginalized by the success of its political party. The decline in republican violence can be attributed to both a renewed faith in political participation, and the increased feelings of social inclusion that resulted from the demolition of Divis Flats. While the fear of loyalist vengeance remained ever present in 1993, the physical and psychological insecurities of 2,000 Divis residents became instantaneously eliminated, along with their dependence on the INLA for protection.

Following a brief campaign of bombing, in August of the following year the IRA renewed their cease-fire, and Hume and Adams released a joint statement declaring:

A just and lasting peace in Ireland will only be achieved if it is based on democratic principles. It is clear that an internal settlement is not a solution… If a lasting settlement is to be found there must be fundamental and thorough-going change, based on the right of the Irish people as a whole to national self-determination.35

In acknowledgement of the achievements of these two men, on November 30, 1995, Bill Clinton became the first serving U.S. President to visit Northern Ireland. For Northern Ireland’s nationalist community his presence contributed to even greater hope for a political, not armed solution.

However, while the militancy of the IRA was effectively suspended, their role as community police continued to be necessary if peace and security were to be maintained in West Belfast. So, by 1995 an organization called Direct Action Against Drugs emerged, and on December 19 of that year they killed an alleged drug dealer on the Ormeau Road. The RUC identified the killings of five dealers that year, but identified the IRA as responsible, not Direct Action, severely compromising Sinn Fein’s position in continued peace talks. Gerry Adams and Sinn Fein managed to control the Provisionals for a while, but in February of 1996 a 500 lb bomb detonated at London’s Canary Wharf commercial district announced the end of the IRA ceasefire. Then, in July and August (the loyalist marching season), rioting in Protestant communities erupted as the RUC attempted to blockade an Orange march on Portadown’s Garvaghy road in County Armagh. Similar triumphant parades...
attempted to pass through Catholic neighborhoods in West Belfast. Rioting ensued and as security became compromised the Provisionals, who had been harshly criticized for the Canary Wharf bomb, again began to gain community support.

On May 1, 1997 Britain’s Labour party won a landslide victory, and in Northern Ireland Sinn Fein won a record 16 percent of the vote. David Trimble’s Ulster Unionist Party maintained the overall majority, with 32 percent, and Hume’s SDLP brought in 24 percent. The radically anti-Catholic Reverend Ian Paisley’s Democratic Ulster Party trailed with 13 percent of the vote.

This victory for Labour meant the appointment of Mo Mowlam (who received her Ph.D. from The University of Iowa in 1977) as the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The perceived victory for nationalism was followed by a new Provisional ceasefire in the summer of 1997, and while the INLA and the new “Continuity” IRA remained militant, Sinn Fein was once again allowed to participate in peace talks. Their participation was temporarily suspended in February of 1998 when another alleged drug dealer named Brendan Campbell was murdered by Direct Action on the Lisburn road. However, by April of that year all parties signed onto the Good Friday Agreement (or Belfast Agreement, depending on ones’ political orientation), which reaffirmed the Downing Street Declaration, reinstated the Northern Ireland Assembly, and called for an unconditional IRA disarmament in exchange for the release of political prisoners. In a public referendum 70 percent of the population endorsed the Good Friday Agreement, and while the UDA refused to sign on due to pressure from the frustrated Orange Order, the UFF did agree to it because of their own prisoner concessions.

Now that the devolution of the Provisional IRA was ensured, a select group of persistent militants broke away, forming the “Real” IRA. On August 15, 1998, they detonated a bomb in Omagh, killing 28 innocent civilians and injuring 360. As the single largest loss of life of the entire Troubles, the public outcry to this tragedy meant the subsequent suspension of the Real IRA’s military operations by September 8. They claimed to have called in multiple warnings, but there was no way for the group to survive once they had alienated the nationalist community. One week after the Omagh bombing the INLA also announced its cease-fire, stating:

We acknowledge and admit faults and grievous errors in our prosecution of the war. Innocent people were killed and injured and at times our actions as a liberation army fell far short of what they should have been. For this we as republicans, as socialists and as revolutionaries do offer a sincere, heartfelt and genuine apology. It was never our intention, desire or wish to become embroiled in sectarian or internecine warfare. We have however nothing to apologise for in taking the war to the British and
Megan Roy

their loyalist henchmen. Those who preyed on the blood of nationalists paid a heavy price. However the will of the Irish people is clear. It is now time to silence the guns and allow the working classes the time and opportunity to advance their demands and their needs.36

In the wake of the Good Friday Agreement, the issue of decommissioning remained the most troublesome for the people of Northern Ireland. Recent polls show that 93 percent of Protestants and 68 percent of Catholics favor immediate paramilitary decommissioning. Despite the outcries of Unionists on slow IRA decommissioning, Good Friday has remained largely successful. In one of the most visible changes to Northern Ireland, the RUC was replaced by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) on November 3, 2001. The aim of the PSNI is to include a proportionate number of Catholics in the service, reducing negative perceptions and ensuring equal treatment. By July of 2005 the IRA was declared fully disarmed, but unfortunately violence in Northern Ireland has not ended. With the absence of the IRA and an increase in perceived threat to Protestant supremacy, loyalist paramilitaries have recently feuded over territory and drugs. July remains an especially tenuous time of year in Belfast, as Orangemen attempt to hold annual parades through Catholic districts, however the Falls Road community remains largely hopeful. In August of 2005 their calls for the “demilitarization” of Divis Tower were finally answered, as the British Army dismantled their outpost on the top two floors in recognition of IRA disarming. This symbolic gesture was as important as the demolition of the Divis Flats in 1993, and ironically meant an increase in feelings of security for Falls residents.

This chapter has provided an overview of the conflict in Northern Ireland since 1968 and has put the insecurities of Divis Flats residents in context. The intention was to discuss not only the IRA and INLA’s vital role in community policing and protection, but to show that the fears of Catholics on Belfast’s Falls Road were both a factor of everyday life and necessitated the presence of paramilitaries. Turning toward the particular issue of architectural design, the next chapters discuss ways in which the built environment contributes to feelings of insecurity. An in-depth examination of physical and psychological threats to Divis residents further supports the argument that thoughtless design has contributed to civil conflict in Northern Ireland.


According to psychologist Abraham Maslow’s *Hierarchy of Needs*, developed in the 1940s and 1950s, basic physiological requirements such as food
and shelter lie at the foundation of human needs. These are followed next by the need for physical security. Maslow notes that adults have little awareness of their security needs except in times of emergency or periods of disorganization in the social structure (such as widespread rioting), and that children more acutely display the signs of insecurity and the need to be safe. Tertiary needs include those for love and a sense of belonging, as well as requirements for self-esteem, and finally self-actualization.\footnote{37}

Within the context of the conflict in Northern Ireland, this hierarchy helps to explain why those whose primary needs have not been fulfilled have little time to worry about political or national allegiance. This hierarchy also helps to explain why issues of housing and safety are so fundamental in understanding an individual’s motivation to support armed conflict.

The work of postmodern theorists Jane Jacobs and Oscar Newman both single out the need for security in urban contexts. The two differ only in the way in which they seek solutions to insecurity; Jacobs focuses on the role that a community’s citizens play in indirectly deterring crime, while Newman focuses on the aspects of specific physical design that directly dictate safety. Both physical structures and the people who inhabit them have been shown to have reformatory powers in a public housing complex. However, this realization also means that poor architectural design, which discourages community relationships and eliminates physical boundaries, can also result in increased rates of crime and feelings of isolation, as was the case at the Divis Flats in Belfast.

The fundamental role that feelings of insecurity have played in perpetuating the conflict in Northern Ireland cannot be underestimated. In a survey conducted by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive just before the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and the subsequent Provisional IRA ceasefire, a list of social problems facing the region were given different rankings according to the religion of the respondent. Overall, Protestants regarded the “Troubles” as the most serious problem facing the people of Northern Ireland, followed by unemployment and the high cost of living. Catholic respondents, however, regarded low wages as the most serious problem, followed by unemployment and the high cost of living. For Catholics, the politics of the “Troubles” came only fourth in order of seriousness.\footnote{38}

While the survey did break a number of responses down according to religion, in an obvious attempt to demonstrate equality, they did not accordingly address proportions of owner-occupiers versus Housing Executive tenants. However, a majority of owner-occupiers regarded the “Troubles” as the most serious problem facing Northern Ireland, followed by unemployment and low wages. Housing Executive tenants overwhelmingly named the high cost of living, low wages and unemployment as their biggest challenges. These statistics are most important in light of the fact that a majority of owner-occupiers are Protestants, and a proportional majority of Housing Executive tenants are Catholics. Such
findings also support the argument that in order to have concern over politics, the fundamental needs for physical security, i.e. housing, must first be met. Only after abject poverty is addressed can one truly focus on issues of politics and nationality, or “self-actualization.”

Thus, for a majority of poor Catholics in West Belfast who are simply struggling to provide for their families, a roof over ones’ head and food in ones’ stomach is a much more significant issue than national allegiance. Physical conflict has been concentrated in the poorer areas of the city, but it is those who own houses in outlying suburbs like Holywood and Newtownards who are most concerned with the political situation. What, then, explains the clashes between working classes on the Falls and Shankill Roads since 1969? The answer lies in the fact that they are in direct competition for both jobs and housing.

If the need for security must be met before politics can be questioned, then it is all the more appropriate to address issues of housing in Belfast when attempting to explain the root causes of the Troubles. Specifically, how did a lack of security for the residents of Divis Flats create conflict? The answer is not linear, but is compounded by many factors, including the need for community policing by the IRA and INLA and the subsequent alienation of the British Army from Divis residents.

Jane Jacobs, who wrote a number of works including *The Economy of Cities*, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*, and *The Nature of Economies*, is perhaps best known for her 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. It was revolutionary in its critique of modernism, and came about principally as a reaction to urban-slum clearance programs of the 1950s that were very much inspired by the work of men like Le Corbusier. Jacobs saw an organic and spontaneous nature of America’s urban landscapes being dominated by corporate and government interests at the expense of the average citizen. She sought to explore the original context of the city in order to show the largely unappreciated nuances and personal interactions which made it a far more hospitable place than the uniform and impersonal concrete high-rises that had become so popular. In describing her street in New York’s East Village, Jacobs notes that,

> The safety of the street works best, most casually, and with least frequent taint of hostility or suspicion precisely where people are using and most enjoying the city streets voluntarily and are least conscious, normally, that they are policing. The basic requisite for such surveillance is a substantial quantity of stores and other public places.**39**

These same observations on a community’s innate security could be easily applied to any urban context, particularly in Europe, where cities have been evolving
organically for hundreds of years. In Belfast, for example, the former Pound Loney community, located just off of the lower Falls Road, was known as a safe and closely knit neighborhood, where mothers looked after each others’ children from kitchen windows, and residents lived out their entire lives. Granted, the mid-19th century two up-two down hovels in the Pound Loney lacked many convenient amenities like running water and central heating (which were later offered at the Divis Flats), but the greater community had a abundance of the more significant social services, like pubs, shops and corner markets. Jacobs notes that these kinds of amenities fill city streets and inadvertently deter crime in the process. Regarding the necessity of this security for a healthy community, she explains that:

The bedrock attribute of a successful city district is that a person must feel personally safe and secure on the street among all these strangers. He must not feel automatically menaced by them. A city district that fails in this respect also does badly in other ways and lays up for itself, and for its city at large, mountain on mountain of trouble.40

What happens then, when a community is denied the kinds of amenities that fill its public spaces? At the Divis Flats one can see that serious problems with crime, vandalism and drug abuse quickly emerged, as residents hid in the seclusion of their anonymous flats, fearful of the vast open spaces below them.

The effects that persistent fear has on a community, and especially its children, are numerous, and included a disinterest in school or employment, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and social exclusion. However, a common mistake in the examination of conflict in Northern Ireland is to place blame only on the paramilitaries, or “terrorists,” and to fail to recognize that the British army was, in fact, the perceived enemy of a majority of Catholics. This misconception is the product of 35 years of bias on the part the media and the British government. While it does help to identify the effects of persistent violence on a community, it also exposes a misunderstanding of the complexities of the Troubles. In his 1977 book Terrorism, author Robert Liston identified a condition called the “Belfast Syndrome.” He explained that:

Terrorism is now recognized as a cause of illness. Doctors in Northern Ireland report an increase in patients suffering from what they call the Belfast Syndrome. The patients, usually women and children, cry and tremble uncontrollably. Often they can’t remember their names or where they live. Sometimes they are unable to speak. Doctors
usually prescribe tranquillizers and mild sedatives, but patients do not always respond to such treatment. The Belfast syndrome is believed to be the result of living with constant terror, where the enemy is not easily identifiable and the violence in indiscriminate and arbitrary.\textsuperscript{41}

While this work does help to identify the effects of persistent violence on a community, it also expresses a clearly one-sided interpretation of the Troubles.

The children who grew up in Divis Flats were exposed to violence on a regular basis, becoming desensitized to it and accepting it as a way of life. These children, who were mostly unsupervised as they ran through the dirty terraces and dark stairwells of the complex, were quickly recruited into joyriding, theft, vandalism and drug abuse. Such internal crime perpetuated the need for paramilitaries, and further encouraged the presence of the British Army. The residents of Divis Flats, who sought a safe-haven from Protestant mobs and paramilitaries after the rioting of 1969, became prisoners within their own complex. Ultimately, the structure did not alleviate fear, but encouraged it. One Divis resident wrote, in a collection of short stories entitled \textit{No Place for a Dog}, that:

\begin{quote}
A whole new generation of children have been reared in these grey concrete blocks – kids who don’t know what it is like not to have armed soldiers on the streets, plastic bullets, violence and death. If they are a tougher breed than us, should we criticize? After all, these kids have had to be tough.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

The people of Divis Flats had to be tough because their physical environment provided them no safe haven. In a comparison study with Catholic children from the neighboring terraced house Twinbrook estate, children at Divis Flats were shown to have significantly higher rates of emotional distress. A shocking 1987 study released by faculty at the University of Ulster showed that while nine percent of Divis children were “affected by depression or weeping so cannot face school or mix with others,” less than one percent of children at Twinbrook had similar problems.\textsuperscript{43} In West Belfast, persistent poverty and feelings of insecurity can easily lead to social exclusion. According the \textit{Green Paper} on housing, published in 2000 by the British Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions:

\begin{quote}
Social exclusion can be exacerbated by crime and fear of crime and can be worsened by housing which lacks adequate security. . .the effect of high crime rates is to undermine communities, create unpopular
\end{quote}
Divis Flats

neighborhoods and reinforce social exclusion.\textsuperscript{44}

While 14 percent of children at Divis were “affected by loss of appetite,” only one percent of those at Twinbrook were affected.\textsuperscript{45} The Catholic children involved in this study came from similar backgrounds, with similar levels of poverty. The only differentiating factor between the two groups was their physical environment.

That environment is effected by what Oscar Newman called “defensible space,” in both his 1972 and 1997 books, published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. In the more recent study he writes that:

\begin{quote}
Defensible space is a surrogate term for the range of mechanisms – real and symbolic barriers, strongly defined areas of influence, and improved opportunities for surveillance – that combine to bring an environment under the control of its residents.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

In relation to the Divis Flats area and the Lower Falls road, there are, today, an abundance of barriers, areas of influence, and opportunities for surveillance, fostering feelings of security, even for strangers. For example, a shopping center located on the corner of Northumberland Street and the Falls Road sits next to the Cupar Street wall. There is no longer an army checkpoint at the wall, but it remains a reassuring part of the landscape for both Falls and Shankill residents. The entire parking lot of the shopping center is surrounded by bars of vertical fencing, but is left open during business hours. Across the street from this is the Provisional IRA’s Memorial Garden. It is a small, well-landscaped and maintained sanctuary on the main thoroughfare, but is also surrounded by a fence and tall shrubs. Much like the rest of Great Britain, everywhere in Belfast is monitored by closed circuit television.

One would think that in an apartment complex under constant surveillance by the British Army, where the entry to every single apartment can be seen from the top of the tower, security would be ensured. But in fact, because soldiers were perceived as the enemy of residents at the Divis Flats, and residents were all perceived as republican sympathizers by the army, feelings of security were very much compromised by the architectural design. Furthermore, because other districts of Belfast were not under direct supervision by the army (only CCTV), with helicopters constantly flying over and landing on the tower, the residents of Divis Flats began to feel uniquely criminalized. It is also important to note that while the army was provided with opportunities for surveillance through the physical design of the Divis Flats, residents were denied equal supervision of their children in the courtyards below.

In addition to “the capacity of physical design to provide surveillance opportunities,” Newman identifies three other characteristics of defensible space.
These include, “the capacity of design to influence the perception of a project’s uniqueness, isolation and stigma,” or the effects of social exclusion. Also important are “the influence of geographical juxtaposition with safe zones on the security of adjacent areas,” namely physical amenities like a community center or stores. But the single most significant characteristic of a safe environment is its ability to create zones of both real and symbolic territorial influence. It is perhaps a bit ironic that physical barriers meant to deter intruders can ultimately foster feelings of social inclusion.

Real territory, as discussed, is defined by such design elements as landscaping, limited access halls and lobbies, and fences, all of which were absent from the Divis Flats. However, symbolic barriers are ever present. “In our interviews with public housing tenants, we have found that expressions of territorial feelings correspond strongly with a concern for the maintenance of law and belief in the possibility of its enforcement,” he writes. This need for territorial definition is explained in Jacobs’ section on “turf.” The role that symbolic barriers play in protecting a community can be very clearly seen on the lower Falls Road. It was these symbols of territoriality that first brought me to the Divis area.

The phenomenon of mural painting in Northern Ireland has been a reflection of territory since it first emerged following the rioting of 1969, and the height of the republican tradition came during the 1981 Hunger Strikes. Murals can be expressions of relative insecurity when they contain images of masked gunmen, ominously standing watch over the street corner. The evolutionary change in republican mural painting, from such paramilitary images to reflections of cultural tolerance and peace today, reflects an overall increase in feelings of security among the Catholic community, and a corresponding decrease in feelings of political and social marginalization. Meanwhile, loyalist murals have continued to display themes of gunmen and fallen militants, as the perceived threat of republicanism has remained, and even increased since 1998’s Good Friday Agreement. The result of my adventures walking the streets of West Belfast to photograph murals was a first-hand appreciation of both real and symbolic barriers. As a pedestrian I became hyper-aware of the space around me, and how welcome (or safe) I either did or did not feel in a particular area.

The work of Jane Jacobs in identifying “eyes on the street” as the foundation of a secure community, and the work of Oscar Newman in identifying the physical characteristics that dictate territory, are crucial when examining the security failures of the Divis Flats. A lack of amenities for residents combined with a lack of real territorial barriers to encourage insecurity in an area that was already plagued by poverty and crime. The absence of security for the residents of Divis Flats, largely dictated by the physical environment, resulted in a consequent allegiance to the IRA and INLA as a source of protection.
Divis Flats

External Threats to the Residents of Divis Flats:
The British state, Loyalist Paramilitaries, and Republican Politics

Divis was conceived without involving the people who would have to live there. Against the wishes of some of the Loney community. As a quick and thoughtless solution to “slum clearance.” By replacing honest information with slick salesmanship. With no regard for the social infrastructure of an established community. To suit the politicians and the profiteers.49

– Lower Falls Residents Association, 1975

Because the ultimate goal of this paper is to show that the conflict in Northern Ireland was perpetuated by the insecurity of social conditions at the largest Catholic public housing project, it is necessary to first identify what those conditions were. As mentioned, the Troubles are often explained within the context of political and national allegiance, but how did politics, economics and national identity ultimately affect Catholic society and the residents of Divis Flats? More specifically, how did the external interests of politicians, economists, city planners and the military result in an increase in support for Irish republicanism at this particular public housing complex?

Various attempts by the British government to weed out IRA and INLA members often had the effect of alienating the entire Catholic community. One Divis resident expressed his frustration with the Emergency Protections Act of 1973, explaining that:

The EPA is custom built for the oppression of a people. It’s the model legislation for any country that wants to oppress people. The whole conveyor belt system is corrupt. The whole legal system here is geared to politics, not justice. They should stop using the law as a counter-insurgency tool. The EPA isn’t a justice system – there’s no justice for Catholics here. Here, the law is a tool to keep Catholics under control and in their place.50

This lack of faith in government legislation reinforces feelings of political marginalization and corresponds to an increase in support for Republican militancy. If citizens do not feel that social justice can be achieved within the system, then they are forced to work from outside of it. Searching a person’s home without warrant, imprisoning and interrogating an individual for a week, initially denying
them access to legal council, and using evidence gathered during such action against others in the community simply reinforces mistrust in the government.

Furthermore, the intervention of the British army in social programs, specifically city planning and public housing, resulted in even greater skepticism and resentment from the Catholic community. In 1979 a number of newspaper articles exposed the military’s direct involvement with the Belfast Development Office and the resultant establishment of a “Security Committee on Housing.” This discovery makes sense within the context of the Divis Flats, where the door to every apartment was oriented toward the army post on Divis Tower, and a highly concentrated Catholic population resulted in more efficient government supervision. One urban planner noted that “the subject of police and army involvement in planning has in recent months been the subject of fierce controversy, following a series of ‘leaks’ from within the DOE.”

Not only did the military’s counter-insurgency efforts benefit from a structure like the Divis Flats, but local politicians did as well, for whom a large Protestant constituency in central Belfast was essential in order to maintain power. In the midst of urban renewal projects, an example of the kind of gerrymandering that was prevalent in Belfast can be seen at the Old Park Redevelopment Area (RDA 42), just to the east of the river Lagan. An internal Housing Executive memo from 12 June 1979 explains that:

The area (RDA 42) suffers sectarian strife. Future real demand from ‘orange’ will be minimal, while future real demand from ‘green’ will be maximal. The problem is to proceed to public enquiry, where sectarian issues are likely to be raised since ‘redevelopment’ will be seen as the replacement of Protestants for more Catholic houses.

Because significant numbers of Protestants were moving to Belfast’s more affluent suburbs in the late 1970s, and public housing was being demanded by a greater number of Catholics (for whom unemployment and low wages were greater concerns), the Housing Executive was concerned with a potential shift in demographics. They sought ways to entice Protestants to remain in the inner city, building terraced and row houses in areas like Andersonstown, Sandy Row and the Shankill Road, rather than high-rise structures seen in the Catholic New Lodge and the lower Falls Road.

In addition to the military and political interests of the British government being served by the Divis Flats complex, which helped to concentrate the Catholic population, economic interests were also of great concern. In the early 1960s, slum clearance projects of the Pound Loney district, where Divis was eventually built, coincided with plans to build a massive four-lane highway. The M1 was not
completed until the early 1980s, but both the initial structure of Divis Flats, as well as the later demolition of four of its blocks in 1983, made building the highway possible. One city planner asked:

What should Belfast’s planners do? Should they use their position and skills to try to provide the physical form appropriate to a harmonious society? Or should they accept the existence of fear and hatred between Protestants and Catholics, and the active presence of the army and police, and merely do what they can to accommodate a state of permanent tension? If the latter, will they not be helping the ensure that Belfast will ever be at peace with itself?\(^{53}\)

I do not wish to demonize city planners and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Their efforts at deterring civil conflict through the built environment (i.e. the building of the Peace Line) have been commendable, providing much needed security to both the Protestant and Catholic communities. Indeed, Belfast has become one of the most important locales for the study of urban and regional planning. However, the realities of economic, political and military influence cannot be ignored, nor can their effects on the psyche of Belfast’s minority population.

It would be wrong to suggest that all of the politicians, city planners, and architects involved in projects like the Divis Flats had malicious intentions. The results of their efforts may, in hindsight, appear disastrous. However, many of the decision-makers were well intentioned and, at the time, believed strongly in the socially reformatory power of modern housing. Indeed most former residents of the Pound Loney didn’t have internal plumbing or central heating. Unfortunately the process of urban redevelopment often involves decisions which may initially appear to be practical solutions (i.e. high-rise structures which allow for open space, or the use of asbestos sheeting to insulate concrete walls) but over time can cause serious problems.

Architects and planners did not foresee the social stigmas associated with such structures either, yet these realities must be considered in hindsight when examining threats to the well-being of Divis residents. It was often the case that residents of Divis Flats would list the address of a friend or relative when applying for a job, because the flats had such a notorious reputation throughout Belfast. The very physical nature of industrial modern housing is a contradiction to established notions of domesticity and individuality. Feelings of social exclusion were common in such impersonal, disconnected high-rise structures. “Social exclusion through housing happens if the effect of housing processes is to deny certain social groups control over their daily lives, or to impair enjoyment of wider citizenship rights,” explains one sociologist.\(^{54}\)
In 1997 Tony Blair’s Labour government established a special Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) to combat a series of contributing factors to what they perceived as a growing epidemic. The SEU defined social exclusion as, “a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown.” At least in the case of the Divis Flats, poor housing conditions were the primary cause of high crime rates, bad health and family breakdown.

Regarding the military’s direct role as an external threat to the lower Falls community, it is worth repeating that there were initially no feelings of antagonism. The soldiers were perceived as protectors. However, following a series of riots during which many bystanders, including children, were injured or killed with plastic bullets, the Divis Community’s perception of the army became tragically altered and support for republican paramilitaries consequently grew.

The spring and summer of 1981 were especially traumatic times for residents due to Hunger Strike rioting and protests. In May, a four-year-old was struck in the head with a plastic bullet after he and his friends had been throwing stones at an armored patrol unit. That same month, twelve-year-old Carol Ann Kelly was killed on the Falls Road by a plastic bullet. “The use of plastic bullets has produced a great deal of Catholic resentment against security forces and the government, and has increased support for the IRA and INLA,” observed Sluka, who was living and conducting research at Divis Flats during this time. The British Army’s plastic bullets proved fatal not only to young children. In July of 1981 Peter Doherty was killed at Divis Flats when a plastic bullet came through his kitchen window and hit him directly in the head.

In addition to plastic bullets, unwarranted searches at the flats (allowed under the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 1976 and the Emergency Protections Act the year later), did much to alienate Divis residents. Feelings of personal insecurity increased when residents felt the sanctity of their most private spaces violated by groups of soldiers who had little regard for their personal property. In regard to an increase in support for the republican movement after the hunger strikes, Sluka writes,

What they [the British government] have either failed to learn or do not care about is that they have to control the everyday acts of harassment and abuse by individual soldiers on the ground that do as much in the long run to alienate public opinion as larger actions.

Another scholar notes that, “offensive and aggressive British activity…had the effect on the community of tilting the balance of allegiance toward the Provisionals.”
It is important to mention that there is an inverse relationship between community support for the British army and support for the IRA. The initially positive perception of the army declined when it became clear that their role was not to protect the residents, but rather to monitor and control them. Simultaneously, support for republican paramilitaries steadily increased in the early 1980s as Divis residents became more politically disillusioned and more physically threatened. At Chicago’s Robert Taylor Homes, a complex of 28 16-story high-rises, “tougher law enforcement strategies produced growing distrust between the police and a tenant body” during the 1980s. Just as the Prevention of Terrorism Act and Emergency Provisions acts of the late 1970s were used to infiltrate the Divis Community to weed out militants, at the Taylor Homes “tenants complained that police were using the mob action aimed at gang members to arrest non-gang-affiliated youth, from whom they hoped to obtain information on criminal activities.” This strategy of interrogation is one of the reasons that the IRA took such strong action against petty crime and was so committed to community policing; they saw the potential for low-level informants who had been brought in on non-political charges. The general hostility toward law enforcement felt at the Divis Flats (the natural product of an “us versus them” mentality) was also seen at St. Louis’s Pruitt-Igoe complex in the late 1960s. Oscar Newman explained:

In the high-rise project – a labyrinth profusion of corridors, fire stairs, exits – police report great difficulty in locating apartments, to say nothing of pursuing criminals. Officers responding to calls meet tenant indifference if not open hostility. It is not uncommon for tenants to angrily attempt to drive off police responding with well-intentioned assistance. Tenants are skeptical of police effectiveness and fearful of police officers and of police intentions.

However, unlike in Northern Ireland, when discussing American minorities’ mistrust of law enforcement, politics are not regarded as a contributing factor. Rather, it is the economic and social inequities of society that are acknowledged as both fostering crime and simultaneously marginalizing the minority group. When communities become plagued by crime, but do not see the police or army as allies, what becomes their alternative? At the Taylor Homes, informal “Mama’s mafias” became the initial solution, and community groups eventually formed. When the residents of Divis Flats in Belfast became plagued by a persistent lack of security, and the presence of the British army actually contributed their fears, they were slow to organize formally. Instead, they sought protection from the IRA and INLA.

Before the military threat of arrest, harassment and being shot by unaccounted-for plastic bullets emerged, the residents of Divis Flats were fearful
of their neighboring loyalist community. As mentioned, it was the burning and rioting of August 1969 that resulted in a mass exodus of Catholics to the safety of Divis Flats, and which was instigated primarily by Protestants from the Shankill road. Falls resident Kathleen Magill described her fear on the night of August 15 in a collection of work put out by a writers’ group at the Mill. She recalls:

I watched in sheer terror as one man was pointing out the Catholic houses while the others threw petrol bombs into them, the street was blazing like a furnace. All around me I could hear the sound of breaking glass and the screams of terrified women and children.\(^{62}\)

The burned out houses along what is, today, the largest Peace Line wall, remained vacant and served as a buffer no man’s land between the Falls and Shankill communities. In the years following, Catholic fears of the Protestant community only escalated with the forming of loyalist paramilitaries.

The Ulster Defense Association (UDA) was formed in 1971 as a reaction to the post-NICRA resurgence of Irish republicanism. While the Provisional IRA claims to have never targeted Protestant civilians, they did attack Protestants who worked for and served the government, especially RUC officers, soldiers, and the businesses that they frequented. Unfortunately, many innocent bystanders were killed in these attacks, and the UDA’s aim was to “protect the community, and to stop the IRA,” according to one-time leader John White.\(^{63}\) In contrast, in the 1970s and 80s the UDA (as well as the Ulster Freedom Fighters and the Ulster Volunteer Force) perceived any Catholic as a legitimate target following an IRA attack. UVF leader Gusty Spence once remarked that any Catholic was by definition an IRA man.\(^{64}\) Unfortunately, this policy of retaliation became all too commonplace as civilians near the Falls Road were abducted and shot at random.

The height of these fears came in 1975 and 1976, when a gang of men later known as the “Shankill Butchers,” led by psychopath Lenny Murphy, began grabbing men near the Falls Road and Divis Flats. The main thoroughfare from the Shankill to the Falls, Northumberland Street, is only blocks from the flats. In November of 1975 Murphy and his crew dragged 34-year-old Catholic Francis Crossan into a black taxi, where they proceeded to beat him with a tire iron and drive him to an alley in the Shankill district. There, Murphy proceeded to hack through his neck with a butcher knife. In February 1976 two other Catholics were murdered in similarly gruesome ways. The next month Murphy was taken off the streets on a weapons possession charge, but his gang was instructed to keep killing, and four more young men were butchered over the next several months. The brutality and random nature of these acts traumatized the Falls community, and many were afraid to go out alone or at night in the mid-1970s. These were the
Divis Flats

most horrific of crimes, but they demonstrate the very real need for IRA protection from outside threat.

It would be a mistake, however, to blame only the British government and loyalist community for feelings of insecurity at the Divis Flats. In fact, the republican movement itself must share a large proportion of the blame. Granted, the IRA and INLA were active in community policing, and their highly structured system of warnings to petty criminals, followed by suggestions to leave the area, and finally knee-cappings or executions, deterred a significant amount of crime in the poorest areas of West Belfast. But their political and military campaigns did, in the end, much to harm the average Catholic.

The high points in public support for the republicanism typically followed the most violent and repressive actions, including the introduction of internment in 1971, the events of Bloody Sunday in 1972 and the Hunger Strikes of 1981. Conducting research at the Divis flats at the time of the Hunger Strikes, Sluka recalls that:

Youths hijacked and burned over 100 cars, buses, and trucks around the complex, barricaded all of the entrances, and turned Divis into a “no go” area. For six weeks they kept the Security Forces out. Some of the balconies were draped with sheets to block observation from the army post on top of Divis Tower, vigilante patrols were organized, and masked and armed IRA and INLA patrols were seen openly on the walks…During the hunger strike, Divis Flats was undoubtedly one of the most violent locales in Belfast.65

Unfortunately, unconstructive mayhem like this only had the effect of further alienating the innocent residents of the flats from the British army. The army came to view every resident as a potential IRA or INLA member, and consideration for the residents’ well-being was rarely considered when the troops themselves were worried about getting shot or blown to bits in a stairwell. Additionally, by allowing naïve and frustrated young people to be physically destructive (the aforementioned leaflet passed around by the Belfast Brigade was a rare event), the paramilitaries were, in effect, helping to justify the military presence at Divis which they fought so hard to drive out. Not only did the necessary embedding of the IRA and INLA deep within the general Catholic population justify the presence of the military, it also set the community up to violent attacks from loyalist paramilitaries, like those in 1971, 1975 and 1993.

Furthermore, by not clearly differentiating between the two distinct roles of the paramilitaries, namely the armed struggle for a united Ireland and their
secondary position as community police, the IRA allowed their entire organization
to be discredited by both the government and the media. As discussed, a group
called Direct Action Against Drugs was eventually formed in 1995, allowing the
Provisionals to suspend their military actions while Sinn Fein participated in peace
talks. But even then, their efforts were easily dismissed as those of “terrorists”.

The position of Republican paramilitaries can be seen as a quagmire for
the residents of Divis Flats and the entire West Belfast nationalist community.
The power of militants fed off the frustrations of social inequality and feelings
of political marginalization within the community. On the one hand, the IRA and
INLA’s role as protectors was made necessary by the very real threats of loyalist
paramilitaries and local criminals. On the other hand, their political agenda and
physical presence resulted in aggressive actions by both loyalists and the British
army, which only increased feelings of social exclusion and insecurity.

Internal Threats to the Residents of Divis Flats:
The Physical and Psychological Effects of Architectural Design

In addition to the external threats of the British government’s military,
political and economic agenda, and the violent actions of loyalist paramilitaries and
the IRA, there were numerous internal problems at the Divis Flats which contributed
to feelings of insecurity. Among the various failures in architectural design were
a general lack of amenities and landscaping, dark stairwells and corridors, the
inability to supervise children, an abundance of trash, the failure of elevators, an
impractical laundry system, the inability to keep warm, the growth of mold and
an increase in ill health. Additionally, the psychological effects of the modern
public housing system, including a lack of community, isolation from society, and
feelings of general hopelessness and depression, coupled with physical concerns
and contributed to support for the IRA and INLA. This final chapter is divided into
two sections: the physical deficiencies of the flats and the psychological effects that
design had on the community.

Physical Deficiencies

In 1972 Oscar Newman identified a handful of physical characteristics that
reinforced criminal behavior in a housing complex, public or private. These included
its size (at least seven floors high and housing over 1,000 families), the destruction
of old city blocks to make one “superblock” which is closed to city traffic, and a
relatively free composition of apartment blocks on the site with one continuous,
undifferentiated green space between structures. Additionally, he added that most
of the physically threatening individual buildings are slab or cruciform towers
with 150 to 500 families, and that they usually contain one central, interior-facing
lobby with elevators. Newman points out that the single most significant difference
between low and upper-income apartment complexes, and the most important deterrent to crime, are the presence of fences and security guards or doormen. The insecurities of the Divis Flats complex can be more easily understood within the framework of Newman’s groundbreaking work. The complex only deviates from the above-named characteristics by the fact that the Divis blocks did not contain a central, interior-facing lobby. Instead, they had exterior flights of stairs and elevators located at the ends of the walk, path and row corridors.

While Jane Jacobs’ postmodern interpretations of the urban landscape exposed the fundamental need for social and community amenities, Newman’s work focused more on the ways that design effects security. In fact, the two concerns both relate to architectural design, and become further intertwined when one considers that continued presence of residents throughout a complex, utilizing amenities like community centers, shops and parks, can deter crime just as much as a lighted stairwell or a doorman.

There was a shocking lack of thought put into the amenities of Divis Flats by the Laing Construction Company. I first learned about the tragedies of the complex when I visited the Divis Community Center in August of 2005; however, that building was not built until 1983, almost 15 years after the original 12 blocks were constructed. Initially, the only amenities at the Divis complex were a football pitch between Gilford and St. Comgall’s and one behind Massereene, as well as a playground with two swing sets in front of Massereene - hardly adequate to accommodate more than a thousand children. “There’s nothing for children. Well, they have a park but it’s full of carry-out bags, broken bottles, no swings, no slides, no nothing,” exclaimed one mother.

In a rare collection of first-hand stories published by the Divis Residents’ Association in 1983 called *Balconies, Brits and Binlids*, a girl named Veronica recalls her childhood.

I remember one of the things we used to do if we were bored was to walk round the balconies looking for black bows on the doors and go in to see the corpse. It didn’t matter if you knew them or not. We just used to knock on the door and ask to see the body, and people brought you in. God love some of those poor people, we must have had them tortured, ’cos if it was a good corpse we’d go back a couple of times.

Unfortunately, the lack of amenities for children not only led to general boredom, but also encouraged petty crime and vandalism. What few amenities were provided for children were not very safe because there were no benches on which adults could sit to supervise, and adequate views of the play areas from the
flats were obstructed. A close examination of the floor plans of the flats, as well as the placement of corridors toward Divis Tower reveals that most kitchen and living spaces were oriented away from the play areas. Only Gilford, St. Comgall’s, Farset, Masserene and Church blocks had living spaces with views of either the playground or a soccer pitch, and these structures only housed 200 of the more than 850 units. Parents living on five of the seven floors at Cullingtree, Milford and St. Peter’s could supervise children in play areas only from the windows of their bedrooms, and those living directly on the path and row levels could not see over balconies to the courtyard from their flats. Parents unfortunate enough to live in Pound, Whitehall, St. Brendan’s and St. Jude’s blocks had no view of play spaces on the ground. Thus, many children were encouraged to play in the corridors. However, as trash chutes backed up and dogs relieved themselves in these areas they became extremely unsanitary places for children. In a 1987 survey of housing and health conditions at Divis Flats, one father explained that his child had contracted an intestinal parasite from playing near the blocked up trash chutes and dog feces on the balcony. Interestingly, in 1968 a Federal Housing Act was passed in the United States calling for no children to be housed in high-rise structures above the fifth floor because of the inability to supervise them.

Besides community centers and playgrounds, the other major amenity that dramatically improves living conditions by ensuring the presence of residents and providing clear definitions of public and private space is landscaping. In 1922, in his planned “Contemporary City for 3 Million People,” Le Corbusier explained that planted areas are, “the only way to promote healthy conditions and create a tranquil atmosphere.” He went on to note that “the new spirit of architecture and the emerging art of urban planning can satisfy our deepest needs by bringing nature into the city landscape.” Surrounded by these new high-rises, he acknowledged that “we must bridge the painful gap between man and his city by introducing a means that fits into both scales… we must plant trees!” There were no trees at the Divis Flats complex.

Newman notes that:

We have found that physical subdivisions, if clearly defined and related to access paths, amenities, and entries, encourage occupants to adopt proprietary attitudes and to exert potent territorial prerogatives which serve as natural and significant deterrents to crime.”

There were no physical subdivisions (including landscaping or fences) related to paths, amenities or entries at Divis Flats. Much of Newman’s work in the early 1970s focused on insecurity at Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis. There, he observed that the simple placement of a chain-link fence around the entrance to one building resulted
Divis Flats

in an 80 percent reduction in crime and vandalism. His work also noted that if fewer residents have access to lobbies and corridors there is an increase in the sense of ownership and a dramatic reduction in crime and vandalism. At the Divis Flats, with its three levels of continuous corridors, army units were able to patrol freely, but feelings of spatial control for residents were entirely denied.

Additional security concerns related more to a lack of maintenance or intentional malfunction than initial architectural design, and included broken elevators, railings and lights. In the mid 1980s one man died after he fell four floors, and a child died when he fell through a broken railing on the stairs. Sluka noted that “residents have complained over the years that soldiers have broken lights on the walks in the complex to prevent their being silhouetted for snipers and to take advantage of their rifle-mounted night scopes.” This claim is perhaps a bit far-fetched, but it is true that there was not adequate lighting in stairwells, links or corridors, which contributed to an increase in feelings of insecurity for residents. Feelings of insecurity and mistrust of the military were also heightened when, as one resident explained, “there were two soldiers killed at the lift round at Pound block. The IRA killed them with a bomb. I think it was hidden in the lift. Then the army came and cut the cables on all the lifts and left the flats without lifts for years after that.”

Following the creation of the Divis Demolition Committee and the media attention that followed their campaign for complete demolition, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive hired ASSIST Architects in March of 1983. The architects’ role was to conduct a physical assessment of the Divis Flats, but the ulterior motive behind this survey was to avoid total demolition (which would require the building of approximately 900 new houses) in favor of cheaper mass renovation. The politics behind the demolition movement of the Divis residents was further complicated by the fact that Belfast City Council was pushing to complete the M1 highway. The highway was planned to run from the southern suburbs to just north of the city center, and would continue out past the airport and eastern suburbs, but it would be built directly through the lower Falls area (only 20 metres from Whitehall block). The highway was first proposed in the early 1960s and can now be seen as one of the catalysts for the preliminary mass slum clearance program of that same decade. However, the outspoken demands that Pound Loney residents to be re-housed within the safety of the lower Falls, as well as Protestant politicians’ concerns over a potentially threatening demographic shift, meant that the M1 project had been put off for nearly 20 years. By 1983 the issue had resurfaced, and in conjunction with concerns over the inhabitability of the flats, the NIHE was forced to act.

ASSIST came to the conclusion that demolition of Whitehall and Farset blocks was unavoidable, a ruling that benefited both the highway builders and the British Army (who could not fully monitor Farset because of its perpendicular position to Divis Tower). But they also pointed to St. Brendan’s and Pound as necessitating demolition, stating in their report that, “we have recommended more
demolition than is now proposed, and more extensive modernization of the remaining flats. We believe if this work is not carried out, the flats should be classified as unfit for habitation.\textsuperscript{77} The cost of the work to be done, including the building of 170 terrace style houses in the area was £10.8 million. They recognized that residents of Divis would not support this finding, and that they favored complete demolition of the 12 blocks, but stated that:

\begin{quote}
We are not in a position to propose such action since it would be largely a political rather than a technical decision. If all the 795 flats were demolished, there would only be room for about 280, at the most 300, traditional houses on the site. A further 500 houses would have to be provided in other areas.\textsuperscript{78}
\end{quote}

Although in coming to this conclusion, ASSIST failed to recognize that, according to a pole conducted by the Divis Joint Development Committee, residents would be more than willing to move outside of the area if it meant escape from the flats.\textsuperscript{79} They proposed a breaking up of the remaining eight blocks of flats, which would remove many hazardous links and increase overall security by limiting access to individual terraces (i.e. Newman’s concept of defensible space). This breaking up of the continuous terraces would help to facilitate a sense of ownership and community for Divis residents.

Unfortunately, the plan was only ever partially implemented by the NIHE. Whitehall, Farset, St. Brendan’s, Pound and the part of Cullingtree that connected to them, and was also closest to the M1 route, were all demolished in 1983 and 1984. However, proposed renovations for the remaining 413 flats never came, nor did the plan to break up the links. Ultimately, problems continued to plague Divis until the remaining blocks were finally demolished a decade later.

ASSIST’s 1983 report breaks up the numerous physical problems of the flats, with the most emphasis placed on “damp” and mold-related issues, which have been shown to cause respiratory problems. This correlation is supported by the findings of the 1987 housing and health survey, which concluded that 36 percent of Divis children had frequent coughs, 36 percent had wheezy or whistling sounds and 10 percent had symptoms of asthma, compared to only single digits of children at a nearby terrace housing estate.\textsuperscript{80} One resident explained:

\begin{quote}
When we moved into Gilford Row, there was no dampness but they were new, but now there is a lot of damp. There was dampness in my own flat in the children’s room on the ceiling, it was to do with the balconies, the water lying on the balconies then when there was heavy rain, the water used to come in
\end{quote}
Divis Flats

through the ceiling they were very very damp. The rooms were damp and cold for the children to sleep in. There was heating but it was more often off than on.\textsuperscript{81}

Problems with mold in the flats came about because of the use of inadequately insulated concrete in a cold climate. Concrete is already one of the most inefficient building materials in a northern climate, and most residents could not afford to heat their flats sufficiently. The ASSIST study showed that the average resident would have to pay more than 9 percent of their income to adequately heat a three bedroom flat.\textsuperscript{82}

Meanwhile, condensation quickly formed when the temperature of rooms fell below that of walls and windows, encouraging the growth of mold. Also, the design of corridors without proper drainage pipes meant that water easily collected and seeped down into the flats. The persistent mold problem was made worse by the impractical design of the drying tower for laundry between St. Peter’s and St. Comgall’s blocks. Residents could not supervise their laundry while it was drying, so they resorted to hanging it in their flats and out of windows, causing more condensation and mold.

Psychological Effects of Design

The psychological insecurities that developed at the Divis Flats in the 1970s and 1980s are not unlike those found in many similar modern public housing projects. These include problems with persistent unemployment, alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, and a breakdown of community and family structures. These problems contributed to feelings of social exclusion, and ultimately resulted in allegiance to paramilitaries, whether as a means of controlling crime or because of resentment toward the British state.

For the young people of the flats, school had little appeal if job discrimination was inevitable, and joyriding became a favorite way to eliminate boredom. Kids would regularly steal cars from along the Falls Road, and drive them to the Divis Flats where there was a high degree of anonymity and where the RUC refused to venture, setting them on fire.

Places like this create their own problems: loneliness, alcoholism, and depression. Kids who have nowhere to play will turn to vandalism or joy-riding, or rioting, for the excitement; laying their life on the line for the thrill of it all.\textsuperscript{83}

Australian sociologist Alex Marsh notes that crime and anti-social behavior not
only destabilize neighborhoods, but also contribute to victims’ feelings of social exclusion when their security needs are not adequately met. As a result the Divis community turned to paramilitaries for social control. ⁸⁴

Many of these “hoods” turned to drugs as an outlet for their pain, and glue-sniffers found easy sanctuary in the dark stairwells between the blocks. But substance abuse was certainly not limited to the youth of Divis Flats. One mother explained:

I think the reason why a lot of people drink now is because depression has a lot to do with it, they have nowhere to go and they are in the house all day with the children. . . . I think a good majority of the people have drink problems, they can’t do anything about it. They are stuck in the flats all day and they are on the dole and they have hardly any money, they can’t afford to go out. . . . they are bored and depressed and when they get a wee drink it takes all their problems away but the next morning they are still there. ⁸⁵

Over 70 percent of the households that Jeffrey Sluka interviewed in Divis Flats had members who suffered from depression, bad nerves, insomnia, alcoholism, dependence on tranquilizers, or other psychological or emotional problems. He notes the potential connections between poverty, political instability (or more likely increased feelings of insecurity) and substance abuse, saying that:

Many of these problems are the result of social, economic, and housing stress, and it is difficult to say how much they are a result of political troubles. But it is certainly the case that when the violence flares up, as it did during the hunger strike, an increasing number of residents begin to complain of depression and bad nerves, drink more, and take more tranquilizers and other prescription drugs. ⁸⁶

Such social problems were compounded by the break down in community that came about when the complex was built. A joint publication by the Divis Residents Association and the Town and Country Planning Association of London described the social bonds of the old, tightly knit Pound Loney community. ⁸⁷ The residents of the old neighborhood who were re-housed at the flats in 1969 attempted to maintain their cohesion, but the physical structure of the blocks made it hard to gather together. There were no public meeting places in the complex until the community center was built in 1983. In his 1945 book Rebuilding Our Communities,
which criticized the structure of modern cities, Walter Gropius wrote, “I am deeply convinced that the building of neighborhood community centers is of even greater urgency than housing itself.” He elaborates that:

The centers could best be developed in connection with the schools, and would enable the people to control their own fate more efficiently. The cost of these administrative units would soon be repaid, for the usual unproductive expenditures for relief, delinquency and crime decline as rapidly as the initiative of the people grows.

The subsequent rise of successful community groups like the Divis Residents Association and Divis Demolition Committee immediately after the Community Center’s construction, demonstrate the power that social amenities have in psychologically transforming an environment. By 1987 the Divis Joint Development Committee formed, and continued to raise public awareness, and empower residents to change their environment without the help of paramilitaries. It was ultimately these groups that ensured the safety of Divis residents, by ensuring total demolition and the building of traditional terraced and row houses in their place.

Numerous physical deficiencies at the Divis Flats contributed to feelings of psychological insecurity; namely depression, alcoholism, hopelessness and social exclusion. They also explain a general loss of faith in government at a time when political participation for Catholics was already nonexistent, and this anger and resentment meant a proportional growth in support for the republican movement and its militant factions. Additionally, the feelings of social exclusion that developed in miserable living conditions led many impoverished children to crime, and ultimately meant that the IRA and INLA were needed for community policing. Because there was no clear separation between the political and social control roles of the IRA, the organization was discredited and Divis residents indirectly punished. Mistreatment by on-edge security forces created further resentment and an even stronger allegiance to republicanism.

Conclusion

Through an examination of the course of conflict in Northern Ireland since 1968 a relative pattern of allegiance to the republican movement has been exposed. While this support was dictated by multiple factors, including national and religious identity and subsequent political motivations, it was also driven out of innate fear. The residents of the Divis Flats in the Catholic Falls Road area of West Belfast were placed into an environment that was physically conducive to crime and insecurity, and actually made them more vulnerable, exactly at the time when civil conflict
erupted and security was needed the most. I make no claims that the structure of the Divis Flats caused the Troubles; however, I do offer that it contributed to conflict in very important and often overlooked ways.

A number of alienating and terrifying events, including the rioting of August 1969, the introduction of warrantless seizures, internment, the gruesome murders of a number of Falls Road Catholics by the Shankill Butchers in 1975 and 1976, and the use of plastic bullets by the British military all contributed to an increase in support for the Irish Republican Army and the Irish National Liberation Army. In fact, in 1983 over 50 percent of residents at the Divis Flats actively supported at least one of these paramilitaries.90

The need for physical security is a fundamental one, and one that must be met before thoughts on politics or nationality can be even marginally considered. Thus, for many of Belfast’s urban poor, Protestant and Catholic alike, the need for stable housing and employment is primary. A shocking statistic to consider, and one which challenges fundamental interpretations of conflict in Northern Ireland, is that in 1983 over 76 percent of Divis residents expressed no interest in politics at all!91 Social historians have identified competition for jobs and housing as a contributing factor to the conflict, but until now there has been little reflection on the direct physical role that public housing has played in dictating the course of conflict.

The Laing Construction Company was contracted to build the Divis Flats in the late 1960s because of their ability to build with the SECTRA concrete system of steel frame and pre-formed slabs. This system was cost-efficient (at least in the short run) but turned out to be disastrous in Belfast’s damp and cold northern climate, where heating is costly and concrete highly inefficient. Condensation quickly led to the growth of mold, which contributed to a significant increase in respiratory ailments for residents, as did the asbestos insulation meant to insulate the concrete. In a health survey conducted in 1987 more than 80 percent of children living at the Divis Flats were found to be unable to keep warm during the winter, compared to only 31 percent of children living in a neighboring terraced estate.92

Considering the numerous other physical deficiencies at the Divis Flats, including easily clogged trash chutes, broken elevators and an impractical laundry system, not to mention the continuous-terrace design that discouraged feelings of ownership, safety and community, it is no wonder that four of the blocks stood for only 15 years. The remaining eight were demolished after a mere 25 years! The poor design and malfunction of the complex resulted in greater feelings of social exclusion for a minority group already isolated from society. This frustration ultimately led to an allegiance for the IRA and INLA.

So, what on earth went through the minds of bureaucrats and politicians at the Department of the Environment and the Housing Executive? There were multiple motivations for building the Divis Flats in 1968, including political, economic and military considerations. Certainly, many city planners had faith in the
popular rhetoric of Le Corbusier’s modern housing theories, believing that life for this poor community would be greatly improved through slum clearance programs. In fact, the Divis complex offered many internal amenities, such as running water and central heating, which had been absent from 19th century two-up two-downs with a communal loo out the back. But while these “modern” amenities made for a good advertising campaign, equally significant exterior amenities were not provided. The lack of landscaping and spatial definition meant that the open spaces between blocks became a no man’s land of “hoods,” drug addicts and joyriders… and a good place to start a bonfire if the opportunity presented itself. Furthermore, the initial absence of a Community Center, as well as the impersonal structure of high-rises itself, resulted in a breakdown of the community bonds that had once kept the Pound Loney-ites safe. Obviously, these essential parts of a community were left from the drawing board because of economic constraints. Le Corbusier’s utopian vision for a “Radiant City” was not one where there were budgetary cuts… or poor people at all for that matter.

An additional reality was that Belfast city planners wanted to make way for a four-lane highway, running precisely through the Lower Falls district. As was the case throughout the United States and Western Europe after World War II, the growth of middle class suburbs and “white flight,” or Protestant flight, as was the case in Northern Ireland, meant that workers needed an easy way to get to their jobs in the city. In Atlanta, Georgia, the construction of a major interstate came about at the expense of the old Sweet Auburn neighborhood, ripping apart the heart of the city’s African-American community.

The building of interstates through disadvantaged communities is not just an economic decision, however. There are also political careers to be considered, and in Northern Ireland politics is always of issue. By concentrating West Belfast’s Catholic community in high-density structures under the guise of modern living and community safety, unionist politicians could maintain a large Protestant constituency in the neighboring Shankill Road and Sandy Row. However, this political tactic also came at the expense of social harmony. By encouraging the separation of West Belfast’s Protestant and Catholic communities bureaucrats were helping to foster feelings of “the other,” which made conflict more pronounced. Granted, certain real barriers like the Peace Line were, at times, needed for protective reasons. But in the long run the division of Belfast into a patchwork of Green and Orange, Tricolour and Unionjack, only intensified social divisions and heightened conflict. By separating Belfast’s working-class Protestant and Catholic communities, bourgeois bureaucrats ensured that they would continue to perceive each other as the enemy, rather than recognize common positions of economic disadvantage.

Civil unrest was supposed to be controlled by the British Army, which began patrolling the Falls district shortly after the riots of 1969. They were initially greeted with goodwill by the residents of Divis Flats and were seen as less biased than the local RUC because they were outsiders. However, many of the events that
contributed to an increase in allegiance to the IRA, such as internment in 1971, also resulted in a breakdown of relations between Catholic residents and army patrols. Such feelings of “us versus them” were only encouraged by an architectural design that positioned the army up in a 20-floor tower, and the front door to every resident’s flat down below in a position of optimal surveillance. Furthermore, the design of a system of continuous terraces throughout the complex, connected by links of stairs and elevators, made for easy military patrolling, but simultaneously denied residents any feeling of ownership or control over their environment. This loss of control was especially important when it came to the monitoring of children.

Because of the positioning of the flats, with living spaces out the back side and bedrooms under and above the terraces, few families were able to adequately monitor their children down on the ground. There were only two soccer pitches in the entire 850-family complex and one playground. But because of a lack of benches for parental supervision and sufficient line of sight from flats on upper floors, bored children were easily lured into antisocial behavior.

The epidemic of glue-sniffers, vandals and joyriders that overtook the Divis complex in the 1970s and 1980s, terrorizing residents already dealing with external threats to their security, meant a significant need for social control. Enter the IRA. The role that Republican paramilitaries have played in community policing has always been overlooked by a media that prefers to depict them as violent terrorists. I do not deny that the Provisional IRA, and especially the more radical INLA, have been involved in hundreds of tragic bombings and murders over the last 35 years. Regardless of whether one believes that their goal of a united Ireland is a legitimate one, the brutality of many of their militant actions, resulting in the loss of innocent life cannot, I believe, be justified. Republican leaders like Sinn Fein’s Gerry Adams have shown that political participation is a much more efficient way of achieving a resolution to the Troubles. However, the IRA’s social control position in the Catholic ghettos of Belfast was made necessary by the absence of an adequate police force and mistrust in government. In 1983 over 76 percent of residents at the Divis Flats believed that the IRA and INLA were needed to control antisocial behavior. A statement released by the Provisional IRA in September of 1976 read:

The 2nd Battalion, Belfast Brigade IRA, warn all thieves in the area to cease their activities forthwith, or else suffer the consequences. The people already suffer severe British oppression and the Republican Army needs all its resources to resist their terror. The activities of these local criminals adds to the suffering of the people, and aids the Brits by channeling Republican activity into a policing role. The 2nd Batt. warn in particular a crime-ring operating from the
In January of 1982 a number of elderly women were attacked and robbed in and around the Divis Flats, and a young woman was brutally raped in a stairwell. On February 2, a 17-year-old was apprehended by the IRA for these crimes, after a number of witnesses came forward. He was shot in both legs just above the knees, and three fellow “hoods” involved were forced to read statements at local clubs apologizing to the girl, her family, and the community at large. While the physical structure of the Divis Flats encouraged rampant criminal behavior within the complex, it also perpetuated physical and psychological divisions between the Catholic and Protestant communities. In addition to such social divisions, the complex also contributed to feelings of resentment toward the British army by Catholic residents. Residents lost faith in a government that seemed to have abandoned them, and turned to militancy when political participation was not an option. Within Catholic society, the physically impersonal and alienating structure of the flats caused a rapid deterioration of traditional community bonds, allowing problems with crime and drug abuse to flourish among young people. Such crime only necessitated the presence of paramilitaries for social control, the very presence of which allowed residents to be further victimized by the British army and loyalist paramilitaries.

Architectural design alone cannot be blamed for the problems that emerged at Divis Flats, because economic constraints on the Housing Executive (the result of Thatcherite cuts in social spending in the 1980s), as well as unavoidable, long-standing political allegiances and cultural differences certainly contributed to unstable social conditions as well. However, in not recognizing the role that public housing design and other social welfare programs play in stabilizing a community, one fails to recognize the issues that effected citizens’ everyday lives.

An examination of the Divis Flats demonstrates the fundamental ways that architectural design can contribute to the ills of a community by denying basic needs for security and encouraging social exclusion. It was these factors that ultimately drove residents to seek protection from the IRA and INLA and which perpetuated conflict.

Feelings of insecurity about one’s residential environment often lead to the adoption of a negative and defeatist view of oneself, to ambivalence about job finding, and to expressions of general impotence in the capacity to cope with the outside world. The secure residential environment – understood by a resident as a haven and interpreted by outsiders as the expression of the inhabitants’ ego – may be one
of the most meaningful forms of social rehabilitation available to the family and to society. 

— Oscar Newman

I am grateful for the generous support of Professor Jeffrey Cox, who served as my primary thesis adviser, encouraging me throughout my research endeavors and allowing me to incorporate my dual interests in the history of conflict in Northern Ireland and the legacy of Modernist public housing. Additionally, I am indebted to Professor Barbara Mooney in the School of Art and Art History. She not only edited my entire thesis and served on my committee, she opened my eyes to the discipline of architectural history and theory. I would also like to thank Bob Kirby, Associate Director of the Honors Program, for his support. Lastly, I would like to thank Professor Shelton Stromquist for serving on my thesis committee and for inspiring me to get involved in the issues of affordable housing.

Endnotes
6 Sluka, *Hearts and Minds*, 45
8 Personal conversation at the Divis Community Center, August 15, 2005.
15 Frederick Boal, *Shaping a City: Belfast in the late twentieth century* (Institute of Irish Studies: Queen’s University Belfast, 1995), 14.
16 ibid.
18 ibid., 61.
20 Holland, *Hope Against History*, 68
22 ibid.
Divis Flats

27 Holland, *Hope Against History*, 93.
28 Today an enormous mural of Bobby Sands is painted on the side of the Sinn Fein center on the Falls road, and is retouched every year by artist Danny Devenny.
30 Ibid., 71.
40 Ibid., 30.
42 Divis Community Arts Project, *No Place for a Dog* (Belfast: Divis Community Arts Project, 1990), 8. From the collection of the Linen Hall Library, Belfast.
45 Blackman, *Housing and Health in West Belfast*, 11.
48 Ibid., 51.
51 Dawson, *Planning in the Shadow of Urban Civil Conflict*, 12. The Department of the Environment directly oversees the Housing Executive.
52 NIHE memo, 6-12-79, from Dawson, 18.
54 P. Somerville, “Explanations of Social Exclusion: Where Does Housing Fit It?,” *Housing Studies* 13, no. 4, 772.
57 Ibid., 172.
60 Ibid.
Megan Deirdre Roy graduated with honors in history in 2006. In 2005, she was awarded the History Department’s Burke Fellowship, allowing her to conduct research in Belfast, Northern Ireland for her thesis. The following year she was awarded the Kay Keeshan Hamod Scholarship from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, as well as a Collegiate Fellowship from the Honors Program. During her senior year, she served as an undergraduate research assistant for Professor Barbara Mooney in the School of Art and Art History. Most recently she was awarded the 2006 Stow Persons Prize for the best undergraduate honors thesis in history. This fall she begins a master’s in architecture at Washington University’s School of Architecture in St. Louis.
Pavlo Hummel in David Rabe’s (1940-) play *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* thinks he knows why he is in the army. He has enlisted during the Vietnam War rather than be drafted, so his uniform states “Regular Army.” Yet he is subjected to the teasing and taunting of the rest of those in boot camp. Pavlo simply cannot understand it. He has done everything to fulfill what he sees as the role of an American male. He thinks he has done so by fulfilling the sacred act of duty to his country, but to embody his ideal, Hummel tells tall tales, romanticizes violence, and takes his cues from idolized, pop-culture “steel” men. Emulating his idols, Hummel searches through basic training for a chance to embody the unattainable ideal that his examples have set forth. In the end, Pavlo falls short, terribly short, getting himself killed due to his desire to fill the shoes of what he sees as the true American male. The experiences of the title character act as a showcase of the failings of static male gender roles and their rigidity during the Vietnam conflict.

*Basic Training*, one of Rabe’s four works commonly referred to as the “Vietnam Plays,” is part of the overall American theatrical response to the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam conflict. When quickly scanning the reply of the domestic art community to war in Vietnam, the casual observer will see only two camps, viewing the war either positively or negatively. But the tendency to confine such a complex engagement into extremely narrow binaries is a mistake and a disservice to the men and women who served in the armed forces during this time. Their voices were often lost amidst the vocal debate over policy and direction on the home front. According to Michael Herr, author of the book *Dispatches*, “We all had roughly the same position on the war: we were in it, and that was a position.” Herr’s words demonstrate Rabe’s principal framing of Vietnam throughout the text of his “Vietnam Plays.” Prior to the appearance of Rabe and similar playwrights, the theatrical response to Vietnam was either concerned with ending it, or merely escaping it for a couple of hours. Many previous efforts to address Vietnam failed to examine the experience of the individual soldier as he moved within the military; instead, early attempts were made at turning each audience against the conflict as a whole, as a matter between nations.

Vietnam reverberated in the American dramatic community in four evolutionary and dramatic shifts that took place during the 1960s, as detailed by Jeffery Fenn. Fenn divides the various segments of counter-culture theatre into four types: the experimental theatre, the radical theatre, the documentary theatre,
and theatre of abstraction. Each is associated with one particular troupe or personality. The experimental theatre, characterized by a breakdown of traditional actor-audience relationships and the belligerent handling of socially and culturally divisive subject matter, was exemplified in Judith Malina and Julian Beck’s “living theatre,” which they launched out of their New York City apartment in 1951. The living theatre distinguished itself by throwing away the conventions regarding an actor’s relationship with the audience and what is considered the “fourth wall,” or the imaginary wall between the performers on stage and the audience beneath.

While experimental theatre toyed with the medium of traditional theatre (an audience observes the action and progression on stage, with minimal to no interaction with the audience), in order to tweak its message, radical theatre came close to throwing out medium for sake of message. Realizing that the typical theatre audience was wealthy enough to afford the ticket and generally conservative, those grouped into the radical theatre, such as the San Francisco Mime Troupe (1959) took their message directly to the streets and therefore straight to their audience, using practices common to “guerilla theatre.” The radical theatre took on many incarnations, including mime troupes, puppet shows, dances, “militant” theatre, and outdoor protest as theatrical expression.

In wanting to bring the rawness of the events concurrently happening in Vietnam to the stage and their audience, a group of performers and writers adapted things such as news reports, magazine articles, and documentary film into their performances, which were based upon actual events. By interweaving “hard news” into their performances, documentary theatre sought to bring a certain degree of credibility to theatre as a protest movement and medium. Such realism was remarkably absent from traditional theatre during the Vietnam conflict. Mainstream American theatre served as an escape for a public inundated with news reports, including pictures and video that constantly reminded them of the war.

Theatres that were chiefly concerned about their economic stability did not wish to touch upon Vietnam out of fear of alienating their source of revenue. Vietnam was not acceptable subject matter. Theatres or performing groups that addressed Vietnam directly prior to the discussion concerning American withdrawal were regarded as fringe groups that viewed theatre not as an escapist medium but instead as a powerful, confrontational catalyst for change in policy. As Robert Asahina points out in Levitating the Pentagon, “Vietnam was not even raised in American theatres until 1971, some six years after the escalation of conflict, three years after the peak of American involvement, and well after public opinion had turned against the war.” It was not until 1971 that commercially viable operations viewed Vietnam overall as well as critical pieces on the subject as acceptable material for the playbill. Asahina refers to the popular, mainstream American theatre, what Fenn refers to as “theatre of abstraction.” On those stages, Vietnam did not exist, as the war and the debate about it raged just outside the auditorium’s doors.

David Rabe is part of the delayed response to Vietnam of the larger theatrical
community or what Asahina terms the “American theatre.” Rabe grew up in the heart of America. An Iowa native, he attended Loras College and pursued his graduate studies at Villanova University following his return from his service as a medic in Vietnam from 1966-1967. When Rabe returned, he spent roughly six months processing the last year before he began to try to put his experiences down in some written form. He did not first seek out theatre as a medium, viewing it as too artificially constructed for expressing what he had experienced: “Theater seemed lightweight, all fluff and metaphor, spangle, posture, and glitter crammed into a form as rigid as any machine geared to reproduce the shape of itself endlessly. Theatrical form seemed artificial beyond what was necessary.” In fact, he found it difficult to record his thoughts regarding the war, with a large number of memories each carrying high priority in his mind.

The process of readapting to civilian life when Vietnam veterans returned home relied upon the ability to forget, to move past their wartime self. The inability of many soldiers returning from Vietnam to accomplish what might be considered a simple task results from the neuroses developed by servicemen from their personal experience in Vietnam: “Many traumatized by twentieth century wars speak of their problem as an inability to forget, as an uncomfortable consciousness of being possessed, ‘haunted’ by a past they cannot put behind them and which continually intrudes into their present lives.” Select returning veterans were immobilized due to their faulty modes of repression, which did not allow them to move forward with their civilian lives. The human ability to not know or accept events and experiences is an element of “historical freedom,” not enjoyed by these servicemen who are trapped within the period of the Vietnam war, restricting their actions and causing them to rely on their instincts. The memory of traumatic events frames and controls the contemporary responses and thoughts of whoever shoulders the episode, informing his daily life. Soldiers who witnessed the destruction of pop culture American manhood firsthand during their service struggled to place themselves in such roles when they began to return from war.

Like his character Pavlo Hummel, who seeks to reproduce the image of macho pop culture figures within himself, when he first returned from Vietnam, Rabe had come to view the medium of theatre as hollow, similar to Hummel’s heroes. Having been selected as a medic during Vietnam, Rabe confronted first hand the trappings of traditional male gender roles within the culture of the Army: “The indispensable masculine qualities of the combat soldier have altered little over the long run of modern history: personal courage, the willingness to sacrifice for comrades, the fear of shame or dishonor.” In his assigned role as an Army medic, due to the “after-battle” nature of the work, Rabe faced difficulty in fulfilling the requirements for courage and sacrifice. Instead it is evident through Pavlo’s fictional experiences, based loosely on Rabe, that Rabe instead developed shame for the secondary nature of his work.

Having served during escalation of the conflict, Rabe returned to a still-
mobilized civilian society that, due to its wartime mobilization, relied on aggressive militaristic definitions of masculinity, which Rabe could not fulfill due to not having experienced combat on the front lines. The aggressive understanding of masculinity at the time explains why Rabe experienced difficulty returning as non-combat personnel: “Wartime masculinities at home and at the front are governed by... danger and loss. The emotions they provoke generally keep combat masculinities in the foreground and other gendered responses, including noncombat military masculinities, in subordinate positions.” Eventually he came to realize his experiences during the war when placed on a stage as an apt way to communicate the shortcomings of the societal roles American men sought to fill.

*Basic Training* expands on Rabe’s personal experience when Hummel, like Rabe, is assigned to be a medic after completing basic training. Pavlo is colored and influenced by Rabe’s firsthand knowledge of the rigidity in the military structure. After a brief stint in the infirmary, Hummel finds it effeminate and demeaning:

CAPTAIN. Don’t you think what you’re doing here is important? You helped out with poor Brisbey, didn’t you?

PAVLO. Yes, Sir.

CAPTAIN. That’s my point Hummel. There are people alive who would be dead if you hadn’t done your job. Those invalids you care for, you feed them when they can’t, you help them urinate, defecate, simple personal things they can’t do for themselves but would die without. Have you asked any one of them if they think what you are doing is important or not, or if you should be ashamed?

Rabe’s own experiences dealing with entrenched male stereotypes as an Army medic manifest themselves in Pavlo’s belief that as a medic aiding the sick, injured, and dying, he is not fulfilling his purpose, his image of what a man should be. His understanding of masculinity is based largely on a steady diet from his mother of “soldiers of fortune, and film re-creations of war heroism, frontiersmen and cowboys, or rebellious youth.” Handfed these stoic representations, Pavlo learned manly conduct vicariously through them. After returning to the States, Rabe fought himself to understand and place his stint in Vietnam in relation to such unrealistic figures, which helped inform his “male sex role.” Despite believing theatre to be too rigid and unrealistic, Rabe’s commercial success *Basic Training* eventually landed on Broadway, the national bastion of finically viable theatre. The audience’s identification with characters like Pavlo Hummel stand
The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel

as a testament not to the validity of Rabe’s young perceptions, but instead to the potential for authentic resonance with an audience sharing an experience that theatre offers.22 These same elements drew Rabe, who first sought to write a novel, back to the medium after struggling to quantify his own experiences.

Contrary to a novel, theatre is able to nonverbally translate the author’s intended message powerfully to an audience. Rabe may not have seen it at the time, but theatre aptly lends itself to communicating the complex experiences of the individual to the group in a more introductory form than perhaps his planned novel. Through endowing one actor with the experiences of Pavlo, each audience came away with a physical and emotional connection to the character, as evidenced by the reviews Rabe received early on, that lauded his persuasiveness, and his ability to, “sense...what people really say and his obvious feel for the dynamics of character confrontation.”23 Rabe’s skill at creating complex yet realistic character dialog and argument helped engage audiences with the performance, while he transported them worlds away to experience Vietnam through a specific set of eyes. The realistic representation of Vietnam onstage captivated audiences, who sat uneasily mesmerized in their seats, “through projecting a bravura and completely convincing picture of army life...The audience is not permitted the comfortable options of a morality play or political tract, and the result is as intensely real an experience of what it is like to go to this war as one could ever hope (or bear) to have.”24 The audience is enveloped within the most realistic encounter with the Vietnam war that they could hope to achieve, Rabe accomplished what many playwrights had sought to do but had fallen short of; eliminate the white noise that surrounded Vietnam and let it speak for itself. In the troubled aftermath of Vietnam, Rabe represented hope for the future, leading one critic to remark, “Vietnam seems to have yielded us up a playwright, if little else to build a dream on.”25 What could be described as the positive legacy of Vietnam formed around those deemed capable of authentically representing and communicating the experiences of America’s soldiers.

Having served in Vietnam, Rabe sought to interpret and explain the soldier’s experience in Vietnam rather than choosing to use his work to bring about a political and military end to the conflict itself. All of this goes along with Rabe’s belief that Vietnam cannot be looked at as a single, solitary event but instead part of a greater human narrative. He does not advocate a particular viewpoint through the character of Pavlo Hummel. Instead he reflects, drawing on his own personal experience, as well as being influenced by those he served with, of how such a single, confusing, and transformative event as war affects and changes an individual. The tale of the fall of Pavlo Hummel forces an audience to deal with more complex issues than simply “for” or “against.” The serviceman is treated as an individual, rather than standing for a particular political ideology. Rabe himself disputes the grouping of any of his plays into such constricting categories as “Antiwar”:

In my estimation, an “antiwar” play is one that expects,
by the very fabric of its executed conception, to have political effect. I anticipated no such consequences from my plays, nor did I conceive them in the hope that they would have such consequences... It seems presumptuous and pointless to call them “antiwar” plays... I believe that to think a play can have immediate, large-scale political effect is to overestimate vastly the power that plays have. In addition, if there is (as I deeply hope there is) more content in these plays than the thin line of political tract.26

One enters dangerous territory when trying to simplify the response in the American dramatic community to such a complex historical event as the Vietnam War into rigid categories of “Antiwar Plays” or “Vietnam Protest Theatre.” While at first glance such categories appear useful and rational in attempts to qualify a large volume of dramatic work, in the end, placing such binaries on something as rich and varied as the multitude of dramatic works coming out of the Vietnam conflict allows one to begin to see how useless such labels really are. While striving for order, Rabe’s work can easily and quickly get lumped together with a hodge-podge of experimental and radical groups including the living theatre or the San Francisco Mime Troupe, which sought through their work an effect on the escalating skirmishes and the increasing involvement of United States troops in Vietnam.

_The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel_ was not performed commercially until 1971 at the Public Theatre as part of the fresh interest in Vietnam on a large scale in traditional American theatres, representing the groundswell that began in 1971 among such theatres, according to Asahina in _Levitating the Pentagon_.27 The late date of the play’s original performance chronologically falls short of the many branches of protest theatre, such as the experimental and radical theatre, or “guerilla theatre,” and others discussed earlier, that date back as far as 1951 (the living theatre). While Rabe’s work often presents Vietnam graphically and in an extremely personal and emotive style, thereby often earning him a place in the broad category of “protest theatre,” the traditional structure of his plays, the audience they brought in, and their overall commercial success quickly remove him from the category.

Rabe does not seek out such a tangible goal about Vietnam in his volume of work, partly because he believes that theatre does not have the power to affect the physical realities of the war on the ground. Instead he has written his plays mainly as a cathartic response to his own experiences serving in the conflict: “I have written them to diagnose, as best I can, certain phenomena that went on in and around me... Family, marriage, youth, and crime are all viewed as phenomena permanently a part of the eternal human pageant. I believe war to be an equally
permanent part of that pageant.”

Gender weaves itself into any of the phenomenon listed above, coloring how people act and compelling characters to fulfill rigid, impractical, and unattainable ideas of manhood. Nowhere is there as clear a distinction between the sexes as when Sergeant Tower demonstrates how to use a bayonet, clearly associating the female gender with failure and shame, and the male gender with aggression and violence.

SGT. TOWER. What is the spirit of the bayonet?

THE MEN. To kill!

SGT. TOWER. You sound like pussies. You sound like slits.

THE MEN. TO KILL!

SGT. TOWER. You sound like pussies.

THE MEN. TO KILL! The bayonet can be considered a phallic object and the act of shoving it in an enemy akin to sex and a denial of the enemy’s masculinity. If the men in basic training cannot control a bayonet, then according to Sergeant Tower, they have assumed the role of a woman. By taking away each soldier’s individual identity and transforming the characters into a character of “THE MEN,” Rabe’s point is even more evident. If Pavlo is a man, he is either with “THE MEN” or he is nothing. This is the distilled version of the idolized manhood that Pavlo enlisted in the Army hoping to find; here it is, laid out bare in the form of dramatic irony. The audience can see the inherent flaws in the black and white choice, but Pavlo must join with the men or abandon his quest for gender realization. In reality, if Pavlo does not join in with “THE MEN” he is no less of a man than if he would become skilled at using a bayonet, but the choice he makes is to either include himself in the demonstration or not. He is presented with no in-between. In this one instant, Pavlo is either a man or he is not.

The *Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* presents the process of Pavlo’s integration into a new dominant culture, whether military or civilian, upon his return to the States, as one such phenomenon. Pavlo’s sour relationship with his mother acts as the catalyst for his enlistment. Because of an argument with her, he voluntarily enlists in the Army during Vietnam, believing that he must prove something to his mother and that the army will confirm for him the fantasy of manhood that Pavlo has been raised on.
PAVLO. And I was wondering also, Sergeant Tower, and wanted to ask you -- when I was leaving home, my mother wanted to come along to the train station, but I lied to her about the time. She would have wanted to hug me right in front of everybody. She would have waved a handkerchief at the train. It would have been awful.

(Sgt. Tower turns; now he is leaving.)

She would have stood there waving. Was I wrong? 30

Pavlo believes that he has done the manly thing by not allowing his mother to say goodbye to him at the train station in front of all the other men, but he finds himself questioning whether or not he has done the right thing in the new culture of the military and seeks reassurance from his direct male authority figure, Sergeant Tower.

He seeks Sergeant Tower out as a father figure because of the absence of his father in his life; he had no fallible male role model from which to learn that even those he looks up to are capable of mistakes. Instead, he was raised by his mother on a steady diet of male television and movie stars, who were always presented as unable to do the wrong thing and instill in Pavlo a rigid code of manhood.

PAVLO. Who... was... my father? Where is he?

MRS. HUMMEL. You know that.

PAVLO. No, where is he now? What did he look like?

...

MRS. HUMMEL. You had many fathers, many men, movie men, filmdom’s great-all of them, those grand old men of yesteryear, they were your father. The Fighting Seventy-sixth, do you remember, oh, I remember, little Jimmy, what a tough little mite he was, and how he leaped upon that grenade, did you see, my God what a glory, what a glorious thing with his little tin hat. 31
The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel

In the previous two excerpts, Rabe includes many facets of the “human pageant.” Striking out on one’s own, gender identity in America, a son’s relationship to his mother, and the role of mass media are all touched upon. Rabe utilizes Vietnam as a vessel to bring under scrutiny the code of conduct for men in American society, the Army and how the existing code handicaps Pavlo’s search for a father figure and his interactions with women. Contrary to using his drama for the sole purpose of making a statement about the Vietnam War, Vietnam is merely the vehicle with many stops within the American psyche and living room along the way.

Although Rabe is grouped among such radical groups as the San Francisco Mime Troupe and those practicing documentary theatre, Rabe’s dramas are relatively safe. In content, all of his plays except for The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel do not take place in Vietnam, but instead are set in the United States. In performance, one buys a ticket for a certain place and time; the audience is passive and not involved in the action on stage. By the time his first play was produced commercially in 1971, he found a large receptive audience that would carry him to Broadway, evidence that the American audience gravitated to his work, especially Basic Training. Men were seeing elements of themselves in Pavlo -- their military or school experience, the mothers sitting next to them, and the expectations placed upon them every day, either directly or subtly.

Ardell, Pavlo’s guardian angel, acts as the audience’s guide to the gender confinement Pavlo ties himself into, one that hinders his range of actions. Ardell begins to point out the shortcomings of the ideal man that Pavlo wants to become, the unattainable goal, which eventually kills him. One of the male cultural mantras embedded in Pavlo’s mind is the necessity of revenge. If anyone messes with Pavlo, he believes it is his masculine responsibility to defend his manhood. He has learned that by escalating the mutual hostility and getting the person back, this is an adequate defense.

ARDELL. Like it’s gonna make a difference in the world, man, what you do; and something made bad’s gonna be all right with this one more you’re gonna kill. Poor ole Ryan gets dinged round about Tay Ninh, so two weeks later in Phu Loi you blow away this goddamn farmer…. Ardell represents Pavlo’s pragmatic voice, the small voice inside for whom an eye for an eye is not an effective code of ethics. Ardell calls out Pavlo on his archaic and faulty assumptions on how a man should behave, showing him that a never ending cycle of his code of manhood would end up getting him and many others killed. Ardell approaches Pavlo’s twisted dogma with a principle he believes someone like Pavlo can understand: self-preservation. Ardell’s words fall on deaf ears; it is Pavlo’s masculine code of conduct that ultimately is his undoing.
Ironically, Pavlo’s pop culture model of manhood results in his death over an argument about a whore. Pavlo is negotiating with a prostitute in Vietnam when a sergeant who outranks him enters the same bar; he is subsequently outranked, which sends him into a fury. They argue about who has rights to the prostitute when Pavlo, who will not take “no” for an answer, attacks the sergeant who, in a twist of fate, seeks revenge.

PAVLO. Shut up? *(His hand is twisting her hair)* I don’t know who you think this bitch is, Sarge, but I’m gonna fuck her whoever she is... You don’t like it, you best come in, pull me off.

*Pavlo kicks him squarely in the groin. He yells, falls.*

PAVLO. Did I do it to him, Ardell? The triple Hummel? Got to be big and bad.

...

*(Sgt. Wall, there in the corner, beginning to move is pulling pin on a grenade.)*

...

*(Pavlo drops to his knees, seizing the grenade... The grenade is in his hands in his lap.)*

The grenade explodes in his groin, symbolically invalidating in an instant what he has believed all his life. He had striven to fulfill the example left by the actors that portrayed his father. He had failed to protect his manhood. Within the rigid cultural constructs of gender that Pavlo adheres to, he was accomplishing this by securing his first chance with a prostitute. To faithfully “protect his manhood,” Pavlo would be forced to choose to reject the simple one-dimensional molds that the iconic men of his childhood were always cast in and embrace his own complexities, rather than fulfilling the static image of his gender. War acts as the perfect method within which to bring out the trappings of harmful, inflexible gender roles. In war, everything becomes more black and white; the individual is stripped of his identity in order to form the successful collective and is full of meaningless clichés such as “turning boys into men.”

Rabe’s message was clear. The saga of Pavlo Hummel was not about Vietnam, but how the society of the United States had suppressed the aptitude and
opportunities of its male gender. Plays and dramas, including *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel*, do not and cannot enact large-scale political change, even with astounding success; however, such plays can cause a reaction in the audience. By seeing himself or herself in Pavlo, Mrs. Hummel, or Sergeant Tower, each person begins to realize the rigidity of their actions and how the culture at large has aided in placing them into a box. Hopefully they break out, having seen played out in front of them the extreme and possibly twisted but believable lineage of their actions. Manhood is not an “either/or” entity; instead, an infinitely definable concept has become trapped by motionless icons of masculinity in America’s widely distributed popular culture.

This essay was written for Professor Douglas Baynton’s Colloquium for History Majors (American) in the fall of 2006. I am in debt to Professor Baynton for allowing students to formulate their own paper topics, in turn forcing us to become deeply personally attached to our work. Art Borreca, head of the Iowa Playwrights Workshop, was also an instrumental compass in the initial hunt for sources.

Endnotes
2 Ibid., 7-109.
3 Lucas Carpenter, “‘It Don’t Mean Nothin’: Vietnam War Fiction and Postmodernism,” *College Literature* 30, no.2 (2003), <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/college_literature/v030/30.2carpenter.html> (26 October 2006).
5 Ibid., 24-5.
6 The term “guerilla theatre” has been used to describe the members of the radical theatre who came to see themselves as outside agitators, developing a method of taking their performances straight to the audience instead of relying on the audiences’ attendance. Born out of the economic realization that theatre space was considerably expensive and tended to place a substantial drain on a group’s monetary resources, as well as the fact that their subject matter would not appeal to the conservative member of society, the traditional audience member. The need to leave traditional spaces behind was also built upon their ideology that rejected the terms of the establishment and regarded the traditional audience member as a supporter of the failed conservative status quo. Afraid of “selling out,” members constantly searched for a more authentic and free process; see Ibid., 50-1.
7 Ibid., 50-64.
8 Ibid., 63.
9 Mainstream American theatre served as an escape for a public inundated with news reports, including pictures and video that constantly reminded them of the war.
10 Ibid., 87.
12 Rabe, *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel and Sticks and Bones*, xii.
13 Ibid., xiii
14 Ibid.
Zane Scott-Tunkin

16 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Rabe, The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel and Sticks and Bones, 90.
26 Rabe, The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel and Sticks and Bones, xxv.
27 Ibid., xii-xix.
28 Ibid., xxv.
29 Ibid., 44.
30 Ibid., 29.
31 Ibid., 74-5.
32 Ibid., xix-xx.
33 Ibid., 99.
34 Ibid., 105-06.

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The Coverage of World War I
by the Radical Black Press, 1917-1919

Mary Hicks

*The Chicago Defender’s* coverage of the entrance of the U.S. into World War I began with a picture of a flag, an African-American soldier standing at attention in full regalia, and a declaration of loyalty to the war effort of the United States.¹ As *The Chicago Defender’s* coverage of the war was ending, coverage of the race riots of 1919 began. Alarmist headlines read “Riot Sweeps Chicago” and “Ghastly Deeds of Race Rioters Told.”² The 1919 race riots raged throughout many large cities during the summer of 1919, of which the one in Chicago was the most explosive of that summer, resulting in hundreds of injuries and deaths.³ Although the *Chicago Defender’s* attitude toward the war can be described as hesitant optimism, the stark contrast between these images of heroic loyalty and violent conflict are an indication of how the *Defender* had hoped the war would affect African-Americans in the United States and how it actually did affect African-Americans. *The Crisis* approached World War I with a similar attitude of optimism. However, the conclusion of coverage of World War I did not contain the same disillusionment exhibited by the *Defender*. Immediately after the riots, the *Defender* began to link the cause of the riots to the war, offering the explanation that troops returning from racially tolerant Europe were now frustrated by the racial discrimination they faced at home.⁴ How could a war which began with two of the leading African-American periodicals enthusiastically advocating participation end with those same periodicals documenting the violence and unrest that ensued as a result? World War I was a paradox not only for African-Americans, but for the rest of the world as well. It is now regarded as the most futile and ambiguous war of the modern era,⁵ and the United States’ delayed entry into the war was a result of this ambiguity. The war had already been raging in Europe for over two years when the United States joined the conflict in 1917. After the U.S. entered the war on the side of the Allies, mobilization further slowed the entrance of U.S. soldiers into the fight. While Wilson had run his re-election campaign using the slogan “He kept us out of war,”⁶ he became increasingly sympathetic to the Allied cause.⁷ Wilson, like many Americans, identified with Great Britain and the democracies of the Western Allies, as opposed to the authoritarian governments of the Central Powers.⁸ Public support for U.S. involvement in the war increased after the sinking of the British ocean liner, the RMS *Lusitania*. Anti-German sentiment was again strengthened by the release of the intercepted “Zimmerman Telegram,”⁹ in which the German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmerman promised Mexico financial aid to reclaim...
Mary Hicks

“the lost territory of New Mexico, Texas and Arizona” if the United States entered the war. In addition to this telegram, German U-boats were continually attacking American merchant ships. American neutrality finally came to an end on April 2, 1917, when Wilson appealed to Congress to make a declaration of war against Germany, claiming “the world must be made safe for democracy.” Soon after Wilson’s address, the Senate and the House overwhelmingly voted in support of going to war.

After the United States entered the war, the question of the place of African-Americans in this newest conflict was still uncertain. The African-American population had fought in all American wars from the American Revolution onward. At the onset of the war, both the African-American community and the rest of the nation grappled with the issue: in what capacity would African-Americans serve in the Armed Forces? The Red Cross? The home front?

Though African-American periodicals *The Chicago Defender* and *The Crisis* took strong positions from the beginning of mobilization, accepting the call to duty on behalf of African-Americans, the issue of World War I was not the most pressing one during the years of 1917 to 1919. Often news of the war took a back seat to coverage of lynching, violence in the south and migration of blacks to the northern United States. The issues of segregation, labor and what later came to be known as the Great Migration received more coverage than the war. According to a survey by historian Lester Jones, only 26.55 percent of *The Chicago Defender*’s editorials were on the subject of World War I; *The Crisis* reported on the war even less. Many of the editorials found in the publication focused on domestic issues, especially those concerning the South. Accordingly, it is important to view the coverage of the war by these two periodicals in the context of their larger goals.

The treatment of World War I by the *Defender* and *The Crisis* offers an important snapshot of the sentiments of African-Americans about their place in America during the years of American involvement in the war (1917-1919). The war was an important political moment for the early black civil rights movement. As African-American radicals were faced with the decision of supporting the war or not, they would come to place their support or opposition in the context of how it would ultimately help the African-American population. The two publications surveyed in this paper, *The Chicago Defender* and *The Crisis*, had differing styles, but both pursued an agenda of advancement of civil rights for African-Americans. Their coverage of World War I revealed the strategies they used to pursue their goal of gaining civil rights. The evidence of these strategies found in the war coverage of these publications helps us to understand the strategies of the wider civil rights movement of the time.

The *Defender* and *The Crisis* were both northern-based publications with similar civil rights goals; however, they had very different beginnings. The turn of the century’s climate of “race” journalism was tepid. The scene was dominated by periodicals such as the New York *Age*, the *Colored American* and the *Conservator*. 

58

*Iowa Historical Review*
Radical Black Press

These publications were all either controlled by or aligned with accommodationist black activist Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee organization. Washington’s attempts to build influence in the print media began with his purchase of shares in the Colored Co-operative Publishing Company in 1901. He then went on to secretly purchase controlling shares in the previously radical Colored American Magazine in 1904; the publication’s politics then changed radically to reflect Washington’s beliefs. Despite Washington’s considerable influence, there was also room for other more radical periodicals.

During this time, W.E.B. Du Bois made his first foray into publishing with the periodical Moon Illustrated Weekly. The weekly only lasted from December 1905 to the summer of 1906, but it provided Du Bois with a journalistic forum for his ideas influenced by his participation in the Niagara movement. The weekly was not ultimately successful in attracting many subscribers, so his message remained relatively unheard. In January 1907, Du Bois went on to found Horizon, another radical publication with a political emphasis. Again the provocative political content of Du Bois’ magazine alienated many, especially those in the more conservative accommodationist black press. The magazine served as a tool to help Du Bois gain surer footing as a journalist, with a more complete sense of how to incorporate politics, art and culture into a single publication. No doubt, Du Bois was eager for his new enterprise to survive. He began an aggressive effort to raise money for the small, ambitious magazine, declaring in May 1910 (the periodical’s last issue) that the numbers of subscribers needed to be increased by 500 and then by 1,000 in consecutive months. Du Bois failed to reach this goal, and the magazine ended its run.

Instead of private investors, Du Bois now turned to the NAACP to fund his latest magazine. The Crisis, founded in 1910, was declared the official publication for the NAACP. Many scholars still declare it as such, but Du Bois was fiercely protective of the magazine’s independence. As Du Bois later explained, “A literary and news journal must be free and uncontrolled; in no other way can it be virile, creative, and individual.” Du Bois also claimed that the circulation of The Crisis was greater than the membership of the NAACP at the time. And The Crisis criticized the NAACP itself, taking positions which were unpopular among some of its members. Unlike the Moon Illustrated Weekly and Horizon, The Crisis became successful, building its circulation from 41,000 to 74,000 during the war years of 1917 and 1918. The paper reached its peak in 1919 with a circulation of over 100,000, a higher circulation than mainstream magazines such as The Nation.

In The Crisis, Du Bois continued writing ambitious editorials on the treatment of blacks in the U.S., as well as publishing politicized art and literature. The Chicago Defender began in a very different way, with a very different founder. Robert S. Abbott was born in Savannah, Georgia and was raised by his mother Flora and his stepfather, German immigrant John Sengstacke. Sengstacke was a staunch Christian and instilled in Abbott a respect for education and charity.
After attending Claflin University in Orangeburg, South Carolina, he went to the Hampton Institute to learn printing techniques. After studying law and being rejected from a black law firm in Chicago for being “a little too dark,” Abbott started his own newspaper. Unlike intellectual and activist W.E.B. Du Bois, Abbott saw his first foray into publishing as a commercial effort, which was the norm rather than the exception in the black publishing industry. The Chicago Defender began in 1905 as a four-page gossip and special interest paper. The publication did fairly well the following four years; in 1909, Abbott stumbled onto what would be his journalistic specialty: muckraking. He wrote a piece which exposed the dealings of the red-light district in Chicago’s black South side. This new style propelled the middling paper to greater success. The growing readership of The Chicago Defender forced Abbott to hire a larger staff; previously, he had done all the work himself. When J. Hockley Smiley joined Abbott as managing editor, the paper, which had previously only focused on scandal and gossip, now incorporated themes of racial advancement into its stories.

Abbott’s platform for The Chicago Defender was as follows:
1. Obliteration of American race prejudice.
2. Racially unrestricted membership in all trade unions.
3. Equal employment opportunities in all jobs public and private.
4. True representation in all school segregation.
5. Establishment of open occupancy in all American housing.
6. Federal intervention to protect civil rights in all instances where civil rights compliance at the state level breaks down.

Abbott claimed his politically ambitious platform was drafted in 1905; however, it was not until Smiley joined Abbott that the paper grew both ideologically and aesthetically.

The Chicago Defender’s now famed migration campaign also began during this time period. The campaign, which began in 1917, encouraged blacks to move north in order to receive better jobs and escape southern violence. To facilitate this campaign and its goal of black migration north, the circulation of The Chicago Defender was not only increased in size but in scope. Again working with Smiley, Abbott developed methods of distributing his paper across the country, especially into the South. By 1919, the Defender was being received in 1,542 towns across the South, including small towns such as Bibsland, Louisiana, and Tunica, Mississippi. During World War I years of 1917-1919, the circulation reached 230,000 per week, making The Chicago Defender the most widely read black newspaper in the U.S.
Following the death of Smiley in 1915, Abbott exercised tight control over the publication, carefully monitoring its message. The Defender never gave up its muckraking roots; the periodical commonly featured sensationalized headlines such as “100 Negroes Murdered Weekly in United States by White Americans” and stories of violence, prostitution and scandal.

The Defender, like Du Bois’ periodical The Crisis, also had its detractors. Marcus Garvey saw Abbott as a “race defamer…who publishes in his newspaper week after week the grossest scandals against the race,” Du Bois similarly dismissed Abbott’s journalism as sensationalist garbage. And though the Defender’s headlines focused on scandals such as murder and vice, the contents of the paper were wide-ranging from theatre and society to politically charged editorials and pieces covering national politics. At the same time, the Defender adopted many of the Hearst empire’s yellow journalism techniques, such as double-ruled headlines and concentration on personalities. However, it also featured radical and thoughtful journalism during its coverage of World War I from 1917-1919.

These two periodicals, while very divergent in tone and reputation, share certain traditional characteristics of black journalism. Both sought not only to supplement mainstream “white” periodicals, but also to evoke feelings of “race pride” in its readers. These publications flourished during the period of “uplift” for the black activist community. Due to their commitment to racial “uplift,” the response to World War I was a complicated one. While Abbott and Du Bois’ perceptions of the war did not always intersect, the two men overlapped on many important issues. Both supported the war, as well as black participation in it; both understood (in different ways) the implications for black progress if their support of the war aided U.S. victory; and both displayed a growing sense of black nationalism as exemplified by the formation of a pan-African identity.

Currently there are few satisfactory explorations of the response of the radical black press to World War I. Historians often only take note of the protests over segregation of troops, or deferment of many activists’ civil rights goals during the war, thus failing to portray the complexity of the black press’ beliefs. These periodicals did not see World War I as an obstacle to black progress. Rather, they saw it as an opportunity to achieve their goals. The Crisis and the Defender used both patriotism and protest during the war to claim their status as Americans, believing that African-Americans not only deserved all the rights of American citizens, but that they should fight for them as well.

“My Race, My Country, My Flag”: Mobilization and Support for the War

The coverage of World War I began in both the Defender and The Crisis with an immediate endorsement. A February 10, 1917, letter to President Wilson in the Defender read: “[We] send you this expression of loyalty, the deepest sympathy and the earnest and constant prayers of the churches and lyceums of the city of
Mary Hicks

Chicago. Similarly, the announcement of war in *The Crisis* was also met with total support: “War! It is an awful thing! It is Hell...But German domination is worse...We fight shoulder to shoulder with the world to gain a world where war shall be no more.”

Not all black periodicals supported the war. In the radical socialist publication *The Messenger*, one story announced, “We would rather make Georgia safe for the Negro” than make the world safe for democracy. Black endorsement and participation in the war was not guaranteed. The question then becomes: Why did two radical, activist publications such as *The Chicago Defender* and *The Crisis* immediately and enthusiastically advocate black participation in the war? An examination of how these periodicals characterized mobilization, the home front and President Wilson provide an indication of the extent of their support of the war. A thorough investigation of the interests of black radicals in the war will also shed light on the issue. In addition, the readership of these two periodicals will be taken into account.

The mobilization of black troops during World War I was encouraged by the *Defender*. In addition to featuring advertisements and announcements calling black men to enlist in the army, the initial coverage of the war also featured the saga of Illinois’s all-black Eighth Regiment. The regiment’s progress was tracked from training, to embarkation, to arrival in Europe. Every step of the way, the *Defender* used its characteristic animated style to paint the Eighth in a heroic and positive light. The only small exception is a report that the regiment may have been headed for training camps in the “Jim Crow” South. The *Defender*’s demonization of the South during its migration campaign seeped into this story, painting the regiment’s placement in the South as a tremendous blow. Ultimately the Eighth was not sent south, to the relief of the *Defender*, and this story was only a small blemish in the paper’s patriotic depiction of the activities of the Eighth regiment.

The coverage of the home front was similar to the positive characterization of military mobilization. The Liberty Loan campaign was given the same significance as the mobilization of troops. One headline read, “Get Ready for the 4th Liberty Loan. The Boys ‘Over There’ Are Giving Their Lives; What Are You Doing?” In a *Defender* article advocating enlistment by members of the “race,” buying Liberty Bonds was recommended as not only as a good investment, but also as a duty to the nation and more importantly to the “race” men abroad. In addition to Liberty Bonds, the work of mobilization on the home front, such as production, healthcare and rationing were also highlighted. The story of one young woman’s effort to found a “Mother’s Comfort Club” was celebrated as a patriotic contribution that women could make to the war effort. Even the efforts of children were applauded; one photograph showed an interracial group of students tending a “war garden.” The *Defender* touted this activity as “real democracy,” not only for its benefit to the war, but also because it featured blacks and whites working side by side.

This enthusiasm translated even to the *Defender*’s coverage of President
Wilson. In rare cases, glimpses of disapproval for Wilson’s policies were apparent, but for the most part the Defender was extremely supportive of President Wilson himself. The paper commanded total loyalty to Wilson and his policies during the war. There was no questioning of any of his declarations. The questioning of any president during wartime was deemed unpatriotic by the publication, which emphatically declared unwavering support for Wilson during the conflict.\textsuperscript{51} The support of Wilson is even more striking when compared to the pre-war reporting on Wilson. In one editorial the Defender criticized Wilson, proclaiming, “We have heard so much of ‘strict accountability’ and have seen so little put in actual practice, that we are losing faith in our chief executive.”\textsuperscript{52} As a figure who adopted a “separate but equal” policy for employees of the federal government, Wilson did not have much support in the African-American community, due to his segregationist policies.\textsuperscript{53} Despite the protests of the NAACP, Wilson considered segregation to be beneficial to both blacks and whites. While Wilson did appoint blacks to government posts during his presidency, the percentage of African-Americans working in the federal government fell from six percent to five percent while he was in office.\textsuperscript{54} However, the Defender neither referred to Wilson’s segregationist policies, nor expressed open criticism of the president during wartime.

Support of Wilson was constant even when he made a decision which opposed the Defender’s position on racially motivated violence. On August 23, 1917, a dispute between a few men turned into a full-scale riot in Houston. The conflict began when white guards on a military training base attacked two black members of the 24\textsuperscript{th} Infantry. After the skirmish, one of the victims was falsely reported as dead, which spurred a violent response from other black troops. Soon after, the white guards – who consisted mostly of armed police and citizens hired to patrol the base – were firing against the enflamed crowd of black infantrymen. The conflict continued to escalate, resulting in the deaths of seventeen people.\textsuperscript{55} In the trials that followed, only the black soldiers were charged. Forty-one men were sent to prison, and after President Wilson reviewed their cases, eighteen were hanged.\textsuperscript{56}

The first reports of this story by The Chicago Defender were highly sympathetic to the black soldiers, proclaiming that the violence was a result of the “inhumane treatment of two members of the Twenty-fourth by the Houston police,”\textsuperscript{57} and that the soldiers were therefore justified in their actions. The early coverage of the incident was slightly inflammatory against whites in its defense of the soldiers, arguing that the riot was the result of racist “rednecks” whose use of firearms was overzealous and unwarranted.\textsuperscript{58} The violent outburst of the soldiers was also linked to the history of oppression they had been subjected to due to their race.\textsuperscript{59} The paper’s coverage of the incident and ensuing trial also included a transcript of the appeal of a committee of advocates for the black troops to President Wilson. This committee pleaded for the convicted soldiers to be spared from the death penalty. Initially Wilson suspended the death penalty for the five soldiers, but then allowed their execution.\textsuperscript{60} The Defender did not report this decision with the
same outrage on behalf of the black soldiers as it did in initial coverage. There was no criticism of Wilson’s approval of the death sentence, though the paper opposed even charging the soldiers when the story ran at the outset. This contradiction in reporting further highlights the loyalty of the Defender to President Wilson.

Another indication of the Defender’s support of World War I was its coverage of Germany. Germany was depicted as completely depraved and an eminent threat to the U.S. without explanation of its offense. One editorial claimed:

The reasons why this country voluntarily entered the conflict have been set forth so many times that only the densely ignorant, or those with pro-German tendencies, would ever raise the issue in a nutshell, the Kaiser and company are attempting to force upon the rest of the world Prussianism, the very antithesis of liberty. What American with an ounce of red blood in his veins will stand for the slightest curtailment of his God-given rights.61

The colorful language and black and white description of a complex political situation was characteristic of the Defender’s style. In another piece, the Defender labeled Germans as “child murders [sic].”62 The paper also questioned if the German public knew what it was fighting for, claiming that ninety-five percent of the population was ignorant of its government’s goals.63 These exaggerated claims reflect the paper’s total acceptance of the government’s rationale and alliances in World War I.

The threat of being labeled as pro-German in the quotation above was particularly significant for the Defender. During the war, the government was highly suspicious of its political affiliations, with the Justice Department labeling the paper as possible German propaganda.64 The government had expected black resistance to the war effort from the beginning. Government organizations such as the Post Office Department and the Bureau of Investigation of the Justice Department investigated “negro” journals for possible acts of treason, which were defined as any newspaper or other publication “containing any matter advocating or urging treason, insurrection or forcible resistance to any law to the United States.”65 The Bureau of Investigation, paranoid about black subversion, used the vague Espionage Act of 1917 to closely monitor the Defender, falsely believing that the periodical would not support the war.66 The Chicago Defender, aware of this surveillance, was exposed not only to threats but also persuasion through conferences held for prominent black editors. The government made a concerted effort not only to threaten the radical black press into support for the war, but to aggressively court them as well.67 The necessity of these methods must be questioned, as The Defender and The Crisis both exhibited truly patriotic sentiments.

A prime example of this patriotism is found in Du Bois’ well-known
“Close Ranks” editorial. The outspoken and radical black activist advocated that his race “close ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens.” This declaration is surprising for Du Bois, whose previous radical positions had led the Bureau of Investigation to fear Du Bois’ opposition to the war. Du Bois’ editorial also argued that blacks should “forget our special grievances” while the war was being fought. At the time of the publication of the influential “Close Ranks” editorial, the Defender speculated that Du Bois’ commission as a captain in the army was responsible for his loyalty during the war. Du Bois’ declaration has led many historians to claim that he advocated that blacks wait to pursue their civil rights until the war was over. Mark Ellis makes a more convincing case in his argument that Du Bois saw the war as a battle between colonial powers, and among those powers he saw the Allies to be less of a threat to the “darker peoples” who were colonized. Support of the Allies in this circumstance would ultimately help blacks’ interests, not ignore them.

The alignment of the U.S. with the Allies was acceptable to Du Bois because he preferred their colonial rule to that of the Triple Entente. The Defender’s endorsement of cooperation during the war, however, was due to different causes. The Defender did not have a leading intellectual at its head. Instead it was the vision of the educated, but not cerebral, Robert S. Abbott. Instead of focusing on the colonial nature of the war or its global political implications and origins, the Defender focused on the stake all Americans had in the outcome of the war, arguing “this war is as pregnant with meaning to our race as it is to any other group of American citizens.” Accordingly, the Defender emphasized the Americanness of blacks. The black population, the Defender argued, had more history, more investment and more to lose than many newly immigrated white Americans. In addition, blacks were surprisingly characterized as especially responsible for the outcome of the war and the victory of the Allies because they themselves had been subject to an abusive rule like Germany’s. However, this explicit linking of Germany’s colonial oppression to racial oppression in the U.S. partially contradicts the Defender’s contention that blacks were full American citizens.

The difference in perceived motivations for black participation in the war was due to the difference not only in the leadership of these two publications, but also in readership. The Chicago Defender was an enterprise designed to be profitable for its owner, Robert S. Abbott. This does not mean that money was its sole purpose, but it was the most important. The style of the Defender indicated this; it was flashy, salacious and lowbrow. The paper featured a lot of pictures and large graphics. The Defender’s stylistic antithesis was The Crisis. The magazine had few pictures, and what photographs it did feature were formal and posed. The headings were small and sensible, stories and articles were serious, and there was a total absence of sensationalism. Du Bois’s primary interest in publishing was “research into the Negro problem” while maintaining reader interest.

The readership for The Crisis was widely believed to be middle-class and
black. As Du Bois himself said, he wanted “a high class journal to circulate among the Intelligent Negroes.”\textsuperscript{79} The complex political philosophies of Du Bois would only be accessible to a sophisticated reader (for example, in order to understand the astute assessment of international politics in the “Close Ranks” editorial). The preference for an educated readership was also supported by the advertisements featured in the magazine, many of which were for colleges and universities. Du Bois has often been criticized as an elitist, limiting his message only to other middle-class or “bourgeois” blacks.\textsuperscript{80} However, Du Bois was also an advocate of the “uplift” of all blacks, and this “uplift” began in raising the consciousness of a large number of blacks to form a powerful union to produce change. Though the readership of The Crisis was always assumed and intended to be educated and middle-class, one reader response in a January 1917 issue of the journal read, “I am a poor, working man and a constant reader of THE CRISIS.” Though there is no way to discover if this reader is a rarity or an accurate representative of The Crisis’ readership, it is at least one exception to this perception of The Crisis.

The Chicago Defender has an opposite reputation to The Crisis among historians.\textsuperscript{81} It is painted as a paper of the people. The paper is seen as a champion of the working class, roundly escaping the elitist tenor of The Crisis. Placing the readership of The Crisis and the Defender as strictly opposite to one another is oversimplifying both papers, but the characterization of the Defender as the more accessible periodical does have some validity. The Defender’s campaign for inclusion of blacks in labor unions\textsuperscript{82} indicates the working class made up at least a significant section of the newspaper’s readership. The Defender’s distribution also included an informal component; copies were shared among members of the community, which were read aloud in public places for those who were illiterate. It is also probable that the paper was passed around to readers who could not afford it. The informal distribution highlighted above also allowed the influence of the publication to reach much further than its buying readership.\textsuperscript{83}

The Chicago Defender’s more informal distribution and wide popularity among many members of the black community helps explain the publication’s sometimes contradictory rationale for black participation in the war. The Defender did its best to articulate its position on the war in ways that would honor its concept of black identity, but it could not escape the pressure of the nation’s popular patriotism. Unlike The Crisis, it did not form a coherent raison d’être for black participation in World War I. Instead, it provided a palatable appeal to blacks which would serve both the divergent ideas of the black community and the nation at large. These publications had to carefully weigh where “[their] best interest [lay].”\textsuperscript{84} The Chicago Defender and The Crisis believed that patriotism and participation in the war would not delay black progress. Rather, their actions would ultimately result in black integration into American society.

“The War Over Here”: The Chicago Defender’s Position on Segregation in
Radical Black Press

the War Effort

A poem appearing on the editorial page of The Chicago Defender in June 1918, written by a reader, featured the harshest criticism of the war in the newspaper’s entire coverage of World War I. The poem argued that although the war was fought to “make the world safe for democracy,” the United States had yet to make all of its citizens part of its democracy. The poem also touched on a deeper issue which questioned the fundamental goodness of a people who treated fellow citizens as white Americans treated blacks. It effectively pointed out what most of the press had been avoiding: how the U.S. was able to fight for democracy abroad while the nation still did not practice universal democracy at home. The Defender struggled with this contradiction during its coverage of the war. Because of its strong advocacy of the increase of rights for black Americans, it was required to acknowledge the shortcomings of the United States. For the most part, the condemnation of racial inequality was aimed at the South, while the North was painted as racially inclusive. The Defender carefully navigated this contradiction by depicting the South as the primary repressor of rights, specifically in the form of segregation, while characterizing the North and the federal government as just. As long as federal policy never embraced segregation, the paper accepted the ideological inconsistency of the United States during World War I.

As mobilization for the war began, one of the Defender’s first stories exposed racial discrimination in the U.S. Navy, writing “the United States government discriminated against the members of the Race in joining the navy.” The story goes onto say, “No law against enlistment of colored men in navy. Their enlistment is restricted by department practice to mess attendants.” This story strongly opposed the institutionalization of racism in the U.S. military. This first protest of segregation in World War I identified the source of discrimination as “department practice” rather than U.S. “law.” In short, the former was a result of racist individuals and the latter of the nation and its authority. It was acceptable, or rather, expected for individuals in the United States to be racist, but it was more dangerous for blacks if the federal government of the United States was racist.

Another protest of racial discrimination in the U.S. military was found in the Defender’s March 31, 1917 issue. It featured a political cartoon with an illustration of a black man staring at a billboard which read, “The Navy Will Not Enlist Colored Men”; above this picture was the caption, “If anything happens, don’t blame us.” The cartoon implied that the discrimination against “race” troops relieved black citizens of whatever duty they had to fight in the war. This ultimatum made service during the war contingent on the treatment of blacks in the military. An article above the cartoon compared the discrimination of blacks in the navy to the discrimination against blacks fighting for the Union during the Civil War (eventually the Union was forced to use black troops in its armies). The ban was characterized as counterintuitive because blacks had the most to benefit from a
Union victory in the Civil War. This characterization of the Civil War is similar to the coverage of World War I, in which the Defender portrayed blacks as having the most to gain from a victory for the Allies (or at least as much as all other Americans).

After the Defender’s protests against a segregated navy abated, the opposition towards the assignment of “race” troops to southern training camps began. There is little ambiguity in the Defender’s position against this practice. Unlike the stance against the U.S. Navy, the position against placement of black troops in the South had little potential for controversy. Since the beginning of the Defender’s campaign for black migration north, the periodical had painted the South as fundamentally bad for blacks. There was little risk in declaring that stationing in the racist South would be detrimental to black troops. The result of stationing troops in the South would be the de facto segregation of troops under federal command due to southern law. This was presented not as a federal problem, but a regional one which would ultimately morph into a federal one if discrimination took place under the watch of the federal government. While this campaign lacked the resolve of the Defender’s attack on the policies of the U.S. Navy, it played an important role in the paper’s advocacy for blacks during the war.

The next battle to be fought over discrimination in the military concerned the segregation of training camps. The importance of the issue of segregated training camps to the Defender is revealed in its veiled criticism of President Wilson. The September 15, 1917, edition featured a lengthy front page address to the president urging him to have integrated training camps in light of the fact that the armed forces were planning to use the exemption process to separate white and black soldiers and form racially segregated regiments. The Defender labeled this practice as “unjust, unconstitutional and un-American.” It countered everything the war was supposedly about. The address went on to state that “the functions of our national government should be exercised in its dealings with all citizens without distinction based on race, religion or any other condition not listed by the constitution.” Again the responsibility of the federal government to uphold equal protection was stressed. This time the Defender alluded to the authority of the Constitution in order to legitimize its fight for integration. The conduct of the federal government during World War I was an important indication of how it would deal with future demands for rights by blacks. It was a critical moment for the black population – a litmus test of how the country would move forward and whether or not the war would aid blacks in their struggle for equality.

African-Americans also initially experienced racial discrimination in the Red Cross. The agency refused to hire black nurses. After a Defender campaign against this practice lasting months, the paper announced that due to its campaign, as well as the protests of other organizations, the Red Cross had begun to accept black nurses in 1918. This decision is presented as a triumph for the “race” as well as a triumph of the efforts of The Chicago Defender. The Defender used the decision to
include black women in the Red Cross as an example of empowerment of the black race resulting from its participation in the war. These campaigns for integration were rare, however. There were many more stories about the refusals of the Army to segregate than there were stories bringing to light military segregation. In the article “Promoter of ‘Jim Crow’ Camp Meet with Failure,” the power of the black community was implied to have forced integration. By refusing to be trained in a segregated camp, the “race” soldiers entered service on their own terms. Another article recalled the disciplining of military captain E. Rowan, for segregating troops “in the interest of the pride and morale of his own men.” Rowan was later dismissed for “refusing to obey an order issued by the brigadier commander.” Rowan’s fate was used as a proud example of the federal government supporting integration of black troops in the military.

There was a discrepancy between The Chicago Defender’s coverage of the integrated nature of the military and reality. While the Defender was lauding the fact that black soldiers did not have to train in segregated camps, the truth remained that 150,000 black soldiers were segregated while overseas. The Defender’s failure to acknowledge the status of Illinois’s all-black Eighth Regiment and Buffalo’s famous 367th Infantry as all-black meant that the campaign to desegregate the U.S. military was ultimately a failure.

The “Negro” Soldier: Uplift and Integration

The importance placed on the bravery of black troops in The Chicago Defender illustrates how black radicals believed World War I could be used as a springboard for progress. Coverage of the war aimed to uplift the image of blacks in the eyes of their own community, as well as in the eyes of whites. Both The Crisis and the Defender viewed the war as a prime opportunity for black soldiers to prove themselves as equals to whites, both on the battlefield and off. Equality on one was seen to be followed by equality on the other. By proving themselves to be equal in their performance of civic duties, blacks could also demonstrate that they were worthy of equal citizenship to whites. While many scholars focus on how black participation in the war obstructed black activists’ efforts to desegregate, an examination of The Chicago Defender and The Crisis indicates that black participation in the war was not an obstacle to black activists’ goals of integration. Instead, it was perceived as a method to achieve this integration.

Black activists were not alone in understanding the implications of having blacks trained in combat. Those opposed to racial equality also took note of the power military training would give blacks. One Mississippi senator, James K. Vardaman, opposed the drafting of black troops because it would leave a problem “more difficult of solution than the emancipation of negro slaves.” The Defender told its readers that Vardaman’s position should “strengthen your convictions and arouse efforts.” Stories similar to the one above exhibited two reactions to
Mary Hicks

segregationist objections to black military service. First, Defender stories argued that blacks should fight in the war just to spite segregationists like Vardaman. But more importantly, Defender stories about segregationist objections to black service echoed the sentiments of Vardaman, arguing that the war would make the “Negro” a “new man.” An April 1917 editorial read “The southern press fears universal military training because it will, in their judgment, place the black man on an equal footing with the white man, and because a man with a gun is apt to receive more respect and fair treatment than a man without one.” These stories reinforced the belief that World War I could be a turning point for the self-respect of blacks and that the honor of serving in the war could greatly change how blacks perceive themselves.

The primary emphasis in the Defender’s coverage of “race” soldiers was on their heroism. Each article or caption featuring a black soldier was embellished with positive details that made the subject even more admirable. One caption read, “the finest body of ‘fighting men’ in the world.” Another passage described the all-black 367th Infantry: “the uniforms looked as if they had just come home from the tailors in time. You looked at the soldiers and thought nothing could be straighter or shiner or dashinger than them.” The romanticization of the troops illustrated in this passage was common in many articles. The images of black soldiers were prominent and highly symbolic. Black men were transformed into bravery and honor personified. The heroic deeds of “race” soldiers were lauded, and the paper kept a comprehensive record of medals and accolades received by black soldiers.

The Chicago Defender painted the deeds of black soldiers during World War I not only as heroic, but also as progressive. An April 13, 1918, story reported the entrance of 22 black soldiers into aviation school. The article called the event a “great epoch in the history of our people,” a demonstration of how the war was “working.” These comments illustrated how the paper viewed the progress of blacks. The war was “working” because it was the engine that allowed this progress. The notion of progress is an important component in The Chicago Defender’s efforts of uplift. The black population not only had brave role models to emulate but also a better future ahead of it.

The “Negro” soldier’s success of the battlefield was not only utilized by the Defender as a form of uplift for the black community, it also was used to demonstrate their equality with whites. A good “race” soldier not only matched the abilities of his white counterparts, he surpassed them. In one story the Defender highlighted the claim that the all-black regiment 367th Infantry was the best in its division. Another report about rates of military acceptance revealed that “out of every 100 Colored citizens...36 were certified for service...whereas, out of every 100 whites called, 25 were certified.” By showing black soldiers exceeding the performance of white soldiers, the Defender asserted that black soldiers were more than equal to whites on the battlefield. The praise of black soldiers by white elites was also often featured. A quotation from General Prushing said, “he could
not commend too highly the spirit shown among Colored combat troops." The emphasis on both the commendable performance of blacks on the battlefield and the growing acceptance and gratitude of whites were indications that blacks were gaining equality on the battlefield and that they should be able to gain equal status as their white counterparts.

The *Defender* contended that black soldiers had proven themselves to be deserving of equal status to whites and denounced any denial of that status. A February 1918 story criticized the military for burying a black soldier without military honors. When a young black private in the Ninth Ohio battalion was buried by private citizens without the recognition of his fellow white and black officers, it was seen as a denial of his status as a soldier. When official demonstrations of status were withheld from black soldiers, it threatened the recently obtained status of blacks. The publication also criticized the U.S. government’s previous treatment of black soldiers, arguing that “In the past the man of color had been denied equal chance as a soldier except when the opportunity was presented to hold himself up for target.” The treatment of black soldiers as expendable was another example of an attack on the status of a soldier. The position of a soldier is a respected one; to use soldiers simply as cannon fodder demeaned the position.

The assertion of the equality of black troops in World War I was central to the *Defender*’s strategy of achieving integration. The *Defender*’s advocacy for integrated status of soldiers fighting in war was ultimately in service of the ultimate goal of black radicals: integration at home. This is one of the reasons why the paper promoted military integration so aggressively. The *Defender* argued that blacks should integrate because they are equal to whites. Fighting in the war itself was also one form of integration. By participating in civic activity, black soldiers had achieved the status of full citizens. By participating in that activity on a level equal with whites, blacks were fully exercising their American citizenship; they were fully integrated into the “white” civic system.

*The Crisis* shared some of *The Chicago Defender*’s strategies for uplift and integration. However, it did not share the bombastic characterizations of heroic soldiers or triumphant battles. Instead, its coverage of the “negro soldier” was far more sober, focusing on troop movements, appointments and public events. Du Bois’ magazine shared the *Defender*’s hopes for the implications of victory in the war: “Out of this war will rise, too, an American Negro, with the right to vote and the right to work and the right to live without insult.” Again, military participation was equated with exercising other civic rights. The center of Du Bois’ ideology was integration; participation in the war was a means to achieve integration. The participation of black soldiers encouraged equality, a rise in status and the attainment of full citizenship. These achievements were all precursors to the full integration of blacks into American society.

While the fight by black radicals for equal status is commendable, there is also a negative angle to this endeavor for integration. In several of the advertisements
found in *The Chicago Defender* there was a connection between military service and whitening. In one advertisement, a pressing comb claimed to declare war on “bad hair.” The link between social mobility and whitening is again emphasized in an advertisement for Kashmir “whitener and cleanser,” which claimed to cure “ugly skin and bad hair.” The ad featured a black Red Cross nurse and asked “will prejudice give her chance to prove her worth?” Connecting the changing status of African-Americans with their acceptance of European standards of beauty reveals how much blacks were willing to change in order to be accepted into society.

The high-stakes struggle for integration by black radicals ultimately ended in failure. The *Chicago Defender*’s coverage of the return of the troops from overseas was markedly optimistic. Large parades were thrown in honor of returning troops, and the *Defender* chronicled the exuberance of well wishers and family members. The political outlook for blacks was optimistic as well. A political cartoon featuring Uncle Sam fitting a new jacket labeled “Civil Rights” on a “race” man is captioned as “A Perfect Fit.” The time for the advancement of blacks had perhaps finally come. However, there was an air of hesitation. Blacks were aware of the rigidity of racial castes in the United States, especially in the South. Soon stories appeared about the segregation of black and white troops on trains returning home. These trains were called “Kaiser on Wheels”; an obvious parallel between the German oppression of colonies and American oppression of blacks. Black Americans had done everything in their power to prove themselves; they had fought valiantly against the Central Powers, supported the war at home, and contributed to the war effort on the home front. However, their dream of equality was wavering in the balance.

The *Defender* noted that returning troops had come home with experiences of relative equality in European countries like France. The *Defender* explained how these men faced disillusionment on returning home: “Those who have been to France have acquired new thoughts, new ideas, new hopes and aspirations. They can never return to nor fully accept conditions to which they had become before they went abroad.” Another article explained that “American Negroes came to France in thousands and mixed in our public and national life like any one else, entering cafes, where their business was solicited, and eating at whatever restaurants they pleased.” Europe did not abide by the same rules of racial segregation found in the United States. During the war, the differing treatment of blacks in the U.S. and abroad was consistently noticed. One caption of a photograph of black troops in France claimed, “France knows no color.” These editorial remarks were made even though on April 26, 1919, the *Defender* ran a story on the poor treatment of African colonial soldiers in Britain. The *Defender* told of the “seething revolution…the day is not distant when the people will awaken to the enormity of the injustices committed on them by the alleged superior races.” The stories about positive experiences in Europe heavily outweighed the negative ones. There was a particular sense of disbelief in some of the stories that there were places where
racial discrimination was absent. The experiences of black American troops abroad transformed their frame of reference. It provided a concrete model for blacks of how things could be for them in the United States.

This newfound disillusionment upon returning home came to a head during the violent summer of 1919, when race riots affected 20 major American cities, the worst of which occurred in Chicago. The riot began when black bathers entered the 29th Street beach, which had been unofficially designated whites only. Soon white bathers began throwing rocks and shouting insults, chasing the black bathers away. A larger group of blacks returned, overpowering the white crowds. This incident stirred unrest on both sides, and the violence spread to another beach where a black teenaged boy was struck by a brick and killed by a white man. Retaliation followed, and violence continued to sweep the city as gangs of whites (most notably Irish) roamed the city intimidating and attacking blacks.

Even at the time of the riot, speculation of its cause turned to the war and its demobilization. One theory advanced by the Defender was that the rapid rise in unemployment due to demobilization and the resulting competition between whites and newly returned blacks for jobs had caused rising racial tensions. Another theory proposed by the French assumed that after living in their “color free” society, returning blacks wanted more respect than they were getting in their home country. Historians have later explored the economic, political and complex ethnic roots of the race riot. Despite its dense and complicated causes, the 1919 race riot in Chicago provides a poignant illustration of how little African-American loyalty during the war advanced the cause of integration and racial equality in the United States.

A New Internationalism

Though the experiences of black troops abroad did not ultimately encourage integration as the Defender and Crisis had hoped, it furthered the scope of black identity. Scholars have argued that The Chicago Defender’s coverage of World War I was not framed in an international context. A careful reading of its coverage suggests, however, that both the Crisis and the Defender took a special interest in Africans and black West Indians. In many ways, the characterization of foreign black troops was almost identical to that of American black troops. The black American identity was strongly linked not only with other peoples of African decent, but with all non-whites. Uplift of all people of color and more specifically all people of African decent added a new layer to black identity during this time period.

The Chicago Defender began highlighting the excellence of colonial African troops before the entrance of American blacks into the war. The French colonial troops were described as showing “remarkable bravery.” The French embraced these colonial troops; “[they] are showered with flowers and kisses as they walk erect along the boulevards. Every one wears a medal of honor.” Passages like
these had an aim of uplift, similar to coverage of black American troops. This uplift was not for the benefit of the subject of these articles. The heroic descriptions of these colonial blacks were written for the purpose of uplifting black Americans. The implication was that American blacks would be uplifted because of the gains of their race across the world. Historians label Pan-Africanism as “the attempts by African peoples to link up their struggles for their mutual benefit.” The Defender and The Crisis attempted to link the struggle of all people of African descent for their mutual uplift. American black identity was tied to the entire identity of the Pan-African “race.” As Du Bois explained, he was struggling to aid the “purpose of all black humanity.”

The parallels drawn between black Americans and other colonial peoples further encouraged the expansion of black identity. The prejudice faced by blacks in America paralleled the prejudice experienced by colonial Africans in Britain: “since the close of the war England finds herself confronted with a condition fostered by prejudice kindred to that which exists in America.” There were other parallels made as well. A Crisis editorial proclaimed “The sympathy of Black America must of necessity go out to colored India and colored Egypt. Their forefathers were ancient friends, cousins, blood brothers.” All non-white peoples were seen as sharing a common bond, an association strong as “blood” or a racial bond. Indeed, non-whites shared the unique position of being disempowered in a white-dominated world. The notion of black identity was not only based on race but also the sharing of an identity as oppressed people.

This complicated new definition of black American identity has similarities to the ideology of Garveyism. Unhappy with the lack of political activism in his home country, Jamaica, black nationalist Marcus Garvey found the political consciousness of American blacks refreshing. Scholars have interpreted his nationalist philosophy as equating to an insistence on a mass exodus to Africa. Historian David Levering Lewis, however, has argued that the cornerstone of Garvey’s philosophy was the belief that “racial liberation and empowerment were inherent in racial opposition and alienation.” His philosophy is echoed in the definition of black American identity in the Defender and The Crisis as both a descendent of Africa and as one of the oppressed peoples of the world. Indeed, the similarities underlining the beliefs of integrationist black activists such as Du Bois and of separatists who espoused black nationalism during World War I become apparent.

The depiction of colonialism in The Crisis and the Defender further complicates the understanding of black activists’ construction of their own racial identity. The successes of French colonial troops were often reported by the Defender, with a focus on the positive response to these troops by their colonial rulers. The relationship between the colonists and the colonized was characterized as one of intense camaraderie. A caption of a photograph of marching black soldiers read, “A convoy of French colonial troops on the march to lend aid to their French
The description of their relationship as a kind of brotherhood was in contrast with that of blacks and whites in the United States. In the coverage of black American troops, there were no depictions of camaraderie between blacks and whites. There was little portrayal of interaction between American blacks and whites in the war unless there was a conflict between the two groups.

Colonial African troops were presented as content in their status as a colonized group in the *Defender*. Another *Defender* article recounted the incredible performance of the “joyeux of Africa” or “the happy ones of Africa” as they successfully attacked German lines.137 These troops were described as “daredevils” who bravely retrieved the body of a commander under heavy fire. The label of “happy ones of Africa” was not seen as patronizing or distasteful, but rather charming. The profile of these troops interpreted colonial life as positive and unobjectionable. There was no indication that colonial Africans were unhappy with their low status. The reporting on colonial troops by *The Crisis* included a lengthy *London Spectator* article which highlighted the significant contributions of the “black man” in the war.138 The African colonial subjects of Britain were numbered at 44 million, and an additional 1.7 million “Aframericans” of the West Indies. The article praised these men’s “help, freely and loyally tempered.”139 In addition to ignoring the reason for the patriotism of these colonial subjects of Britain, the *Defender* failed to even examine the colonization by the U.S. of Haiti.140 These stories were superficial explorations and did not question the conditions of colonialism. The positive depictions of colonialism are contradictory to the understanding of black American activists’ identification with other oppressed peoples’ struggles.

While the majority of articles found in the *Defender* did not carefully examine the implications of colonialism, *The Crisis* paid greater attention to international politics. As a result there was a more insightful and skeptical portrait of colonialism in Du Bois’s magazine. Du Bois’s support of the war was originally the result of his belief that German colonization would be more unpleasant than Allied colonization. In an editorial advocating black support of the war Du Bois stated, “You [colonial peoples] are not simply fighting for Europe; you are fighting for the world, and you and your people are a part of the world.”141 Du Bois’ plea continued, “Out of this war will rise, soon or late, an independent China; a self-governing Indian, an Egypt with representative institutions; an Africa for the Africans, and not merely for business exploitation.”142 While Du Bois wanted to see the end of colonialism, as a compromise during the war he advocated cooperation with Allied colonial powers rather than a rejection of colonial powers altogether.

After the end of World War I, Du Bois began advocating independence for African nations previously under German occupation.143 Du Bois argued “Africa must ultimately be returned to the Africans. They are the best custodians of their lives and ideals.”144 He criticized the European exploitation of raw materials in Africa. Indeed he further believed that the justification of the colonization of Africa
Mary Hicks

was essentially racist. One effort to address the problem of African colonization was the Pan-African Conference, which was covered by both *The Crisis* and the *Defender*. During this conference, prominent black leaders from all over Africa met to discuss the future of African nations after the conclusion of World War I. The coverage of the Conference was positive in both papers, encouraging African nations to make efforts to gain their independence.145

The place of the “darker races” in the League of Nations was the focus of most of the coverage of the League by the two publications. The *Defender* reported that a senator from Missouri opposed the League of Nations because of the potential influence of the “darker races.” Like segregationist opposition to the enlistment of blacks in the war, the opposition of this racist senator strengthened the *Defender*’s support for the League of Nations. However, its support of the League of Nations only existed while it appeared as if traditionally less influential “darker” nations would be treated equally to more powerful white ones. When a Japanese proposition that all nations be recognized as equal was turned down, the *Defender* ended its support of the League of Nations.146 The *Defender* then featured a cartoon which depicted the League as dividing Africa only among Europeans, and not among “the race.” The continued disregard for African sovereignty by European nations was frowned upon by the *Defender*.

In contrast, Du Bois fully supported the League of Nations, deeming it the “salvation of the Negro race.” In a May 1919 editorial, Du Bois endorsed the League of Nations as an important tool in achieving racial equality for black Americans. He argued that the League would fight discrimination by opposing the doctrine of racial inferiority, and that the African and other non-white nations would be a “civilizing” influence on the United States. In addition it would also help the United States to understand different cultures and civilizations.147 After Du Bois heard of the rejection of Japan’s proposition for equality among nations, he criticized the League, but did not end his support of it. This was in sharp contrast to the reaction of the *Defender*, which called the dismissal of the Japanese proposition “not only a slap in the face to Japan, but at all other races that are not Caucasian.”148

Du Bois’s continuing support of the League of Nations revealed his strong belief in paternalism as a means to fight racial inequality. While advocating for the independence of African nations, he asked that “the guidance of organized civilization”149 be included in the process. Du Bois labeled African culture “folk-custom,”150 thus revealing his lack of respect for Africans. He requested guidance for new African nations because of their primitive nature but then described American and European civilizations as immoral for their treatment of black Americans. Similarly, he saw the cooperation of nations as positive for all those involved; he did not see equality among nations as a prerequisite to helping black Americans. This contradiction was the result of Du Bois’s two not incompatible beliefs of paternalism and racial equality.

Du Bois also believed in the white paternalism of American blacks. He
believed that the world faced two possibilities: “Africa must either be assimilated completely by Europe on the basis of absolutely equal political, civil, and social privileges for its black and white citizens or Europe must allow the rise of an autonomous ‘great African state’.” The first solution to colonialism greatly resembles the goal of many black American activists. They desired a complete inclusion into white America. Du Bois’s use of the term “assimilation” is troubling, since assimilation provides no retention of previous culture or values. Du Bois indicated that the only means Africans could attain equality with their European colonizers was through assimilation, or the total relinquishment of their identity. Because Du Bois had the same strategy for attaining equality for American blacks as he did for colonial Africans, one could argue that Du Bois believed in the same outcome for American blacks: assimilation.

Conclusion

*The Chicago Defender* and *The Crisis* are considered to be two radical periodicals of the World War I period. The definition of radical is relative. The United States government considered these publications to be radical for their criticism of federal policies during the war. However, their criticism was greatly tempered by an enthusiastic support of the war. These periodicals were also considered radical because of the men who controlled them. Both men were activists in their own ways. During the World War I period, much of the country considered Du Bois to be radical. Compared to more conservative African-American activists such as Booker T. Washington, Du Bois’s position on integration was indeed radical. Robert S. Abbott, not as well known as Du Bois, was considered to be a radical activist as well, mostly because of his migration campaign. These two men also shared similar beliefs, even though Du Bois did not approve of Abbott’s paper.

These two periodicals represent two influential views in the black community. Although *The Crisis* did not have a vast following, the magazine was only one outlet for Du Bois’ views. He was an educator at Harvard as well as other universities; he also published books and gave lecture tours around the world. Abbott’s paper had the highest circulation of any black periodical of the time. Both of these men had great influence over a wide audience.

An exploration of these two papers helps not only to explore the beliefs of the black community, but also that of the black activist community. The black activists of the early twentieth century were extremely varied in their viewpoints. Booker T. Washington’s conservatism and economic separatism were in stark contrast to Marcus Garvey’s radical black nationalist perspective. Du Bois and Abbott fall somewhere in between. They advocated integration and equality, but Du Bois also believed in tempering this process with paternalism. Abbott believed that racial discrimination could be escaped by migrating away from the Jim Crow South.

The complicated and contradictory nature of World War I tested these
beliefs. The war began at a crucial time when both publications were first becoming successful. The response of the black press to the war reveals how black activists hoped World War I would act as a catalyst to further help them achieve their goals. Their immediate commitment to support the war did not equate to an approval of all the actions of the U.S. government, such as segregation and the League of Nations, but they understood they could benefit from demonstrating their loyalty.

The war, as some have previously suggested, was not a postponement of the black activist agenda. Rather, it was a reform of that agenda. Activists supported a government which did not grant blacks full rights; in return, they believed that their support would help blacks earn those rights. In short, a new integrationist strategy formed during the war. These periodicals were founded on the principle that protest was the best method to integrate blacks more fully into American society. During the war, there was a slight break from these tactics. Abbott and Du Bois no longer employed outright protest of segregationist and discriminatory policies. Instead, they believed that the war itself would aid in reaching these goals. They hoped the success of black soldiers would not only uplift the self image of blacks, but it would also prove to white Americans that blacks were worthy of full citizenship. They struggled desperately for the integration of the troops and of the Red Cross, hoping it would initiate the spread of integration across the United States. Black activists also believed that a united sense of identity with other non-white peoples would foster further success for their goals. Unfortunately, none of these hopes came to fruition; one could argue that prospects for African-Americans actually worsened as post-demobilization violence swept the country. African-American activists would have to wait another twenty-five years, until the end of the Second World War, for another post-war wave of optimism to finally produce the changes they had so desperately desired.

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Endnotes
1 Chicago Defender, February 10, 1917.
2 Ibid., August 2, 1919.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., July 12, 1919
5 Michael J. Lyons, World War I: A Short History (Englewood Cliffs and New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1994), 66. Lyons argues that the war was sparked by an international crisis which could have been defused (the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand). However Europe’s Great Powers
had faced many long term tensions such as growing nationalism, disputes over imperial possessions, an arms race, border disputes as well as a complex system of secret alliances which escalated any conflict between two nations (Austria-Hungary and Serbia) into a conflict between many. The tragedy of this war was compounded by the incompatibility of modern weapons with outdated military strategies. Lyons calls World War I the first modern war. Indeed, many of the nations involved had no idea of the length and ultimate human cost of the war when they entered it. Lyons also notes that historians have linked the cause of the Second World War to the mishandling of The Treaty of Versailles.

6 The Chicago Defender, March 31, 1917.
7 Lyons, World War I, 249.
8 Ibid., 246.
9 Ibid., 251.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 252.
12 Ibid.
14 Washington’s politics were moderate compared to that of Du Bois; Washington advocated economic separatism and patience for the acquisition of civil rights.
17 Elliot M. Rudwick, “The Niagara Movement,” The Journal of Negro History 42: 3 (July 1957): 177-200. The Niagara Movement was founded by W.E.B. Du Bois and 28 other black radicals who wanted to explore more progressive solutions to the problems faced by African-Americans. The movement created a platform in a secret session in Fort Erie, Ontario in July of 1905. The platform included objectives such as creating a radical and unsubsidized black press, providing an ideological challenge to Booker T. Washington’s beliefs, obtaining voting rights equal to whites, abolishment of racial caste systems, equal education and employment for blacks, and the strategy of constant protests to secure these goals. Their platform was printed in papers across the country to initiate the creation of local branches of the movement.
18 Johnson, “Away From Accommodation,” 333. In its run, the periodical only attracted 250 to 500 subscribers.
19 Ibid., 334.
20 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 147.
25 Wolseley, The Black Press, 60.
29 Ibid., 64.
30 Ibid.
31 Wolseley, The Black Press, 43.
32 Desantis, “A Forgotten Leader,” 64.
Mary Hicks

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 66.
36 *Chicago Defender*, January 31, 1976
38 Ibid., 67.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 66.
41 Ibid., 63.
42 Strother, “The Black Image,” 139.
43 Ibid., 137.
44 *Chicago Defender*, April 16, 1917.
45 *Crisis*, March, 1917.
47 *Chicago Defender*, August 11, 1917.
49 Ibid., March 23, 1918.
50 Ibid., June 1, 1918.
51 Ibid.r, March 30, 1918.
52 Ibid.r, March 31, 1917.
54 Ibid., 99-100.
55 *Chicago Defender*, Jan 26, 1918.
56 Ibid., September 21 1918.
57 Ibid., November 1917.
58 Ibid., January 16, 1918
59 Ibid., March 2, 1918.
60 Ibid., April 6, 1918.
61 Ibid., May 11, 1918.
62 Ibid., December 29, 1917.
63 Ibid., May 25, 1918.
68 *Crisis*, July 1918.
70 *Crisis*, July 1918.
71 *Chicago Defender*, July 20, 1918. The Defender also asserted that Du Bois promoted beliefs which were more radical than its own.
73 Ellis, *Race, War and Surveillance*, 1.
74 Alan D. Desantis’ article “A Forgotten Leader” characterized Abbott as an entrepreneur rather than an intellectual.
75 *Chicago Defender*, May 18, 1918.
76 Ibid., November 13, 1917.

80 *Iowa Historical Review*
Radical Black Press

77 Ibid., April 16, 1918.
78 Du Bois, “Editing the Crisis”, 147.
79 Wolseley, The Black Press, 58.
80 E. Franklin Frazier, Black Bourgeoisie: The Rise of a New Middle Class in the United State (New York: Collier Books, 1957), 149. Frazier goes on to assert that the black press only represented the interests of the “black bourgeoisie” and that it deceived the lower-classes with its medium of mass communication.
84 Chicago Defender, April 21, 1917.
85 Ibid., June 8, 1918.
86 Ibid., February 24, 1917.
87 Ibid., March 31, 1917.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., July 20, 1917.
93 Ibid., July 27, 1918.
94 Ibid., April 6, 1918.
95 Ibid., July 6, 1918.
96 Ibid., April 16, 1918.
98 Chicago Defender, October 6, 1917.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid., April 21, 1917.
102 Ibid., March 10, 1917
103 Ibid., March 30, 1918.
104 Ibid., April 13, 1918.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid., December 1, 1917.
107 Ibid., January 9, 1918.
108 Ibid., June 29, 1918.
109 Ibid., February 2, 1918.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid., March 3, 1917.
112 Crisis, June 1918.
113 Chicago Defender, August 24, 1918.
114 Ibid., September 21, 1918.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid., May 3, 1919.
117 Ibid., April 21, 1919.
118 Ibid., May 31, 1919.
119 Ibid., August 2, 1919.
120 Ibid., January 26, 1918.
121 Ibid., April 26, 1919.
123 Ibid., 4-6.
Tuttle argues that the uncertain political climate of the post-war period made unrest more likely in a time of transition for the country. This factor along with long standing racial and labor conflicts caused underlying tensions to erupt to the surface. Tuttle, Race Riots, 16-22.


Chicago Defender, April 26, 1919.


Chicago Defender, May 24, 1919.

Crisis, May 1919.

Ibid.

Chicago Defender, May 3, 1919.

Ibid.

Chicago Defender, April 23, 1918.

Ibid., June 15, 1918.

Crisis, May 1919.

Ibid.

Chicago Defender, February 1919.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Crisis, February. 1919.

Ibid.


Assimilation and paternalism are very similar concepts. Paternalism assumes that a superior population will provide guidance to another. Assimilation is the complete acceptance of the culture and values of a dominate population by a subordinate one. In a paternalist system, oppressed people are more likely to give up their own culture to emulate their superiors.

Kornweibel, Investigate Everything.


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Filibustering to the Forefront of National Attention

Elliot Andrew Anderson

Only three years prior to the outbreak of the American Civil War, there was an ideological transition that greatly influenced the rapidly increasing polarization between the northern and southern United States. In 1857, the arrest of the notorious filibuster William Walker by Commodore Hiram Paulding caused filibustering to become one of the most important public issues of its time. During the 1800s, filibusterism was the term applied to the actions of groups of men, most commonly small groups of adventurers known as filibusters, who formed private military forces, and who invaded foreign countries that maintained peaceful relations with the United States with the intention of conquering them. In 1855, Walker and a small militia of fifty-eight men seized control of the Nicaraguan government. He then presided as commander-in-chief over a coalition government, and he later declared himself president of Nicaragua in July of 1856. One year later he was arrested on foreign soil by the United States Navy and this incident, along with his forced return to the country, became known as the Nicaraguan affair. It called into question the legality of the actions of both filibusters and the United States government among the general public.

The Nicaraguan affair produced an ideological polarization between the North and South, and its rise to prominence on a national stage can be divided into transitional phases that characterize this movement. The first part of this essay uses New York newspaper coverage of William Walker’s return to the United States and the reaction to this event among the American population in order to demonstrate the division of public opinion that existed over this affair. It acknowledges the commonly recognized link between filibustering and the yearning to expand the institution of slavery beyond the borders of the United States. Next, evidence is provided to prove that a division existed by examining the public debate that ensued over whether or not filibustering would lead to the democratization of Central America and bring benefits to the territory. Finally, the coverage provided over the division that existed on whether filibustering was legal is examined, and in considering this, how it could function to either hurt or improve the image of the United States on an international level.

As public opinion became increasingly divided over the Nicaraguan affair, the Buchanan administration was driven to take a stance on filibusterism. The media coverage of the public reaction to this administrative position represents the second part of this essay, and the administration’s involvement represents another major way that the issue polarized the nation. Buchanan’s condemnation of filibusterism
only further divided the nation. As a result, a Senate debate over filibusterism then ensued among the United States’ most prominent Northern and Southern senators. This senatorial debate represents the peak of filibustering in its rise to prominence in national attention during the late 1850s. This essay argues that the New York newspaper coverage of William Walker and the Nicaraguan affair demonstrates the sectional divergence that existed over the issue of filibustering in Central America as one of the precursors to the United States Civil War. This polarization can be placed into three primary phases: the media coverage of filibustering upon Walker’s return, the sectional reaction to the position of Buchanan administration, and the congressional debate over filibustering.

Media

Southerners, including Walker, did identify with filibustering partly because of the presence of slavery on the South. One well-documented belief tying the two issues together was that through filibustering, Southerners would be able to extend black bondage into Central America. The idea was that the institution would ride in on the heels of filibusterers such as Walker, who would have already established control of Central American nations as he had accomplished years before in Nicaragua.3 Though his attempt at resurrecting slavery had been thwarted, it was reported to be a position that some Southerners still supported. On December 23, 1857, the New York Daily Tribune published an article from a correspondence relating the events of a meeting in Mobile, Alabama, called to express sympathy for Walker and his expedition. In the article the correspondent offers a glance at the wariness for a new Southern movement, which it claimed was attempting to essentially make Nicaragua into a new Texas, or to occupy the role that Texas had assumed in the year of its annexation.4 However, the slavery question and its link to the filibuster missions was not the only important aspect of filibusterism that was dividing public opinion.

Public opinion was also divided over whether or not filibusterism was a vehicle for the democratization of Central America and whether it benefited or adversely affected the nations it was imposed upon. The debate over filibusterism in the media reflected the morals in contention between the North and the South. In other words, some Southerners felt that the imposition of North American government outside of the United States border was of benefit to the afflicted nation regardless of whether it was accomplished through filibustering. More specifically, it was believed that filibusters benefited Nicaraguan society, and that military transgressions in Central America were inherently positive.5 This argument is visible in the following excerpts taken from speeches that were reproduced in both Northern and Southern newspapers.

The Southern support for filibustering manifested itself in the media in reports on town meetings regarding the issue. On January 11, 1858, the New

Iowa Historical Review
Filibustering to the Forefront of National Attention

*York Herald* published a report on a meeting in Petersburg, Virginia, originally printed in the *Richmond Whig*. The meeting was called to condemn the actions of Commodore Paulding for arresting General Walker and to speak in defense of the filibuster cause. At the meeting, two key speeches were given and were outlined in the article, one identified with a man named Mr. Pryor, and another by Mr. Old. Pryor, in his speech, “vindicated the character of General Walker, his motives and the objects of his enterprise from the aspersions of his enemies, maintained his entire exemption from responsibility to this government, the legitimacy of his claim to the Presidency of Nicaragua,” and “the advantage to the world of opening Central America to the quickening influences of industry, civilization and good government.” This dialogue highlighted key beliefs towards the positive influence of filibustering on Central America and pointed to other factors aside from slavery as motivation. Clearly Pryor believed that the invading forces were a benefit to both Central America and the rest of the world. In short, he felt that the filibustering of William Walker could enable the formation of a government that would civilize the region.

At the same time Old supported the above position, he also pointed to other reasons for his advocacy for Southern support of filibustering. In fact, he explicitly presented his beliefs over the issue in a manner that was highly characteristic of the ideological polarization that had become common as a result of the filibuster issue. He “regarded the possession of the tropics as of vital importance to the South” and believed that by securing all of the products of the tropics, the South “might defy all the schemes of Northern fanatics, and British competitors and rivals in commerce.” Old emphasized the necessity of a Southern occupation of Central America enabled by the filibustering movement, as a bargaining tool with which to stave off the North and retain a competitive hold on the world market. This is clearly not a vision of a unified United States, but instead one where the North and South represent separate entities in a regional competition. This view exemplifies those during this period that proved cataclysmic to the diplomatic ties between the North and the South. Further, this regional competition is exactly what happened only three years later, as a result of the continued exacerbation of sectional digression, upon the outbreak of the American Civil War. Indeed, in reporting on the existence of these Southern sentiments in a Northern newspaper, the media was likely generating animosity, whether intentional or not, between the two regions.

The North, in contrast to the Southern position on filibustering, condemned the filibusters as a misrepresentation of democratic expansion and influence outside of the United States. Specifically, the popular belief was that Walker’s undertaking in Nicaragua was not at all representative of democratic ideals. The January 4 *New York Daily Tribune* stated “Walker and his filibusters, in going to Nicaragua as the allies and abettors of the Democratic Party of that country as against the aristocrats and legitimatists, can only be compared to the wolves… who put themselves forward to be appointed guardians of the sheep-fold.” It was perceived in the North that
Walker was moving through Central America on a platform of pseudo-democracy, and his intentions were really to conquer Nicaragua and construct non-democratic institutions supported by white supremacist ideals. By assisting the Nicaraguan democrats, a party composed of “Indians, negroes and mixed castes,” Walker was posing as a benefactor in the “overthrow of the doctrine that only white men are fit to govern.” By supporting the Nicaraguan Democratic Party, Walker was trying to accomplish the overthrow of a white government by means of a popular mixed-race movement, temporarily assist the establishment of a new government, then usurp power and re-establish his own white government. He was not laying the groundwork for democratic expansion in Central America; instead, he was perceived as establishing his own form of autocracy. By exposing this belief, the media portrayed the Northern wariness of Walker’s non-democratic methods within an atmosphere of Southern support.

A final issue that divided public opinion in the media over the Nicaraguan affair was whether filibusterism was a legal institution, and in considering its legality, how it functioned to either improve or hurt the image of the United States. Editorials were published that took positions against the motivations of the filibusters and the reflections that the movement had on the U.S. The Union published an extensive piece on the Walker and Paulding affair that highlights this attitude. In the critique, “filibustering expeditions are deprecated as unlawful, wrong intrinsically, and disgraceful to the character of the country” by the author of the editorial. These strong words express a belief that the filibustering expeditions acted contrarily to the author’s conception of United States idealism and it is representative of a dispute that existed against the aggressive action.

The role of Commodore Paulding in the arrest of Walker was also disputed among the American population, encouraging further public division over filibustering, and can be used as further evidence for the split over the legality of filibusterism and its impact on the country. His arrest in 1857 by the United States Navy was the result of the “combined pressure of a Central American Army, Great Britain, and threatened American shipping interests.” Yet still, Paulding was forced to enter Nicaragua in order to forcefully remove an unwilling Walker. A pro-filibuster position was reflected in the explicit condemnations of Commodore Paulding for this action throughout the South, not because of his violation of the United States Neutrality Law in relation to Nicaragua, but instead due to his forced removal of General Walker from the country. Southerners considered Paulding to have acted illegally by arresting Walker. They resented him for interfering in the actions of the filibusters in Nicaragua and in doing so, again referred to the antagonism that existed between the North and South. One article entitled “Southern Condemnation of Com. Paulding” was printed in the Herald-Tribune on January 7, 1858 from a correspondent of the Baltimore Sun. The opening paragraph, in mentioning the Nicaraguan incident, states: “The subject excites a very deep feeling. It becomes complicated with the antagonism which exists between the North and
Filibustering to the Forefront of National Attention

The impact that the episode was now having on the country was becoming increasingly important as well as increasingly clear. Another article in the January 4 Herald-Tribune exposes the reciprocating Northern perception on the Southern position regarding filibustering. Northerners believed that Walker was acting illegally by waging war in Nicaragua and were grateful to Paulding for his actions. “The anxious and indecent haste with which the act has been disavowed and the responsibility thrown upon Capt. Paulding is a strong evidence of the disgraceful influence the extreme South exercises over the Government.” Here the media portrayed the condemnation of Paulding and the action taken against him as a Southern position. Continuing on this line, an article from the Daily Tribune on January 4 taken from a correspondence of the Philadelphia Inquirer further exemplifies the polarization between the North and South in regard to the judgment of Paulding. In reference to the Northern perception of the Paulding affair, “As for Com. Paulding, he will have his reward in the grateful acknowledgments of the honest, right-minded people of this country.”

The Northern support of Commodore Paulding gives an insight into the ideological division between the North and the South over the issues of the use of the military and the legality of filibusterism. This is particularly interesting because in the eyes of the North, Paulding represented a legitimate, officially sanctioned military authority with the right to interject in foreign affairs, if he was acting in the interest of American democracy. Yet in the South, Walker represented this authority and Paulding, instead of the filibusters, was the illegitimate and encroaching force. Both regions viewed one of the parties in the incident as guilty, and the other as leading a positive cause. There was no middle ground or point of reconciliation between the regions, save for President Buchanan, a deft diplomat who did try to mediate the two opposing viewpoints over Paulding’s actions. By the time of William Walker’s return, the North and South had clearly split over the filibustering issue and Buchanan’s involvement now allowed the media to tie the administration into its portrayal of the polarization.

Buchanan

In light of the ideological division existing between the two regions, the Buchanan administration was forced to take a public position. And there was much speculation in the media just what that position would be prior to its inception. Some Northerners maintained a particularly interesting opinion on what the administrative position would be, and both the New York Daily Tribune and the New York Herald covered the regional distrust that existed between the North and the South over the Buchanan administration. This time however, it was not motivation and legitimization that was argued, but instead, with the new politicization of the filibuster issue, it was the regional association with the administration that became the new battleground.
In the North, the media radiated an air of pessimism towards the administration. There was much speculation of a link between the administration and the South. A correspondence of the *New York Tribune* wrote on January 3 that “the administration and the ultra interest of the South are only separated by a matter of form.” While both the administration and the Southern interest sought the same ends – the acquisition of Central American territories – the manner in each pursued this was characteristically different. It had previously been established in the North that Southern extremists favored the repeal of the Neutrality Laws, military expeditions into Central America by United States citizens, and the conquest of these territories that the expeditions moved through. The argument continued on to say that, in seeking the same ends, conquest in Central America and the Caribbean Basin, Buchanan instead wanted to use diplomacy, discretion and acquisition.

This comparison is important for one key reason. Despite explicitly distinguishing the administration from the Southern movement over the manner in which they were attempting to acquisition Central American territories, the *Daily Tribune* was actually bringing the two closer in the eyes of Northerners by placing them together on the same page in terms of their view on foreign relations and the possession of foreign nations. This is further supported in the same article, “Cuba is the great object of ambition with the President… Hence he is not willing to risk even a remote chance for Cuba by encouraging…enterprise against Nicaragua.” Indeed, they held the view that the administration was forced to oppose filibustering, not due to a moral indignation towards the movement, but because of the possibility of sacrificing the acquisition of countries other than Nicaragua. Yet, the suspicion within the North did not end with the assumed alignment of the administration with the South on the issue of the acquisition of foreign territory.

Another Northern fear was that Buchanan would side with the South because he was indebted to his Southern supporters. The belief held that Buchanan had been elected largely as a result of his position as minister to the United Kingdom from 1853 to 1856. The Southern Democrats wanted Buchanan in office because he had been absent during the debate of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and supposedly was ambivalent towards the issue. Because Southern support had won him the election, it was believed that Buchanan would now be now obliged to govern by ultra-conservative Southern principles. The Nicaraguan affair was demonized in one Northern editorial as a “Central American Conspiracy.” Regional dissatisfaction was bolstered by statements such as “The administration is not now like the ass of the logicians, dying of want between two attractive stacks of hay; it is rather like a more natural and possible ass between two goads, and the most urgent of the two drives it Southward.”

In the South, one of the principal requests to the administration was to restore Walker to Nicaragua following his arrest. In fact, Southerners demanded not only that Walker be allowed to return to the country, but that he be reinstalled immediately by the federal government and the military. New Orleans newspapers
Filibrusting to the Forefront of National Attention

ran a report of a pro-filibuster meeting at a hotel in the city where a number of resolutions were adopted. The final resolution claimed that it was the opinion of the meeting that it was "the imperative duty of this government to restore General Walker and his captive companions… to the country from which they have been so unlawfully taken…and also to indemnify them for all losses they have sustained from capture."25

While Southerners advocated the restoration of Walker as a federal duty, the North maintained a strong view on the implications of this Southern position in relation to the administration. Essentially, if the South was to be represented by Walker as its exemplar, by demanding him to be replaced in Nicaragua the South insults the administration. Stronger words were used in the media. "The South, supporting, defending, and applauding Walker, thus quietly kicks and spits upon the federal government."26 No longer was the polarization between the two regions a marginal ideological difference. The politicization of the filibuster issue and its presentation in the media had pushed the issue into debate throughout mainstream United States public opinion.

The media-driven increase in public awareness forced the administration to take a position regarding the Walker expedition, the incident of his arrest, and filibustering as an institution. This position differed from the preceding Northern perception of the South as a beneficiary of administrative policy and it served as a vehicle in furthering the already prominent polarization between the regions. In short, while Buchanan reprimanded the action of Commodore Paulding for landing on foreign soil, he also praised his effort in rescuing Nicaragua from invasion by the filibusters. In regard to Walker’s expedition Buchanan stated that “the crime of setting on foot or providing the means for military expeditions within the United States to make war against a foreign State with which we are at peace, is one of an aggravated and dangerous character.”27 He believed that the government had a responsibility to punish the filibusters or it should be considered an accomplice in the crime. By taking this stand against filibustering and declaring the activity to be both illegal and morally reprehensible, the administration surprised those who had believed that it would align itself with the conservative South by endorsing Walker.

In response to the administrative declaration on filibustering, the regional populations sounded off in opposition to and in favor of the administration, creating yet an even stronger sense of polarization between the North and South that was reflected again in the media. The decision to oppose filibustering and condemn Walker’s actions as illegal pushed the South to a more extreme radicalization of its position towards the administration. Keeping in mind that the vote of the Democratic southern states had enabled Buchanan’s election upon his return from Great Britain, some Southerners viewed the President’s position as a stab in the back to the South. Filibuster rallies publicly denouncing Buchanan were carried out in the South as a response to the message. In Mobile, for example, one such rally took
place that strongly represented the divergence of the South from the administration over the Nicaragua affair and the increasing identification among Southerners of the administration as a Northern entity. One speaker at the rally declared that the administration had manifested with regard to Nicaragua, “a very different spirit towards the South from what was expected of it when the Southern people elevated it into power.”

The speaker continued that “had the sentiments of President Buchanan…been known before the last elections as they have since developed themselves, not a single member of Congress favorable to the administration could have been elected from Alabama.”

In summing up the newly identified animosity in the South toward the administration, he finished announcing that he was deceived in his support and was now certain that the administration had acted with wrongful conviction to the South. The Presidential message opened the door for sectionalist editorials for and against the position stated and while resentment did reign in the Southern states, in the North the scene was quite the opposite.

In fact, Northerners celebrated their bureaucratic victory by staunchly reinforcing the administrative position on Walker and Nicaragua. The day after the President’s message was printed, one editorial declared that it had “commanded the unanimous approbation of all classes of our intelligent readers. We are equally confident, too, that the high toned, clear and unanswerable views of Mr. Buchanan concerning filibusters and filibustering, the duties of the government and the good faith of the country, will receive a hearty endorsement from the great body of the American people.”

As Northerners applauded the administration for condemning the alleged illegal institution, the media helped to carry the sentiment throughout the country. The North and South had now reached a new peak in their ideological division as a result of the public-induced politicization of the filibustering issue within the United States. Because the media so highly publicized this polarization regarding the administration, the Nicaragua affair needed to reach only one last platform before it became a dominant issue in the pre-Civil War era.

**Congress**

The position of President Buchanan on the filibuster issue, along with the media coverage of the strongly contrasting public opinion that came as a result of the administration’s stance, caused the issue to spill out onto the floor of the United States Capitol. The heated congressional debate that ensued marked the head of the filibustering issue and its contribution to the resulting sectional difficulties in the years leading to the American Civil War. While Congress debated the issue of the seizure of Walker, the debate primarily focused on the President’s message in response to the filibuster question. Each senator who spoke on the issue clearly revealed his own regional ideology.

The attention that some of the most influential personalities in U.S.
politics during the late 1850s and the 1860s paid to the filibuster issue during the Congressional debates demonstrates the substantial perceived importance of filibustering to the future of the United States. The support from James Pearce, a member of the Senate from Maryland between the years 1843 and 1862, for the position on filibustering taken by Buchanan, can be seen as reflecting Maryland’s unexpected Union-supporting position among the border states despite its slaveholding population. William H. Seward, the representative of New York and another outspoken defendant of Buchanan served from 1849 to 1861 when he was appointed Secretary of State by Abraham Lincoln. Those who stood against Buchanan on the Congressional floor were similarly significant. Jefferson Davis of Mississippi became the President of the Confederate States after the secession that led to the Civil War. Davis’s colleague, Robert Toombs of Georgia also became active in the political agenda of the Confederate States as secretary of state and general of Confederate forces during the Civil War. By 1858, filibustering had become so important on a political and social level that some of the most influential names in American politics were debating for and against the administrative position on the movement.

During the Congressional debates, Senators Pearce and Seward argued in favor of the administrative position on filibustering. Pearce believed that the Walker expedition from the United States was in fragrant violation of the law and that the President had done his duty in preventing Walker from attacking a people in peace. He argued that disgrace would come to the country as a result of the harmful filibustering expeditions, and that it was the government’s duty to end them. Senator Pearce agreed with the President’s response to the filibustering issue and Walker’s seizure in Nicaragua by Commodore Paulding. He felt that the President had maintained an even keel in censuring the filibusterers while at the same time lauding the good intentions of Paulding while acknowledging the unlawfulness of his actions. He believed that the principle being asserted on the opposing side of the Senate was that the crime of filibustering existed only because Walker was caught. He disagreed strongly with this point and felt that Walker had defied the president and federal law. Despite his unquestioned support of the President, in the eyes of the Congressional reporter for the New York Daily Tribune, Seward’s argument was at times confused and at some points trifling. This may have been testament to his inclination to support the administration in its liberal declaration, the pressure that he felt to maintain an opposition to the impending condemnation of the President by the Southern senators, or the publicly driven anti-filibuster sentiment that had been constructed in New York.

In contrast, the remaining senators argued against the administrative position and showed their support for filibustering. Senator Davis condemned the actions of Commodore Paulding and the position of the president in regard to the law. He argued that it was not the position of the executive branch to be able to police outside of the borders of the country and that if that was a power that the president wished...
Elliot Anderson

to wield, then legislation must be made enabling him to do so. He argued in favor of allowing General Walker and the filibusters to seek any course of action within Central America and that it was not within the rights of the United States government to impede him outside of the national boundary. This Southern sentiment from Davis identified unmistakably with the visible Southern agenda in the days prior to the Congressional Debate. Senator Toombs explicitly aligned himself with Senator Davis. He said little about the actual piratical actions of Walker and appears to have been more interested in condemning the federal government for removing him from Nicaraguan soil. The third important senator to take a stand against the administration was Senator Douglas. He was seemingly the only Northern senator to outwardly oppose Buchanan in favor of Walker. However, there likely is at least one reason that may account for Douglas breaking the mold with his opposition to the president’s message on filibustering. Douglas was believed to support the Southern men on the filibuster question in an attempt to reconcile with the Southern wing of the country. He had been a Senatorial opponent of Abraham Lincoln, a presidential aspirant in 1852 and 1856, and was looking forward to a Presidential candidacy that he did receive in 1860.

Douglas’ representation of a discrepancy in the otherwise clear Congressional polarization ushered in by the media can perhaps be explained in the context of the other persisting issues in American politics during the period. However, the fact that he aligned himself with the position of the South in order to gain Southern popular support is nonetheless extremely significant because it again highlights the primary, dominant place that filibustering came to occupy within the political scene. There would be no reason for Douglas to display himself as a Southern archetype over the Nicaraguan affair if it had not suddenly become a very important political debate during this period. Indeed, in order to gain Southern support, Douglas had to oppose a president that was identified as a Southern elect, a seemingly ironic condition, but not in consideration of the position taken by the administration and the power that the filibuster issue now commanded over the political ring. To be supported by the South, Douglas, a Northern senator, showed that one had to be in favor of Walker and in favor of filibustering. This is strong evidence of the polarizing role that the Nicaragua affair played in the United States, and how it drove the North and the South apart in the years leading to the Civil War.

Conclusion

Filibustering captured the attention of the United States population and called into question the American foreign policy exemplified by the debate over Walker’s aggressions in Nicaragua and his arrest on Nicaraguan soil. As the Nicaraguan affair received increased attention, public opinion would come to reflect regional divisions. It is commonly exhibited in other examinations of Walker’s undertakings that slavery played a principal role in the link between the South
Filibustering to the Forefront of National Attention

and filibustering. However, while it is true that many Southerners during the mid-nineteenth century viewed Central America as the answer to the increasing abolitionist sentiment within the United States, it is equally important to discern the other factors surrounding the Nicaraguan affair that made it such a key issue. The media played a key role in amplifying the variety of issues that entered into the debate on filibustering, and it is clear that the questions of the morality and legality of filibustering maintained a significant importance alongside the slavery issue within the ensuing public disputes.

Another idea that has arisen as a result of this analysis is the role of the Nicaraguan affair in catapulting the nation to a Civil War. Public opinion became divided, and no one backed down. In each region people continued to step up and speak out about the issue, holding meetings and rallies and publishing editorials. The public opinion then sparked the administration’s condemnation and estrangement from Southern support. As a result of Buchanan’s message, Washington became less trustworthy and influential in the Southern states. This helped to lay the groundwork for the inability of the government to maintain relations with the South during its secession. Finally, the Congressional debate that resulted from the president’s message featured the most influential players in the oncoming Civil War era. Essentially, filibusterism provided an important insight into the ideological differences that existed between the senators, and this served as a prelude to their approaching disassociation.

This paper was written for Professor Michel Gobat’s Latin America and U.S. Relations: Historical Perspective. Much of Professor Gobat’s research focuses on the relations between Nicaragua and the United States, and I was fortunate enough to be able to work as a research assistant for him for a semester. His interest in and support of the process of completing this paper was invaluable, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with him.

Endnotes
3 May, “Young American Males and Filibustering in the Age of Manifest Destiny,” 857-86; Amy S. Greenberg, “A Gray-Eyed Man: Character, Appearance, and Filibustering,” Journal of the Early Republic 20, no. 4. (Winter, 2000): 673-99; also for a broader overview of the slavery issue and its ties with filibustering as well as William Walker’s character and expeditions to Nicaragua during the 1850s, see Amy S. Greenberg, Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Robert E. May, Manifest Destiny’s Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); interestingly, Walker attempted to seize Northern Mexico prior to his arrival in Nicaragua and went so far as to declare a Republic and establish slavery, though he ultimately failed to fully accomplish this task. For more in depth coverage of Walker’s period in Mexico see Joseph Allen Stout, Jr., The Liberators: Filibustering Expeditions into Mexico, 1848-1862 and the
Another important precursor to the United States Civil War was the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 which created these new territories while promoting the utilization of popular sovereignty to decide whether slavery would be permitted north of the 36°30’ line of latitude that had been established in 1820. Its consequent repealing of the Missouri Compromise of 1820 also became a heavily debated issue in Congress. The debate made it clear who in the Congressional body was for or against the institution of slavery in these newly opened territories. For more information over the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Congressional debate, see Robert R. Russel, “The Issues in the Congressional Struggle over the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, 1854,” *The Journal of Southern History* 29, no. 2 (May, 1963): 187-210.

In many ways, it would also be interesting to reflect on the impact of filibusterism on the future of Nicaraguan and Central American politics, as its impact in the United States is so evident. It seems obvious that the unification of Central American forces against the filibusters may have benefited
domestic Latin American relations. However, it is clear that in the transition of the Nicaraguan affair from the public to the nation’s political sectors, it did seem to have overshadowed the Kansas question’s importance as a primary ideologically polarizing force within the United States.

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Confronting the Perils of Globalization:
Nicaraguan Banana Workers' Struggle for Justice

Ethan Grundberg

As our bus finally entered the city of Managua in early April 2005 after a 10-hour drive from San Salvador, I peered out the window in an effort to locate the numerous landmarks that the stout Nicaraguan man sitting next to me was describing. We passed the massive statue of Augusto Cesar Sandino that towered over the city, the Taiwanese-funded outdoor amphitheater, the giant Plaza de la Fe constructed in honor of Pope John Paul II’s 1996 visit, the Rúben Darío National Theater, and finally the modest National Assembly. Across the street from the Assembly in what normally was a desolate field, thousands of campesinos crouched under tents made of black plastic and swung in their brightly colored hammocks behind giant banners pleading for the protection of Law 364 and demanding fair compensation for exposure to a chemical called Nemagon. Gustavo informed me that this was not the first time that the former banana plantation workers had marched from their homes in the northwestern region of Chinandega to Managua in their long struggle to hold transnational corporations (TNCs) accountable for damages resulting from exposure to the toxic chemical. Over the next month and a half, I would regularly find myself crouched beneath the sweltering black plastic tents listening to the humble workers donning torn plaid shirts and wide-brimmed cowboy hats describe how they had managed to forge a popular national movement to confront some of the world’s most powerful corporations.

The movement of former banana plantation workers began in the 1990s as a legal struggle for indemnity from TNCs responsible for the production and use of Nemagon. After failing to obtain a satisfactory compensation through the courts, workers mobilized to pressure the Nicaraguan government to provide the movement with legislative support. The workers were successful in their efforts and reissued numerous lawsuits against the TNCs in both Nicaraguan and U.S. courts. Though these cases are still in trial, the movement has succeeded in obtaining numerous material concessions from the government and in rallying popular support in Nicaragua.

The experience of the former Nicaraguan banana plantation workers’ movement illuminates the paradoxical effects that deepening globalization has had on rural workers’ agency. Though there is little agreement among theorists as to its precise definition, globalization can be broadly characterized as, “the ways in which previously distant parts of the world have become connected in an historically unprecedented manner, such that developments in one part of the world are now
Confronting the Perils of Globalization

able to rapidly produce effects on geographically distant localities. This in turn has made it possible to begin to imagine the world as a single, global space linked by a wide array of technological, economic, social and cultural forces."¹ In the case of the Nicaraguan banana workers, globalization has created the conditions in which a U.S.-produced toxin can be utilized by TNCs operating in the global south with little regard for the human health impacts on a seemingly infinitely replaceable labor pool. However, globalization has also ushered in an era in which grassroots labor and social justice non-governmental organizations can bridge cultural, physical, and logistical barriers to disseminate information and unite geographically disparate groups to network for a common cause. The emergence of a “globalization from below,” a model of globalization that “supports individuals and groups using the new technologies to create a more multicultural, egalitarian, democratic, and ecological world,” has enhanced the ability of workers throughout the global south to shape international law and confront their systematic exploitation.²

Though the Nicaraguan banana workers are engaged in such an international confrontation, their movement bears little resemblance to popular globalization theorists’ vision of the politics of “globalization from below.” Unlike traditional social mobilization that has focused on organizing at the national level and engaging the nation-state, some theorists argue that “globalization from below” will seek “to challenge the power of the global elite by accumulating counter-hegemonic forces beyond national and regional borders; to challenge that power from within an expanding transnational civil society.”³ The creation of a “global multitude” resulting from the demand that “the juridical status of the population be reformed in step with the real economic transformations of recent years” is perceived as necessary to confront the actors of global capitalism.⁴ Even the “Lilliputian strategy,” which promotes the global coordination of decentralized and autonomous popular movements, assumes that social mobilizations will transcend the confines of the nation to confront the new global elite.⁵ This focus on transnationalizing social movements seems to be the result of the perceived obsolescence of the nation-state as a category of analysis. At a time in which neo-liberalism and global capitalism have left skeletal governments in their paths, it is understandable that one would argue, “the neo-liberal state retains essential powers to facilitate globalization but it loses the ability to harmonize conflicting social interests within a country, to realize the historic function of sustaining the internal unity of a nationally conceived social formation, and to achieve legitimacy.”⁶ However, the movement of former banana plantation workers in Nicaragua demonstrates a powerful alternative to a transnational globalization from below that instead champions the traditional nation-state and popular nationalism as unifying forces against foreign exploitation. By employing innovative tactics that simultaneously appealed to Nicaraguan society and pressured elected representatives, the former banana workers were able to gain valuable support from the government. The Nicaraguan government, a clear example of a minimalist neo-liberal state, has effectively reasserted its traditional
powers of sovereignty and self-determination to challenge the declaration of the
death of the nation-state.

The movement’s success in gaining the support of the Nicaraguan
government can be explained by two factors. First, the decision can be viewed as a
continuation of Nicaragua’s historical narrative of resistance to foreign intervention. From President Zelaya’s opposition to U.S. pressure to concede territory for the construction of an inter-oceanic canal in the early 1900s, to Augusto Cesar Sandino’s anti-imperialist campaign against the U.S. Marine occupation from 1927-1933, to the overthrow of the U.S.-supported Somoza regime by the Sandinistas in 1979, many Nicaraguans understand their history as a perpetual quest for self-determination and against foreign interest. The former banana plantation workers were able to forcibly associate with this narrative of anti-imperialism to garner popular and governmental support.

Part of the workers’ success in associating with Nicaragua’s historical
narrative was dependent on the second factor: the workers’ effective creation of spectacle to assert their citizenship and awaken a latent popular nationalism infused with the powerful anti-imperialist ideology of Sandinismo. As anthropologist Daniel Goldstein notes, “The spectacle, then … is also about being seen: calling attention to oneself or one’s group by means of public display. This is particularly important in urban settings, in which people are marginalized or otherwise rendered invisible in the public eye, yet are in close geographical proximity to the loci of official power.” By physically camping in front of the National Assembly in Managua and threatening violent tactics such as self-immolation and crucifixion while also carrying the Nicaraguan flag at the head of each march and employing the rhetoric of Sandinismo, the banana workers forced themselves into the public eye and cultivated a powerful association with Nicaraguan nationalism that resonated strongly with much of society. As a result of constructing their movement as an embodiment of nationalism, the workers were able to force the government to overcome its neo-liberal obsolescence and challenge the hegemony of capital in order to maintain popular legitimacy. The struggle of the Nicaraguan banana workers confirms Marc Edelman’s assertion that, “even after more than a decade of neoliberalism, state agencies remain absolutely central points of reference, foci of demands, and sites of struggle, despite the undermining of traditional power centers that accompanies economic globalization.” From a small field across from the National Assembly in Managua, the workers have illustrated the continuing potency of popular nationalism in defiance of an increasingly transnational world.

The Beginnings of a Toxic Legacy

U.S. banana businesses began to develop along Nicaragua’s Atlantic coast in the mid-1890s in response to efforts by President José Santos Zelaya to attract foreign investment and modernize the economy. Between 1909 and 1929, U.S.
business investment in Nicaragua doubled to $20 million largely as a result of an
influx of banana corporations, such as the Cuyamel Fruit Company, Bragmans Bluff
Lumber Company (a subsidiary of Standard Fruit), and the Bluefields Company.
However, the banana industry failed to develop as robustly in Nicaragua as it had in
other Central American countries because of less productive soils, an early outbreak
of Panama disease, and eventually the socio-political turmoil caused by Augusto
Sandino’s 1926 rebellion. The banana industry slowly withered after the onset
of the Great Depression until production was so low in 1943 that the government
neglected to issue a report on the sector.

However, Standard Fruit Company renewed its interest in developing a
banana industry in Nicaragua after a 1944 soil study revealed promising conditions
on the Pacific coast near Chinandega. Standard’s resident manager H.D. Scott
obtained a land concession that same year intended for banana production. United
Fruit Company followed Standard’s lead and began operations on the Pacific coast
in 1960. Although production numbers remained low through the 1960s, Standard
Fruit maintained significant exports averaging approximately 5.7 million crates
(about 40 pounds each) per year earning around $5 million USD annually between
1972 and 1979. However, U.S. banana corporations dramatically decreased
production in Nicaragua in response to the triumph of the Sandinista revolution
in 1979. Fearful of increasing socio-political instability and disturbed by the
creation of a nationalized banana company, the Empresa Nicaragüense del Banano
(BANANIC), Standard Fruit essentially abandoned the country in 1982.

Part of the temporary success that U.S. companies had in reviving the
Nicaraguan banana industry in the 1960s resulted from their introduction of new
and more powerful agro-chemicals. Transnational corporations first introduced
synthetic agro-chemicals to Central America in the 1940s in order to combat pests
and plant diseases and increase crop yields. The use of such chemicals spread quickly
over the next several decades, reaching consumption levels of approximately 66
million pounds per year and constituting a $165 million market in the region in the
1970s. In Nicaragua, agro-chemicals were first used to help spur the cotton boom
of the 1940s and ‘50s, but eventually spread to other agricultural crops like sugar
cane and bananas. After containing the massive outbreak of Panama disease in
the 1940s with the help of synthetic fumigants, banana corporations encountered a
new infestation in the 1960s: tiny worms called nematodes. The worms fed on the
roots of banana trees, destroying the plant in the process. Standard Fruit Company
estimated that nematodes had reduced production by as much as 25 to 35 percent
on its plantations in Costa Rica and Honduras in the late 1960s. In response, the
corporation began to experiment with a number of nematicides, agro-chemicals that
control nematode populations, including Nemacur, Terracur, Lannate, and DBCP.
Most fruit companies soon settled on DBCP and began using the nematicide on
banana plantations throughout Latin America.

DBCP, or 1,2-dibromo-3-chloropropane, was discovered independently by
Shell and Dow Chemical Companies in 1951. Before releasing their products on the market, each corporation conducted a series of toxicological tests that exposed lab animals to the agro-chemical to determine its potential health impact on humans. These tests, conducted from 1954 to 1955, showed that rats exposed to the chemical experienced “retarded growth, organ damage, and undersized testes” even at low doses. Despite these initial test results, Shell began to produce DBCP in 1956 in preparation for its introduction to the commercial market using the name Nemagon, followed by Dow in 1957 under the name Fumazone.\(^{19}\)

Dow and Shell continued testing DBCP on lab animals throughout the 1950s. Further testing confirmed the initial findings, concluding, “Liver, lung and kidney effects might be expected…Testicular atrophy may result from prolonged repeated exposure.”\(^{20}\) However, Shell Chemical Company intentionally withheld some of the toxicological test results and recommended safety precautions while understating other potential hazards associated with the agro-chemical in its product data summary report that was submitted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1961. In 1964, Nemagon and Fumazone were both approved for commercial sale provided the chemical packaging displayed mild warning labels such as “Do not breathe vapors” and “Do not contact with skin and eyes.”\(^{21}\) Within months, DBCP was being used in the United States on over 40 different agricultural crops, including soybeans, pineapples, nuts, and cotton.\(^{22}\)

Standard Fruit and other banana companies began to use DBCP on a large scale on plantations across the globe beginning in 1969, with the first registered use in Nicaragua recorded on August 14, 1973.\(^{23}\)

Though they were not the most effective at combating nematode infestations, the DBCP products proved to be the most cost efficient due to their 40 to 60 percent lower cost than the other nematicides.\(^{24}\) In order for the chemical to be effective, DBCP had to be absorbed by the soil and come into physical contact with nematode populations. Plantation managers eventually discovered two primary methods of applying the nematicides to the sprawling rows of banana plants. First, workers used long devices imported from Taiwan, known as “kyoritzu,” that were comparable to oversized syringes to inject a diluted solution of water and DBCP as close to the banana plant root as possible. Teams of four to six workers would cover approximately three hectares of plants daily using this method.\(^{25}\) The other popular application method used on plantations involved distributing the chemical through the irrigation system and aspersion towers. While this second method was more efficient than the manual injection of DBCP, it could only be used given the appropriate dry soil conditions, lack of wind, and stable temperature range. Under these conditions, DBCP was typically mixed into the irrigation system at the end of the working day and allowed to saturate the plants and soil overnight.\(^{26}\)

Both application methods resulted in excessive exposure of workers and their families to the nematicide. Banana workers using the direct injection method were frequently splattered with DBCP residue when the liquid encountered obstacles in
the ground like roots or rocks. Since these workers rarely wore protective clothing, the chemical would be absorbed through the skin, respiratory tract, and into workers’ clothing. Workers were also regularly splashed with the liquid chemical and exposed to its fumes when they were required to manually dilute the chemical throughout the day and pour the water-DBCP mixture into their kyoritzu. When the chemical was applied through the irrigation system overnight, everyone living around the plantation would inhale DBCP’s vapors the following morning as the sun heated the earth creating a layer of evaporated liquid residue trapped by the thick canopy of banana leaves. Former banana plantation workers tell stories of waking up to thick clouds of pungent fumes enveloping both the fields in which they worked and their homes that were situated on the periphery of the plantations. The irrigation application method also resulted in higher contamination of rivers, creeks, and other drinking water sources. Furthermore, workers and their families ingested chemical residues by eating food produced and/or prepared in close proximity to DBCP.

Although the workers and their families were unaware of it at the time, their repeated exposure to DBCP posed a serious health risk. The mild cautionary warnings provided on the barrels of DBCP products were of little help to the workers using the nematicides. Angel Espinoza, a Nicaraguan lawyer representing victims of DBCP exposure, explained bluntly that the warning labels “were written in English, and the banana workers didn’t know English, and even in English the labels only advised in general terms that the chemical could be dangerous.” Tests conducted on the product in the three decades since its introduction to Nicaragua have begun to illuminate just how dangerous the product really was. In addition to being categorized as “possibly carcinogenic to humans” by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, DBCP has been linked to kidney damage, liver damage, respiratory tract toxicity, testicular damage, and male infertility.

In response to these test results and the discovery of rampant male infertility in a California DBCP production plant, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) banned general use of the potent nematicide in 1979. However, transnational chemical corporations were permitted to continue producing and exporting DBCP to countries with less stringent environmental and labor regulations. Although United Fruit Company stopped use of DBCP after the EPA ban, other transnational fruit corporations like Standard Fruit Company continued to use the product into the 1980s in an effort to avoid production and profit losses. In Nicaragua, leftover stockpiles of DBCP were used on both nationalized and private banana plantations until 1985. The chemical was not formally prohibited until 1993.

As a result of the prolonged use of the toxic nematicide, thousands of former banana plantation workers now suffer the agonizing symptoms of DBCP exposure. For example, Pedro Lezama, a 64-year-old former plantation worker, blames Nemagon for his sterility, asthma, migraines, blurred vision, and chronic body aches. Fifty-two-year-old Teléforo López, a former Chinandegan plantation
worker, suffers from over 30 cancerous tumors in his legs, abdomen, thorax, neck, and back. Julio César Peralta, the eight-year-old son of a plantation worker, suffers from physical deformities, hemorrhaging in his eyes and nose, and a variety of skin problems. Similar health problems afflict thousands of former Chinandegan banana plantation workers and their families who now blame DBCP for their ailment. According to another victim of DBCP exposure, Victorino Espinales, the effects of the chemical’s use in Nicaragua have been devastating. “We’ve arrived at the conclusion that this problem is one very similar to the bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: 25 years later we are suffering the consequences of this deadly product.”

The Fight to be Heard in Court

Twenty years after the last drops of Nemagon were injected into the soils of Chinandega, a controversial movement of over 20,000 former banana plantation workers emerged to demand indemnity from the transnational corporations responsible for their exposure to the “Dew of Death.” The source of the numerous health problems plaguing the former banana plantation workers was not known until the mid-1980s. The man largely responsible for unearthing the culprit agro-chemical was Victorino Espinales Reyes, an ex-Sandinista politician and charismatic leader of ASOTRAEXDAN (the Association of Workers and Former Workers Affected by the Pesticide Nemagon) founded in 2000. Espinales became active with the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) when he was only in his late teens. In 1971, he was assigned to clandestinely organize workers on the María Elsa, Elisa y Alfonso Angelina banana plantations in Chinandega. In order to complete his obligation to the revolutionary movement, Espinales became a plantation worker cutting, packaging, and applying pesticides to the bananas that covered much of the region. After the triumph of the Sandinista revolution in July 1979, Espinales remained active in one of the many banana worker unions and led a commission that same year to understand the widespread occurrence of skin infections, vision problems, depression, male infertility, and other ailments within the sector. However, Espinales would not discover the correlation between DBCP use and these various ailments until 1985. Then working as the President of the Environmental Commission for the National Assembly, Espinales was informed by a group of Costa Rican and Colombian banana worker union leaders that the nematicide that had been applied for years had been linked to many deaths in their countries. After the Sandinistas were voted out of office in the 1990 elections, Espinales decided to devote himself to organizing those affected by DBCP exposure.

Despite its origins in the Sandinista Revolution, the Nicaraguan movement that developed in the 1990s was largely a response to the powerful Costa Rican movement that had developed in the mid-1980s. Like in Nicaragua, banana organizers began to notice an astonishing increase in the prevalence of certain health problems
Confronting the Perils of Globalization

in communities of former banana workers. The first cases of male infertility linked to DBCP exposure were discovered in Costa Rica in 1977. By 1990, some 1,500 Costa Ricans had been diagnosed as infertile as a result of exposure to Nemagon. Costa Rica’s National Insurance Institute (INS), the nationalized health insurance company, bore the financial costs of evaluating the workers. In addition, many of the infertile workers began to file for compensation from the state institute under a provision of the Costa Rican Labor Risk Law that provided payment to individuals who had lost their testicles as a result of their occupation. By 1988, about 500 infertile banana workers had received compensation payments between U.S. $500-$2,000 from the INS.

The INS compensation was unsatisfactory to some of the Costa Rican workers, especially after hearing that Californian workers who had received compensation after pressing legal charges against Dow and Shell for sterility caused by exposure to DBCP had been awarded up to $2.8 million each in the late 1970s. Using connections within the INS, the Costa Rican victims of DBCP exposure were able to contact a Dallas, Texas-based law firm in 1982 to begin legal proceedings in the U.S. Between 1983 and 1990, approximately 400 workers filed suits against Dow Chemical and Shell Oil in U.S. courts. However, the workers were routinely denied access to the U.S. judicial system on the grounds of forum non conveniens, a legal doctrine “which allowed judges to dismiss suits by foreign plaintiffs on the grounds that the forum or court that the plaintiff had chosen was not convenient or proper because the injury or death took place elsewhere.” According to Erika Rosenthal of the Pesticide Action Network, forum non conveniens “has been used as a shield or a way for U.S. corporations to evade liability.” Finally, the Texas Supreme Court overturned forum non conveniens in a 5-4 ruling on March 28, 1990. Within two years, Dow Chemical, Shell Oil, Standard Fruit, and Chiquita Brands had settled out of court with 800 Costa Rican workers for approximately $20 million, with each individual receiving between $1,500 and $15,000 after legal fees.

The case of the Costa Rican banana workers established a strong precedent that allowed a class action lawsuit in which some 26,000 workers from Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, the Philippines, and five other African and Caribbean countries were able to settle out of court in 1997 for $41.5 million, with each worker receiving an average of $1,500. The Costa Rican movement also acted as a catalyst for individual national movements to develop across the global south, including Nicaragua. After learning of the Costa Rican law suit at a grassroots legal service seminar held in San Jose in September 1992, Álvaro Ramírez, the president of the Nicaraguan Association of Democratic Attorneys, began legal proceedings on behalf of 812 Nicaraguan workers affected by Nemagon. The case ended in 1997 when Dow Chemical agreed to pay $22 million to the Nicaraguans. Tragically, only a fraction of the multi-million dollar settlement trickled down into the pockets of the banana workers. It is estimated that the 812
plaintiffs collectively received only $143,000 while the U.S. law firm that filed the case retained an impressive $21.8 million. Additionally, plaintiffs were “forced to sign a document that exonerated the transnationals of further damages caused to the workers and to their children.” These settlements were clearly insufficient to compensate for the suffering of the banana plantation workers.

While these settlements were inadequate, non-U.S. workers for TNCs had at least successfully fought for a forum in which to seek justice against their employers. Other foreign workers who had suffered occupational injuries while employed by TNCs, especially the victims of the 1984 Union Carbide chemical plant explosion in Bhopal, India, were anxious to take advantage of legal opening established by the Costa Rican case and further their own case of corporate accountability. However, the Texas State Legislature prevented such action by reinstating the doctrine of forum non conveniens in 1993. Workers affected by exposure to Nemagon, as well as the Bhopal victims and others struggling against TNCs across the globe would have to find an alternative route to justice.

In Nicaragua, banana workers responded to the doctrine’s reinstatement by seeking redress in the national judicial system. In 1996, Victorino Espinales and other leaders began to lobby the National Assembly to pass a law to provide legal support in future lawsuits brought against the corporations by affected workers. Nicaraguan law firms also continued collecting medical information in coordination with the movement leaders, such as the 1998 report that revealed that 169 of 500 ex-banana workers surveyed suffered from different types of cancer. During this period, workers also continued to spread the word of the correlation between Nemagon and various illnesses and organize behind the leadership of Espinales. However, the movement had little success rallying popular and governmental support.

As a result, the movement that had developed under Espinales began a new more public phase of their struggle. The March 1999 imprisonment of Espinales for allegedly making death threats towards Chinandegan politicians and for threatening the freedom of commerce led the movement to initiate a campaign of direct action. The leader and many of his followers began a hunger strike to protest both Espinales’ imprisonment and to bring greater attention to their cause. The flurry of newspaper coverage that resulted from the hunger strike conveniently highlighted the start of a government commission centered in the city of El Viejo, Chinandega, to investigate the impact of Nemagon in the region.

The workers continued their public acts of direct action in November 1999 by organizing what would become the first of four long marches from Chinandega to Managua. The 133-kilometer trek made by several hundred campesinos was intended to highlight the plight of the victims while articulating their demands to the rest of the nation. According to Espinales, the two main goals of the movement were to secure a fair compensation from Standard Fruit Company and Dole and to pressure the Nicaraguan government to establish a permanent health commission.
in the countryside to both study the various ailments of campesinos and provide medical treatment.\textsuperscript{57}

After being received by Sandinista representatives of the National Assembly, Espinales and the other workers marched across town to the U.S. Embassy to continue their protest. The workers intended to deliver documents containing medical evidence of the correlation between Nemagon exposure and their illnesses along with a letter to U.S. Ambassador Oliver Garza requesting the support of the U.S. government in their continuing lawsuits against the TNCs.\textsuperscript{58} Though they were unable to meet with Garza, another embassy official met with members of the movement and expressed his support for the workers’ right to protest, but did not comment on the U.S. government’s position on their struggle.\textsuperscript{59} Though the workers failed to secure the support of the U.S. government during their visit to the embassy, they certainly “began to make themselves heard” to both the Nicaraguan and U.S. governments.\textsuperscript{60} Their shouts of “We Want Justice” and “No More Exploitation by the Transnational Standard Fruit Company” not only helped to raise the consciousness of the general public, but also acted to inform other former Chinandegan banana plantation workers suffering from similar illnesses of the probable link to the toxic nematicide.\textsuperscript{61}

The next step in the Nemagon victims’ direct action campaign was to rally local support in Chinandega to place greater pressure on the government to provide institutional support to the movement. In the middle of July 2000, approximately 200 former banana and sugar cane workers blocked the main highway at the entrance to the state capital demanding support for an “Emergency Law of Pesticides” that would provide legal assistance to the Nemagon victims, as well as other local issues such as the titling of disputed land in the region. After three days of sustaining the blockade, the Chinandegan police arrested Espinales and three other leaders while allegedly confiscating 18 machetes, various metal pipes, and 130 wooden clubs (which the workers argued were used for coffee grinding) from the protesters. The demonstration was then moved to the police headquarters, where some 100 women affected by Nemagon announced the beginning of a hunger strike in protest of Espinales’ imprisonment. Espinales and the other movement leaders were released later that afternoon and the police promised to respect the workers’ right to protest, so long as they stopped their blockade of the highway.\textsuperscript{62} Though their rights of assembly and expression were preserved, the workers failed to secure government support for their struggle.

Following their demonstration in Chinandega, Espinales and his followers decided to return to Managua to continue pressuring the government to provide them with medical attention and legal assistance in their cases against the producers and users of DBCP. The protesters set out on the week-long journey from Chinandega to Managua in late August and arrived in front of the National Assembly on September 1, 2000, where they began to voice their demands and attract media attention. First, many of the protesters participated in a seven-day long hunger strike to pressure
legislators to help their cause. However, 16 protesters involved in the hunger strike were forced to abandon the demonstration and return to Chinandega after nearly dying as a result of the combination of their pesticide-related illnesses and malnutrition, while four others were hospitalized in Managua.63

As a result of their actions, the workers drew the attention of Human Rights Ombudsman Benjamín Pérez, who visited the protest camp to meet with Espinales and other ex-banana workers. After the meeting, Pérez noted, “The real battle and solution to the problems that are impacting the campesinos affected by Nemagon are inside the National Assembly” and pledged to meet with the Assembly’s directorate to encourage the passage of a proposed bill that would provide legal aid to the workers.64 Despite the support of Pérez, the National Assembly continued to delay the approval of the bill, likely fearing political and economic ramifications from the U.S. government.

In response to the continued inaction, Espinales and the several hundred other protesters issued an ultimatum to the Nicaraguan legislators on September 5, 2000, to pass the law that had been proposed four years earlier in the coming 48 hours, or the workers would stage a nude march through Managua “to show the parliamentarians that we are better citizens than they are, and more true to our word.”65 More tangibly, the “march of the naked” would have forced the public to accept the physical fragility and weakness of the hundreds of campesinos suffering from cancers and skin diseases. The workers hoped their willingness to sacrifice humility would shame the Nicaraguan government and the TNCs, both alienated from mortal impacts of pesticide use, into taking action.

Finally on November 23, 2000, the National Assembly made the historic decision to pass legislation to provide legal support to the former banana plantation workers.66 Law 364, the “Special Law for the Procedure of Law Suits Filed by those Affected by the Use of Pesticides Made with DBCP (Nemagon),” contained a number of provisions intended to circumvent the legal obstacle of *forum non conveniens*. It also established a minimum allowable settlement in order to avoid the outcome of the Costa Rican-led class action lawsuits of the 1990s, which resulted in only meager payouts for the affected workers. According to Bayardo Izaba, a lawyer with the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights, the law was so helpful because it “establishes a very rapid procedure for handling judgments that workers bring before the courts.”67

Specifically, Law 364 mandates that foreign companies must provide a minimum payment of one hundred thousand dollars for each case brought against them in Nicaragua within 90 days to pay for legal expenses and to ensure that workers will receive compensation if the court rules against the TNC. Under the law, the money is returned if the foreign corporation wins the case.68 Most importantly, the law notes that TNCs must forfeit the right to invoke the doctrine of *forum non conveniens* if they refuse to pay the stated sum or hear a case in Nicaraguan courts.69 Thus, workers who are denied access to U.S. courts on the basis of *forum
Confronting the Perils of Globalization

non conveniens have a chance of winning a just compensation by suing the TNCs in Nicaraguan courts, whereas previously TNCs could simply refuse to respect the jurisdiction of the Nicaraguan judicial system after being found liable for damages. Juan J. Dominguez, a U.S.-based lawyer representing some of the thousands of Nicaraguan Nemagon victims in court, noted the importance of Law 364 by stating “for the first time, there’s a law in the country where the tort occurred. It provides defendants with a forum to defend themselves. They can choose either forum and there are adequate laws and measure of damages.”

Overwhelming Obstacles on the Road to Justice

Though Espinales and the other victims of Nemagon exposure made great progress toward holding the TNCs accountable with the passage of Law 364, the universal perils of corporate globalization threatened the movement’s legislative victory. In this era of neo-liberal fundamentalism, where international standardization and market supremacy have achieved status of infallibility, the Nicaraguan government’s decision to provide institutional support to the workers was considered blasphemous by globalization’s most vociferous advocates: TNCs and the U.S. government. Such a challenge to the disparity between the international rights of corporations and those of workers threatened to set a dangerous precedent that undermined status quo international power relations. Thus, the proponents of globalization attempted to exploit their position of relative privilege in the global political-economic arena to pressure the Nicaraguan government to reconsider the new law.

After the passage of Law 364, the targeted TNCs immediately launched a campaign to undermine the legislation. One Dow Chemical spokesperson noted “Special Law 364 contains numerous provisions that simply make it impossible for Dow (or the other targeted companies) to receive a fair trial in Nicaraguan courts. In fact, Law 364 ensures the entry of judgments that are completely inconsistent with due process.” Rather than risk a guilty verdict in the Nicaraguan courts, the TNCs organized to pressure the Nicaraguan government to revoke Law 364. Dole, Dow, and Shell recruited former Clinton and Reagan administration officials to lobby the Bush administration to urge the Nicaraguan government to repeal the law. This strategy was evidently effective, as Secretary of State Colin Powell reportedly discussed the issue of Law 364 with Nicaragua’s Foreign Minister, Norman Caldera. In March 2002, U.S. officials increased their pressure on Caldera. U.S. Ambassador Oliver Garza presented a formal letter to Caldera on March 19 “asking the new government of Enrique Bolaños… to look into the constitutionality of Law 364.” Caldera responded by issuing a letter to the Nicaraguan Attorney General, Francisco Fiallos, noting that the critiques of Law 364 emanating from the U.S. embassy “could be valid.” Finally on September 2, Fiallos issued a formal petition to the Supreme Court of Nicaragua asserting that the law should be “revoked and
declared unconstitutional."75

While U.S. officials were busy pressuring Nicaragua to annul the legislation, Law 364 came under criticism during negotiations for the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). In a round of 2002 negotiations, Mark Smith, a representative of both the Association of American Chambers of Commerce in Latin America and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, made the argument that “the neutralization of Law 364 should take place before trade agreements are signed.”76 Furthermore, the Office of the United States Trade Representative, the body charged principally with drafting and negotiating CAFTA, described Law 364 as consisting of “onerous requirements” such as “truncated judicial proceedings; imposition of a $100,000 non-refundable bond per defendant as a condition for firms to put up a defense in court; escrow requirements of approximately $21 million earmarked for payment of awards; irrefutable presumptions of causation; liquidated damages as minimum liabilities; and no stay of execution of a judgment pending appeal.”77

In reaction to this U.S. campaign, the former banana plantation workers resumed their direct action tactics in an attempt to ensure the preservation of Law 364. On October 20, Espináles’ followers rallied in Chinandega and marched through the provincial capital “demanding that the government respect Law 364 and that their solicitations for support from the government be listened to.”78 Following the local demonstration, some 1,200 former workers again marched the 133 kilometers from Chinandega to Managua with the intent of submitting a document signed by all of the plaintiffs in cases against the TNCs to the U.S. embassy, the president’s home, and finally the National Assembly where they planned to remain “the time that is necessary until this issue is resolved.”79 On November 20, the protesters received promising news from the country’s Supreme Court of Justice. After meeting with Espináles, the President of the Supreme Court of Justice Alba Luz Ramos and the other justices issued a statement announcing that “the opinion expressed by the Attorney General Francisco Fiallos in reference to Law 364 in no way constitutes the judgment of the Court.”80 Furthermore, the National Assembly agreed to call a special session to meet with the movement’s leaders and discuss the government’s position on the issue.

The National Assembly met on November 22, 2002, and issued a resolution advising the Attorney General and other government offices on the Nemagon issue. It instructed both the Human Rights Commission and Labor Issues Commission to assist the workers obtain responses to their “just demands” and recommended further studies to “evaluate the situation of those affected and their families.” After the session, the President of the National Assembly commented that “the doors of the National Assembly are open not only to listen to the people affected by Nemagon, but also to tell them [the victims] that we share and are in solidarity with the pain and suffering of their families and we trust that the damages caused by the use of those chemicals will be repaid in a just manner.”81 Having received the reaffirmation of the constitutionality of Law 364 from the Supreme Court and
Confronting the Perils of Globalization

support from the National Assembly, the protesters returned to Chinandega to continue focusing on the legal proceedings of their law suits against the TNCs.

The victims of DBCP exposure began flooding the Nicaraguan courts with lawsuits brought against Dow, Shell, and Dole after the passage of Law 364 in early 2001. By March 24, 2001, over 400 workers had filed suit demanding a cumulative compensation of more than $400 million from the fruit and chemical companies since the first suit was filed on February 28. Rather than filing a single class-action lawsuit, the workers and their lawyers decided to file multiple suits in groups of approximately 100 workers each because the Nicaraguan courts “would not have the ability to hear it [a class action suit]” as a result of their “limited resources,” according to one of the workers’ lawyers Boanerges Ojeda. By the end of August, 26 separate suits had been filed on behalf of over 3,600 victims of Nemagon exposure to demand a total compensation of more than $3.8 billion. In response, the targeted TNCs had only submitted a letter denying all culpability to the workers’ lawyers. As publicity of the lawsuits saturated Nicaragua, more former banana plantation workers organized to demand compensation from the chemical and fruit companies. In late October 2001, the Nicaraguan judicial system had received 32 separate suits for a total compensation of almost $4.5 billion, and that number continued to grow. Though the workers still had not received a ruling from the Nicaraguan courts during their November 2002 demonstrations, one of their lawyers Walter Gutiérrez took the media opportunity to discuss the importance of the lawsuits. Gutiérrez noted that the suits had the potential to set an international precedent that could be used by global victims of Nemagon and other products that “have caused equal or worse disasters to the humanity of the people in poorer countries.”

The first set of rulings on the Nemagon cases was issued on December 11, 2002, by the Third District Civil Court just weeks after the former banana plantation workers had left their protest camp in Managua with support promised by the National Assembly. The victims enjoyed another pivotal victory when the Nicaraguan court ruled in favor of 583 plaintiffs and ordered Dow, Shell, and Dole to pay a sum of $490 million for damages caused by DBCP exposure. The ruling was significant for a number of reasons. First, it provided still greater media coverage of the issue, thereby acting as a recruiting agent and stimulus for greater public and governmental support. Many protesters currently demanding indemnity from the TNCs cite the ruling as their motivation for joining the movement. Furthermore, the ruling provided a much needed source of hope and inspiration for the thousands of workers who had been suffering from fatal illnesses and struggling for a just compensation with little success for years. One of the lawyers representing the workers commented “with this sentence we see a light in the tunnel for them.” More concretely, the ruling meant that the case would finally be heard in U.S. courts under the stipulations of Law 364 and with the support of the Nicaraguan government where the TNCs could no longer elude responsibility if found guilty.
Once heard, the case would represent the first of its kind as a toxic damages suit filed by foreign workers against U.S.-based corporations. While the ruling was a huge success for the workers’ movement and inspired one of the group’s lawyers to proclaim “we will go to the United States to pound on the doors of the transnationals,” many obstacles remained between the victims and a just compensation. First, the ruling only represented a decision for nine cumulative cases. By mid-December 2002, 74 more cases awaited rulings from the Third District Civil Court Judge Vida Benavente. Secondly, the TNCs were spurred by the verdict to revive their assault against the constitutionality of Law 364. Michael Carter, a representative of Dole Food Company, traveled to Nicaragua shortly after the ruling and told local newspapers with great confidence that the only way to resolve the issue would be an out of court settlement, since U.S. courts would not accept the cases as dictated by an unconstitutional law. Also, the TNCs affected by Judge Benavente’s ruling almost immediately communicated their refusal to pay such a large sum to workers in the global South. After citing the fact that Hawaiian pineapple farm workers who suffered from DBCP exposure had received more than $1 million per person, lawyer Ángel Espinoza informed the press “they [the TNCs] say that it isn’t the same to pay a North American as it is to pay a Nicaraguan… They say that they will pay what is just, but they believe that what is just is $6,000 maximum… They say that what we are asking is irrational.”

The former banana plantation workers and their lawyers could do little to respond to the criticism, and instead focused on attempting to maintain a cohesive and unified movement in the face of growing fractionalization. Of particular concern was a general assembly of Nemagon victims called by the Nicaraguan law firm Provost and Umphrey on February 9, 2003. Though it legitimately represented some former workers in cases filed against 10 different fruit and chemical corporations, the firm attempted to capitalize on the success of the main law firm representing the movement, Ojeda, Gutiérrez, Espinoza, and Associates, to attract more potential clients. Provost and Umphrey invited two U.S.-based lawyers to attend the general assembly and speak about the legal details of the case and the possibility of an out of court settlement, even though the firm had not yet received a ruling on any of the cases that they had filed. In an attempt to further associate the firm with the mutual success of Victorino Espinales’ direct action tactics and the Ojeda law firm, the U.S. lawyers discussed the importance of the “marches, protests, and public demonstrations” carried out by the workers that had created a “favorable environment in the United States.” Lawyer Ángel Espinoza of the Ojeda firm responded to the general assembly called by the Provost and Umphrey firm by stating, “[L]acking any sense of ethics, they [Provost and Umphrey] have tried to make the people and their clients think that the ruling [of December 11] was won by them when that is not true, and in doing so have wanted to give themselves credit that isn’t theirs.” Though the movement had never been completely unified under a single organization and several law firms represented smaller groups of victims
of DBCP exposure, the different factions had cooperated and co-existed mostly harmoniously until late 2002.

After months of eagerly awaiting further rulings from the Third District Civil Court on the other Nemagon cases and hoping for progress in the efforts to move the case ruled upon on December 11 to the United States, Espinales and his followers began to lose patience and issued demands for the Nicaraguan judicial system to expedite the workers’ cases. According to Espinales, it was imperative to quicken the legal process because “in many of the plaintiffs’ cases... delay could mean death.” Espinales hoped that a public demonstration on May 17, 2003, with the participation of the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights, lawyers representing the workers, various human rights and environmental NGOs, and delegations of former banana plantation workers from Costa Rica, Honduras, and Panama who were also victims of DBCP exposure would spur the Nicaraguan courts to expedite the cases. The workers did not receive a response from the Nicaraguan judicial system despite the show of international and cross-sector solidarity.

Moreover, the illusion of unity presented in the May 2003 rally was quickly supplanted by reports of growing divisions within the movement. Seemingly due to the active campaign by the law firm Provost and Umphrey, many former banana plantation workers began to defect from the Ojeda, Gutiérrez, and Espinoza firm that had won the December 11 ruling after complaining of exorbitant monthly fees. According to thousands of protesters who gathered in Chinandega’s National Stadium on August 27, 2003, to demand the payment of an indemnity from the TNCs and voice other complaints, the Ojeda firm had been charging the former banana plantation workers 67 million cordobas per month (roughly $4 million USD) for representing the movement in court. Such fees had a devastating impact on the individual level. In the case of one campesina involved in the suit, Segunda Gómez Gutiérrez had to pay a 362,000 cordoba fee (about U.S. $22,000) to the Ojeda law firm although she hadn’t received a cent in compensation from the TNCs. Among the other criticisms voiced at the protest was a denouncement of the movement’s charismatic leader Victorino Espinales. Some 500 workers alleged that Espinales had falsified documents and forged their signatures in order to maintain their names on the list of plaintiffs represented by the Ojeda law firm. The accusation resulted in a government investigation. Although the investigation produced no evidence of such manipulation, the disparagement of Espinales reflected the growing disagreement within the movement over tactics and leaders.

The movement’s divisions were compounded by an announcement from Dole Fruit Company in early September that the corporation refused to recognize the jurisdiction of the Nicaraguan courts. Representatives of the fruit company argued that the Nicaraguan court had failed to make a neutral ruling on the case, which jeopardized the judicial system’s competency. As a result, Dole requested that the case be transferred to the United States to be heard by a neutral judge. Though the critique of the Nicaraguan legal system was insulting to the lawyers
involved in the case, the former banana workers would finally have the opportunity to present their case in a forum from which the TNCs could not escape if found guilty.

Many of the plaintiffs involved in the suit were hopeful that a just compensation was just within reach now that the case was being transferred to the United States. However, their hopes were soon dashed by crucial translation errors that threatened to invalidate the entire case. The first error discovered by the U.S. court in the translated suit was that the defendant Dole Food Company had been misrepresented as “Dole Food Corporation.”\(^9\) Other errors were later detected in the suit, such as the inclusion of Standard Fruit and Vegetables as a defendant, a subsidiary of Standard Fruit Company that was not founded until 1998, long after the workers’ exposure to DBCP.\(^10\) Days later, Judge Nora M. Manella of the Central District Court of California based in Los Angeles ruled that Dole would be dropped from the suit because of the translation error, and that a decision would be made by November 3, 2003, as to whether the case would continue or be closed. Despite the growing possibility of leaving the U.S. courts without even presenting his case, lawyer Walter Gutiérrez noted that the exclusion of Dole from the suit was of little importance. “Each one of them [the TNCs] is responsible for the total amount. In other words, one can pay the $498 million or they can divide it between two, or divide it among three. That is their problem! But yes, they are going to have to pay.”\(^101\)

Gutiérrez’s remarks proved to be premature. After discovering more translation errors and “legal irregularities,” in the December 11 ruling, Judge Manella closed the workers’ case. In response, the law firm Ojeda, Gutiérrez, and Espinoza, which was responsible for the case filed with errors, blamed the failure on Victorino Espinales and other law firms, accusing both of being affiliated with Dole. The firm also accused Judge Manella of closing the case for political reasons, citing “a relationship between the judge, her father, and the government of President George Bush.”\(^102\) Espinales responded in typical fashion by threatening protests and direct action against the law firm in the days following the announcement and lamented that the closure of the case was “a death sentence” for the victims awaiting compensation.\(^103\)

With the plaintiffs’ hopes dashed and their internal conflicts becoming more pronounced, the TNCs attempted to put a final end to the workers’ movement by filing a countersuit against the law firm and plaintiffs involved in the error-ridden case. Dole submitted a countersuit under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) law on December 23, 2003, against the State of Nicaragua, the workers, and the law firm representing the movement in court. The U.S. federal law, which was created in 1970 to prosecute organized crime rings, was now being used by the TNCs to demand repayment for the slander suffered by the corporations involved in a fraudulent suit founded on fabricated medical evidence. The suit also alleged that in addition to not actually suffering from exposure to DBCP, many
of the victims had never worked on the banana plantations in question.\textsuperscript{104} Shell and Dow Chemical Company followed Dole’s lead and submitted similar suits on January 21, 2004, but initiated the process in civil court instead of attempting to invoke the RICO law in their case.\textsuperscript{105}

To the Streets Again

As the TNCs and the U.S. government sought to disempower the Nemagon workers’ movement, Espinales and ASOTRAEXDAN responded by reaffirming the persistent power of the Nicaraguan nation-state and by harnessing nationalist opposition against foreign intervention to their struggle. Yet ASOTRAEXDAN’s attempt to represent itself as an icon of Nicaraguan nationalism had great potential not only for unity but also for conflict as the movement’s breed of nationalism was heavily associated with the country’s most powerful anti-imperialist ideology: Sandinismo. Though the various factions of Nemagon workers in Nicaragua apparently agreed with Espinales’ declaration that “Sandinismo is not just Daniel Ortega [the leader of the FLSN],”\textsuperscript{106} they deeply disagreed about what precisely defined Sandinismo—a conflict that became especially intense after the FSLN leadership struck an infamous pact with their main rival, the ruling PLC, in August 1999.\textsuperscript{107} Nemagon victims already opposed to Espinales’ leadership thus turned even more against ASOTRAEXDAN, as its charismatic leader sought not only to represent the entire Nemagon workers’ movement but also to embody a new form of Sandinismo.

Espinales’ turn toward a greater embrace of nationalism first became visible when he and other members of ASOTRAEXDAN planned another 12-day march from Chinandega to Managua. The organizers of the march had ambitious expectations for their third trek to the capitol, estimating that at least 2,500 participants would leave from Chinandega, and at least 3,500 more would join en route as the protesters passed through Chichigalpa, León, and Managua, where 6,000 would weave through the streets.\textsuperscript{108} According to Espinales, the 6,000 participants intended to “protest in front of the National Assembly, Presidential House, and Supreme Court to demand that these state institutions assume a legal position in support of the ex-workers… and condemn what the gringo companies did to us.”\textsuperscript{109} The workers also hoped to force the government of President Enrique Bolaños to publicly oppose the RICO suit filed by Dole, which “branded them [the workers] as international gangsters.”\textsuperscript{110}

The march left Chinandega on the morning of January 31 with Victorino Espinales leading the group and waving a full-sized Nicaraguan flag in an appeal to nationalist sentiment to rally popular support behind the former banana plantation workers against the foreign corporations. Espinales’ tactics worked well. In a poll conducted by the conservative paper \textit{La Prensa} several days after the beginning of
the march, all five Managuans interviewed expressed deep support for the protesters. All five also emphasized the just nature of their struggle, including bus driver Efraín Centeno who simply argued, “We should support them because they are fighting for a just cause.” The marchers also won the support of key government officials, especially Sandinista politicians on the Labor and Human Rights Commissions. However, this support was achieved at a high cost. Three protesters died during the march and more than 600 were forced to abandon the protest and return to Chinandega due to deteriorating health. Still, more than 5,000 workers made it to Managua by February 11 resolved to stay as long as necessary to achieve their goals in the protest. The former banana plantation workers were no longer willing to be ignored by the Nicaraguan government. In this regard, the march represented the forced recognition of the fatal externalities of the global banana trade that had remained hidden from global consumers for decades. As Espinales noted, he wanted Bolaños to be forced to see his body and “realize that the suit that they have filed against the North American transnationals is just.”

Once they had established themselves in the desolate field across from the National Assembly, the former banana plantation workers began to threaten more drastic measures to achieve their goals in the protest. By February 14, the workers were demanding that the government provide the victims of DBCP exposure a permanent personal pension to cover their basic subsistence costs, as well as guaranteed medical attention from the Health Ministry. After several days passed without a response from President Bolaños, the workers threatened more hunger strikes, crucifixions, and naked marches. Espinales expressed his desire for “the people to see that we are willing to die of hunger in front of all of the people” as a means of shaming the government to take action to avoid culpability in the starvation of the innocent workers. Thus, 130 men and women who had made the march to Managua initiated an indefinite hunger strike on February 17 to demand a meeting with President Bolaños. Espinales recognized President Bolaños previous disregard for agreements signed with the workers, but explained his fixation upon meeting with the President by questioning the competence of other governmental bodies. “We don’t want anything to do with bureaucratic commissions that don’t resolve anything. It has been one year since we signed an accord in which the same President Bolaños and the Attorney General of the Republic agreed to support us, but they have lied to us and they haven’t complied with anything.”

Despite their public pressure, the workers’ hunger strike failed to force the government to negotiate. The strike was ended after three days when doctors advised the workers that they would need medication and food if they wanted to continue struggling for their compensations. Rather than accept defeat, the workers modified their tactics in hope of forcing a meeting with the President. Following a march and protest in front of the U.S. Embassy in late February, the workers rallied in front of the Presidential House on March 5 carrying large crucifixes and repeating the threat that “we are ready to die here until we have obtained justice.”
Confronting the Perils of Globalization

The government still refused to respond.

At the same time, a long-time division in the workers’ movement culminated in a massive public dispute in the capital city. Benjamín Chavez, a former journalist for the Nicaraguan newspaper El Nuevo Diario, had become the spokesperson for a group of approximately 2,000 Chinandegans led by the agricultural labor union leader Francisco Ruiz calling themselves the “legitimate victims of Nemagon.” This faction of former banana plantation workers was one of several labor organization and law firms representing Nemagon victims that disapproved of Espinales’ confrontational tactics and instead channeled their energy into the legal process of suing the TNCs. On February 24, some 500 workers in the Chávez/Ruiz camp arrived by bus in Managua to denounce Espinales and the other “imposters” camped out in front of the National Assembly. In addition to seeking government support, the “legitimate victims of Nemagon” seized the opportunity to further denigrate Espinales. Benjamín Chávez voiced his opinion that, “Victorino Espinales is distorting the true struggle of the banana workers, he knows that the majority of those who are there with him, in that protest, haven’t even peeled a banana, but he places them there in order to take a part of the indemnity in case they win against the transnationals.” The Ojeda, Gutiérrez, and Espinoza law firm also took advantage of the opportunity to criticize Espinales, adding, “The whole world says that he [Espinales] receives money from the transnationals to ruin the lawsuit.” In an attempt to resolve the conflict, the Office of the Ombudsman of Human Rights announced that it would provide medical examinations to both groups of workers to determine who were the real victims of agro-chemical exposure. Though the Chávez/Ruiz group agreed to the proposal, Espinales and the members of ASOTRAEXXDAN refused, noting, “the Ombudsman is not competent to determine who is ill… that is the exclusive responsibility of the courts.”

In response to growing internal divisions in the workers’ movement, the Espinales group received an upsurge of support from local individuals and organizations. Students and artists performed concerts for those camped in front of the National Assembly. Human rights and church organizations donated food, medicine, and building materials, and the renowned Mejía Godoy brothers, popular revolutionary musicians now critical of the FSLN, offered solidarity and support. Michelle Najlis, a theologian and poet who visited the protesters, later reflected that the workers “have mobilized our consciences. They figured out how to earn the respect of Nicaraguan society, not only because of the legitimacy of their demands, but also because of their exemplary attitudes and strategies. They have helped awaken civil society. Their actions should be the first steps on a new road in Nicaraguan society.” Espinales lamented, “It is a shame that the same sensitivity doesn’t exist in the government.” However, more government officials had begun to pay attention to the former banana plantation workers. In response to the arrival and criticisms of the Chávez/Ruiz group, the Secretary General of the FSLN Daniel Ortega urged the workers to “unite and struggle” together against the TNCs.
The protesters received more good news on March 2, 2004, when the Nicaraguan Judge Vida Benavente issued another ruling in favor of 81 female workers for a sum of $82.9 million. According to the judge, the women suffered from uterine cancer caused by DBCP exposure while working on the plantations, as well as exposure through contaminated drinking water sources. The ruling was of particular significance given the traditional exclusion of women from consideration in labor struggles and the predominant machista culture that exists in Nicaragua. The March 2 ruling certainly gave hope to other female victims of Nemagon exposure who continue to face discrimination within the movement for compensation today. Indeed, many movement members consider the women’s demands illegitimate, some even arguing that the women joined the struggle for lack of anything better to do. In response to this marginalization, a group of 50 women have organized to denounce the lawyers and movement leaders representing the victims of Nemagon exposure for refusing to represent women despite manipulating them into participating in public protests.

As the protest outside the National Assembly continued into mid-March, more government officials voiced their support for the workers’ movement. On March 16, 2004, the Ombudsman of Human Rights Benjamín Pérez requested that U.S. authorities use the same diligence to force the manufacturers and users of Nemagon to respect the human rights of those affected by the chemical that the government uses to force nation-states to respect citizens’ human rights. The same day, the popular Sandinista mayor of Managua Herty Lewites visited the protest camp and promised to pressure President Bolaños to take action on the issue. The mayor added that in addition to support from the municipal government, “I believe that it is also the responsibility of the national government to see this problem.”

Finally after 40 days camped in front of the National Assembly and after repeated threats of starvation, live burials, naked marches, and crucifixion, President Bolaños conceded to increasing pressure and met with the protesters. After a day of negotiation, Bolaños, Espinales, Benjamín Chávez, as well as other government officials and movement leaders signed the El Raizón Accords on March 20, 2004. The agreement consisted of five points that established an outline for action by both the government and the workers’ movement. The first point mandated that the divided movement must unite their efforts and create a single petition of demands for the government’s own use and to present to the TNCs. Secondly, the government agreed to provide legal assistance to the victims and provide the movement with lawyers based in Washington to assist in their U.S. law suits. Third, Bolaños agreed to send the Ombudsman of Human Rights Benjamín Pérez to the U.N. International Human Rights Convention in Geneva, Switzerland with two movement representatives to present their case. Fourth, the government agreed to protect Law 364 from revision. Finally, the protesters agreed to end their protest in front of the National Assembly in exchange for government-provided transportation back to Chinandega and promises of medical attention. Espinales
expressed cautious optimism after the accords were signed, stating “[F]or now, we will leave satisfied, but we will continue in the struggle.” As the thousands of former banana plantation workers boarded buses to return home, one protester observed, “I only hope that I don’t have to come back to Managua to protest, it is hard for an old woman to sleep on the ground.”

Just days after the agreement had been signed and the protesters had returned to Chinandega, the El Raizón Accords came under criticism from human rights organizations and began to crumble. On March 26, Benjamín Pérez announced that he would not comply with Bolaños’ request to attend the UN meeting in Geneva to present the Nemagon issue. The Ombudsman defended his decision by noting the short notice provided by Bolaños and adding, “I can’t travel in an improvised manner to an event of such magnitude.” In light of this failure to abide by the El Raizón Accords, the legal advisor for the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights Bayardo Izabá argued, “We think that the president lied to those affected by Nemagon exposure. He is a liar or an irresponsible person,” in addition to asserting that Bolaños had hastily signed the agreement to rid Managua of the protesters in preparation for an upcoming governmental summit.

Despite the initial failures of the El Raizón Accords, the workers’ hopes for a just compensation from the TNCs were rekindled when another suit was filed in the Los Angeles courts in mid-April. Juan José Dominguez, a personal injury attorney based in Los Angeles, filed the suit against the TNCs alleging that the corporations produced and used toxic substances while intentionally withholding information about their risks from the workers. The suit was filed on behalf of 25 individual plaintiffs, though the lawyer represented more than 10,000 victims of Nemagon exposure at the time. With the support provided by Law 364, Dominguez confidently stated, “Now there is no escape for the multinationals. The defendants will have to choose the country that pleases them to fight this case.” Dominguez continued, “We invite them [the TNCs] to fight in Los Angeles if they think that the system here in Nicaragua is corrupt.” The Los Angeles courts formally accepted the case on April 20, 2004, re-opening not only the possibility for compensation of the Nicaraguan workers, but a new era of international corporate accountability. Dominguez noted, “This case can set a legal precedent and be an example for all nations, that the multinational corporations can be held responsible for illicit actions that result in injuries, damages, or exploitation of citizens.”

The former banana plantation workers continued their attempts to recruit more victims of DBCP exposure into their movement as they pursued legal action in the United States. Branching out beyond the banana plantations of Chinandega, the movement expanded into tobacco and sugar cane growing regions of the northern state of Estelí. Although the sugar and tobacco plantations were either state-owned or domestically managed, workers in the regions assert that the plantations had used pesticides derived from DBCP, produced by the TNCs Shell and Dow, and that they now suffer the negative health effects of exposure.
Ethan Grundberg

on the tobacco and sugar cane plantations, many workers in Estelí migrated west to Chinandega after the annual coffee harvest to seek seasonal employment on banana plantations. Thus, the National Association of People Affected by Poison officially opened an office in Estelí in early July 2004, representing an estimated 700 victims of DBCP exposure.\textsuperscript{143}

The March of No Return

While the government had provided some institutional support for their movement, the workers understood that they would have to continue to pressure the National Assembly and President to comply with their promises. However, they were unable to use traditional sources of influence and power to interact with the state. Instead, Espinales and the other members of ASOTRAEXDAN repeatedly used the threat of creating a public spectacle at the expense of their own bodies to simultaneously shame the government, create public outrage and support, and reaffirm their status as victims of violence entitled to justice. This tactic follows an emerging trend of historically marginalized communities in Latin America using public performance as “a form of political action based on visual display, undertaken by specifically positioned social groups and actors attempting to stamp society with their own agenda.”\textsuperscript{144}

Much of the workers’ ire resulted from the Nicaraguan government’s refusal to implement an effective medical assistance program for those affected by DBCP exposure. By September 2004, the workers were running out of patience and began to seek the assistance of the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH) to pressure the government to comply with the El Raizón Accords. In response, CENIDH made several phone calls to officials in the Ministry of Health, and considered rallying international solidarity if no changes were made. CENIDH’s legal advisor Bayardo Izabá threatened, “If a positive response does not exist, CENIDH will see it necessary to begin an international petition to denounce the attitude of the government, that it has put the health and lives of millions of people affected by the pesticide in danger.”\textsuperscript{145}

Despite these threats, the promised governmental medical attention never came to fruition. The Ministry of Health explained that the failure to attend to the needs of the Nemagon victims was a result of a chronic lack of resources. “The doctors declare themselves bankrupt because of the lack of materials.”\textsuperscript{146} The workers were reluctant to accept the excuse of the practical impossibility of establishing an effective health care program and redirected their dissatisfaction again at the National Assembly in hopes of increasing funding for the Ministry. “The members of parliament told us that they would support our demand, we hope they will now support us because the lack of medicine has killed many of us campesinos,” noted Espinales.\textsuperscript{147} The workers added further pressure on the government by threatening to return to Managua in January if their demand to increase allocated funds for the
Confronting the Perils of Globalization

Ministry of Health by 100 million cordobas (approximately $6.2 million USD) in the 2005 operating budget.  

After another month of governmental inaction, Espinales and the members of ASOTRAEXDAN decided that they had no other option but to return to Managua to protest in front of the National Assembly for the fourth time since 1999. In explaining the decision, Espinales ranted, “They [the government] have promised us everything, they have signed agreements upon agreements with us, they have told us that they are going to help us, they have formed commissions upon commissions, but later no one complies, they run from us to their offices, they don’t meet with us and only when we protest do they return our calls… now we want real justice.”149 While Espinales’ sentiments were widely shared among the former banana plantation workers, the 4,200 members of the Chávez/Ruiz faction refused to participate in the planned march. Chávez explained the decision by arguing that he and the law firm representing his faction (Ojeda, Gutiérrez, and Espinoza) had good relations with the Ministry of Health and suggested that it would be inhumane to force the ill to walk 133 kilometers to Managua. Nonetheless, Espinales continued planning the march and sought solidarity from other sectors, such as the newly mobilized sugar cane workers in Estelí, landless campesinos movements, and other human rights activists.150 Espinales estimated that 8-10,000 people would leave Chinandega on the morning of February 20, 2005, in a massive display of discontent with the government’s handling of the Nemagon issue. The protesters, who would walk 12 kilometers per day to reach Managua in early March, expressed three principal demands before their departure. First, they reiterated their demand for a 100 million cordoba allocation for medical attention in the 2005 government operating budget. Second, they demanded the provision of an economic pension to the former workers to cover basic living expenses. Finally, they insisted upon a revision of the February 2004 El Raizón Accords, which had been largely ignored by the government.151

Approximately 3,000 protesters left as planned on the morning of February 20 with Espinales again leading the march carrying the Nicaraguan flag on his shoulder. After the march had begun, Espinales announced the workers’ intentions to remain in Managua until a new agreement was not just signed, but fulfilled by the government. “This is a march of no return, because we are going to demand not just the signing of agreements like we did in El Raizón in 2004, but also compliance with those agreements.”152

The first to respond to the massive protest was not the Nicaraguan government, but rather the TNCs targeted by the movement. Just days after the protesters settled in front of the National Assembly in Managua, Dole Food Company spokesperson Humberto Hurtado began issuing statements criticizing Law 364 and discrediting the movement. Hurtado asserted, “There is nothing to discuss, unless they [the workers] withdraw their lawsuits and abandon Law 364.”153 The next day, Hurtado dismissed the claims that DBCP exposure was responsible for the array of illnesses
the former banana plantation workers suffer. “According to trustworthy scientific
evidence, DBCP, known as Nemagon, only produced a decrease in sperm in the men
who worked in the factories that produced the chemical.” He continued, “There
is no reliable scientific evidence that links Nemagon with all of the other illnesses
in the people who applied this product.” Dole’s arguments did not convince the
more than 12,000 workers involved in lawsuits against the TNCs, and only elicited
more fiery words from movement leader Victorino Espinales, who called them
“idiotic and ridiculous.”

The first signs of a governmental response to the new protest came from
political parties rather than the government. On March 5, the leftist Sandinista
Party (FSLN) passed a party resolution in favor of supporting the protesters and
attempting to obtain government support for their demands. Various members of
the center-right Liberal Constitutionalist Party (PLC) also expressed formal support
for the workers and pledged to fight for government action. However, the workers
were distrustful of the promised support after years of experiencing institutional
deceit. “We do not want to be the political flag of anyone, of any party,” stated
Espinales. He continued, “Until now we have navigated with the blue and white of
the country, and as an organization…we are apolitical, and as a result we distrust
the burst of politicians beginning to offer help who never give it concretely.” This
contempt for the PLC and the FSLN echoed popular disillusionment with national
politics in post-Pacto Nicaragua.

However, the Bolaños government still refused to react to the Nemagon
protest. As a result, both the workers and other organizations began to increase
pressure on the president to resolve the conflict. In mid-March, the new Human
Rights Ombudsman Omar Cabezas, a popular former revolutionary leader,
denounced the Nicaraguan state and the targeted TNCs in front of the Inter-
American Court of Human Rights, an institution of the Organization of American
States based in Costa Rica, for violating the human rights of those affected by DBCP
exposure. In addition to Cabezas’ official denouncement, the workers issued a
threat for violent action after the government announced that it was not planning
to address the Nemagon issue before leaving for a weeklong vacation during Holy
Week. Espinales announced the formation of what he called the “sacrifice brigade”
on March 8. “There will be 90 men. 30 will bury themselves alive, 30 will crucify
themselves, and another 30 will begin a hunger strike. If they [the government]
remember us some day, they will find a cemetery here.” Moreover, the workers
threatened self-immolation if the government refused to provide the money for
medical attention promised in the El Raizón Accords. Sixty-five-year-old Ramón
Catalino Suazo Molina, one of the protesters, explained the seemingly extreme
tactics by observing, “Desperation can make you obligated to do anything.”

As Holy Week approached, the government had still refused to meet
with representatives from the movement or take action on the issue. In response,
Espinales and ASOTRAEXDAN issued a new set of demands and threatened self-
immolation if the government refused to discuss the list in the next 24 hours. First, the workers demanded the immediate ban of a group of 12 agro-chemicals still used in Nicaragua known as the “dirty dozen,” such as Aldicarb and other highly toxic chemicals that have been linked to negative health effects. Second, housing and land for more than 3,000 Chinandegans were requested from the government. Finally, the workers reiterated their demand for a government-sponsored pension to cover the cost of living. After releasing the demands, Espinales warned, “if they [the members of parliament] leave for vacation today, we are going to begin to execute our plans.”

Though Espinales was the target of harsh criticism from CENIDH, lawyer Walter Gutiérrez, and Benjamín Chávez for “forcing them [the workers] to make risky decisions, like the sham of crucifixion, burials, and immolations,” the pressure was effective. The workers were able to pressure the government to agree to implement the El Raizón Accords and begin a census of those affected by Nemagon. Bolaños also agreed to obtain 80 visas for workers and movement leaders to travel to the U.S. to provide legal testimonies and continue the judicial process. Unlike previous agreements that pacified the protesters but were never implemented, the workers immediately began to enjoy the benefits of the new agreement signed on March 18. Within days, the Ministry of Health had devoted 75 employees to opening five health centers in Managua exclusively for treating and testing the victims of DBCP exposure. Though children of the former banana plantation workers were not granted access to the centers despite allegations that they suffered genetic illnesses related to the agro-chemical, the Ministry of Health’s actions represented a huge victory for the protesters.

The workers had little time to celebrate their achievement before receiving surprising news of secret negotiations between Dole Food Company and the Nicaraguan government to resolve the Nemagon issue out of court without consulting the victims. In late March, the BBC published a report in which Dole’s Executive Vice President Michael Carter confessed to having negotiated with the Nicaraguan Attorney General Alberto Novoa to arrange a settlement. Dole proposed that the Nicaraguan government permit the fruit corporation to return to Nicaragua, increase direct foreign investment, and create thousands of jobs in the impoverished country. In exchange, the Nicaraguan government would abolish Law 364, eliminating the legislative support that had allowed the workers to circumvent forum non conveniens and file suit in the United States. Such action would almost certainly ensure the failure of the thousands of lawsuits against the TNCs representing a sum of almost $17 billion. Though the government denied negotiating with Dole, the allegations infuriated the workers’ movement. Espinales responded to the news by exclaiming, “We do not accept that while the government publicly promises to help us, they are talking under the table with the transnationals to throw out our lawsuits. That would be treason…” The government has steadfastly denied the charges.

Already enraged by the allegations of secret negotiations between Dole and
the government, the workers sought to force Human Rights Ombudsman Omar Cabezas to fulfill his promise to represent the protesters’ interests in the government. On the afternoon of April 7, a large group of workers marched to the office of Cabezas to demand an immediate meeting with him. Although Cabezas agreed to meet with Espinales and other representatives, the accompanying workers occupied the building to further pressure Cabezas to comply with their demands. After three hours of negotiations, the workers left peacefully having reached an agreement with Cabezas that included continuing to hold the government accountable for the March 18 agreement and presenting the Nemagon issue to the 61st Session of the United Nations Human Rights Commission on April 11, 2005, in Geneva.\footnote{169}

The following week, the protesters initiated another direct action campaign targeting the members of the National Assembly for refusing to meet with the workers. On April 14, a group of 30 began an indefinite hunger strike. Espinales communicated the group’s intentions of blocking the streets, expanding the hunger strike, and beginning self-immolations if the police intervened and members of parliament continued to refuse to meet with them.\footnote{170} These more conventional movement tactics were augmented by attempts to secure greater local and international support to pressure the government to reach an agreement with the protesters. Local human rights groups and religious organizations began to provide the protest camp with food donations and even agreed to establish a solidarity camp beginning May 1. Deborah García, a representative of one of the religious organizations involved in the solidarity camp, explained their actions by arguing, “Because of the suffering of all of them, we are trying to make them [the government] listen and not forget these companions.”\footnote{171} Movement leaders even tried to contact the leftist documentary filmmaker Michael Moore to raise international consciousness of their struggle.\footnote{172}

In the face of mounting pressure, the Nicaraguan government finally reached a comprehensive agreement with the protesters on May 13. The 19-point agreement was signed both by government officials, representatives of the Nemagon victims’ movement, affected sugar cane workers, and members of the landless campesinos movement after the protesters had spent 73 days marching and camping in front of the National Assembly. Among the provisions of the agreement, the affected banana and sugar cane workers were granted 80 visas to travel to the U.S. to provide testimony in their lawsuits, lifetime health care, inclusion of some 17,000 former workers into existing social security and state pension programs, acceptance into the government-sponsored program Pound for Pound to provide basic foodstuffs, the establishment of environmental impact studies in communities potentially contaminated with agro-chemicals, the development of housing projects for landless and homeless movement members, and the provision of 300 coffins per year to bury those passing away from Nemagon-related illness. In exchange, the protesters were provided with free transportation back to their homes in Chinandega and Estelí. However, 300 protesters elected to stay behind to ensure that the newly signed agreement was enacted and to further pressure government officials who had

Ethan Grundberg
communicated with the lawyers representing the TNCs. Unlike the previous El Raizón Accords of 2004, with which the government failed to comply, the May 13 agreement received formal institutional support from several international human rights organizations, such as CENIDH and the International Federation of Human Rights. Julio César Cruz, a former banana worker on the El Relámpago plantation, explained that he was pleased that such organizations were involved “because in this way they protect the struggle at the international level.”

The May 13 agreement represented a huge victory for the victims of Nemagon exposure and initiated a deluge of progress in the movement. The first workers arrived in the United States in late July to begin providing witness statements to be used in the U.S. lawsuits against Dole, Dow, and Shell. Weeks later, the workers received news of another judicial victory in Nicaragua. Chinandegan Judge Socorro Toruño ruled in favor of 150 former banana workers in early August for damages resulting from DBCP exposure for a sum of $97 million. By the end of the month, the more than 15,000 workers involved in lawsuits against the fruit and chemical corporations were informed that the Ninth Circuit U.S. Federal Court of Appeals had issued a ruling in support of the initial December 11, 2002, Nicaraguan verdict in favor of 464 workers for $489.4 million. Though the ruling has been appealed and is still in court, Walter Gutiérrez assured workers that, “We are struggling to bring justice to our Nicaraguan brothers and so we will continue on until we have won all of the lawsuits in Nicaragua, and although the companies run from us, we will follow them to China or Africa if it is possible.” Finally, the National Assembly reaffirmed its support for the Nemagon victims in mid-September by passing a resolution re-asserting the constitutionality of Law 364. Satisfied with the successful implementation of the promised programs and the renewed support for Law 364, the remaining several hundred protesters camped in front of the National Assembly decided to return home on October 9, 2005.

However, the workers’ struggle for a just compensation from the TNCs remains riddled with obstacles. In addition to having to overcome the improbability of winning a lawsuit against the massive TNCs that have promised “a vigorous defense” in court, the movement continues to struggle with crippling internal divisions. Since the negotiation of the May 13 agreement, Espinales has been criticized for everything from withholding the passports intended for plaintiffs testifying in the U.S. suits to stealing a 1995 Isuzu Rodeo, which he claims was given to him by U.S. lawyer Juan José Domínguez. Movement leaders made progress towards unification in late October by consolidating eight separate factions representing a total of 23,333 former workers under the leadership of various law firms, the Rural Workers Association (ATC), and other labor organizations. However, Espinales’ organization ASOTRAEXDAN was excluded from the unified body and accused of fraudulently attempting to represent the entirety of the Nemagon victims’ movement. Espinales has also been working with the Latin American Regional Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Tobacco, and
Allied Workers Association (Rel-Uita, based in Montevideo, Uruguay) to found a new workers’ center scheduled to open in February 2006 to coordinate multi-sector labor movements in Nicaragua and continue organizing victims of DBCP exposure.  

Conclusion

Although Dow and Shell were aware of the health risks posed by the nematicide as early as 1954, the Nicaraguan banana workers suffering from exposure to DBCP are still waging a battle for a just compensation from the TNCs. Their struggle has led them from the courtrooms of Nicaragua, to the streets of Managua, and finally to the U.S. in hopes of finding justice. Though internal divisions, legal expenses, and the enormous power of the TNCs threaten to undermine the workers’ hopes for victory, the Nicaraguan movement has rekindled a global movement for compensation from Dole, Dow, and Shell. Lawsuits against the fruit and chemical corporations have been filed in Ecuador, Venezuela, and Colombia for damages resulting from exposure to DBCP, and popular movements have re-emerged in Costa Rica demanding medical attention and compensation. The Nicaraguan workers now comprise just one of several independent national movements in Latin America fighting the same transnational targets.

The success of the Nicaraguan movement in rallying behind a mix of popular nationalism and Sandinismo to pressure the government into action illustrates a viable alternative to popular conceptualizations of “globalization from below.” Rather than transnationalizing their struggle, the Nicaraguan workers effectively used the power of the spectacle to construct a highly visible and patriotic mobilization with popular resonance. In order to avoid losing even greater legitimacy in this age of small government and market supremacy, the National Assembly and President Bolaños were forced to support the movement and challenge the global agents of neo-liberalism. The movement’s success indicates that perhaps the nation-state should still be considered a viable actor despite the confines of increasing transnationalism in the age of globalization.

Although the workers have returned home to Chinandega for the time being, their battle against the TNCs is far from over. None of the protesters seemed eager to return to Managua, but they all seemed ready to continue struggling until their death if necessary. As the protesters camped in front of the National Assembly have chanted many times over the years, “la lucha sigue” - the struggle continues.

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Confronting the Perils of Globalization

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Outside the Public Eye:  
How the Carter Administration Used “Quiet Diplomacy” to  
Impact Human Rights in Argentina  

Julia LaBuá

From the beginning of his campaign to become President of the United States, Jimmy Carter spoke frequently and forcefully about the role human rights should play in issues of U.S. foreign policy. Carter believed that such policy was a necessary corrective to the overt support given by the Nixon and Ford administrations for right-wing military regimes that routinely violated human rights on the pretext of countering the threat of communist revolution. Support for such abusive regimes, Carter felt, went against the principles upon which the United States had been founded, and had damaged the image of the United States around the world. Carter believed it was possible to maintain vigilance against communist insurgency without condoning human rights abuses, and he found allies in the U.S. Congress, where several pieces of legislation had been passed prior to his election seeking to limit or prevent the U.S. from granting military or economic aid to countries whose governments systematically abused human rights.

Throughout his presidency (1977-1981), Carter never wavered in his public support for a foreign policy that took human rights into account. In numerous speeches, as well as formal and informal news conferences, he reaffirmed his campaign rhetoric calling for the United States to once again live up to the ideals found in its Constitution. Despite Carter’s consistent rhetoric, media accounts during his administration reveal a general impression that Carter’s devotion to his so-called “human rights crusade” was mere lip service, impractical in the face of geopolitical reality. Carter was forced to defend the apparent contradictions between rhetoric and action in a televised interview with news anchor Barbara Walters. Members of Congress who had been instrumental in passing human rights legislation before Carter took office also publicly criticized how those legislative mandates were implemented. Legislative prohibitions on military aid to countries committing human rights abuses, for example, were so narrowly defined by administration officials as to allow aid shipments to continue.

U.S. government documents declassified in recent years, however, show that at least in one case (Argentina), the relative lack of public condemnation by Carter Administration officials for the military regime’s atrocious behavior masked a successful campaign of “quiet diplomacy” being conducted out of the public eye which sought to convince the Argentinean regime to end its human rights abuses. The declassified documents also show that while Carter and some of his
administrative staff — notably Patricia Derian, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights — were committed to incorporating human rights as an element of official foreign policy, they were fighting explicit and implicit messages to the contrary sent to foreign governments about whether the U.S. emphasis on human rights was anything more than political rhetoric. Carter adopted the strategy of quiet diplomacy in an attempt to craft a human rights-centered foreign policy that would satisfy various factions within and outside of the U.S. government. Some members of Congress and the NGO community believed that the human rights-based foreign policy must be implemented in toto, without exceptions and without regard to national security or other foreign-policy considerations. Other members of Congress and the administration also supported a human rights policy but were primarily interested in wielding it as an anti-communist tool against the Soviet Union and other communist regimes. And still other officials, including many in the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency, had no patience at all for talk of human rights, believing that the hard-line foreign policy initiated during the Nixon and Ford administrations should be continued. The reduction in numbers of detained political prisoners in Argentina over the course of Carter’s time in office shows that contrary to public perception, the strategy of quiet diplomacy had a significant impact on the actions of the military regime in Argentina.

The Origins of Carter’s Human Rights Crusade

In the months leading up to the 1976 presidential election and after he took office, Carter spoke frequently about his vision of crafting a foreign policy based at least in part on encouraging other countries to uphold internationally recognized human rights. In the speech he gave announcing his candidacy in December 1974, Carter expressed a vision of the United States as a country that could once again “set a standard within the community of nations of courage, compassion, integrity, and dedication to basic human rights and freedoms.”1 In his January 1977 inaugural address, Carter stated, “Our commitment to human rights must be absolute.”2 In speeches he gave to the Organization of American States at the beginning and end of his presidency, Carter spoke of human rights as a value shared by the U.S. and Latin America. “Our own concern for these values will naturally influence our relations with the countries of this hemisphere and throughout the world,” he said in 1977.3 The message was similar in 1980: “Today no government in this hemisphere can expect silent assent from its neighbors if it tramples the rights of its own citizens.”4

Carter’s human rights rhetoric was undoubtedly a change of pace for the executive branch, but it was not the first initiative within the U.S. government to make human rights a centerpiece of foreign policy decisions. Years before Carter’s election, Congress had passed a series of bills aimed at requiring foreign governments to meet certain human rights standards in order to be eligible for economic or military aid from the United States. One of the earliest was the 1973
Outside the Public Eye

Foreign Assistance Act, drafted by Rep. Donald Fraser (D-Minn.), which called for the president to deny aid to any foreign government that “practices the internment or imprisonment of that country’s citizens for political purposes.” In 1975, Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) helped pass an amendment to the International Development and Food Assistance Act that prohibited U.S. aid to any country that consistently violated human rights. Legislation passed in 1976 directed U.S. representatives at the Inter-American Development Bank and the African Development Fund to vote against loans to governments that had engaged in “systematic and gross” violations of human rights. That same year, Congress established a new appointment for Coordinator for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs within the State Department (later renamed the Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights). During Carter’s time in office, Congress passed the Foreign Assistance and Related Programs Appropriations Act of 1978, which specifically prohibited military aid to Argentina on human rights grounds.

A variety of non-governmental organizations also were lobbying during this time for more attention to be paid to human rights. Perhaps the most well known was Amnesty International, founded in 1961, but also active at the time was the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), an outgrowth of the National Council of Churches, and the International Commission of Jurists. WOLA, in particular, has been credited with having provided many of the documents and witnesses for the 1973 hearings held by Fraser’s Subcommittee on International Organizations and Movements that produced an influential report, “Human Rights in the World Community: A Call for U.S. Leadership.” The hearings and report were the basis for Fraser’s landmark Foreign Assistance Act. The influence of NGOs went beyond lobbying Congress, however. Amnesty International’s publication of country reports detailing human rights abuses and its letter-writing campaigns focused on specific political prisoners, put the issue of human rights abuses before the public, both in the United States and around the world.

Mixed Signals from Within and Without

Despite Carter’s emphatic public statements on the importance of human rights in his foreign policy decisions, members of the media and the public remained skeptical about the extent to which his unquestioned personal commitment translated into active policy. In a television interview with the president and his wife in December 1978, ABC News anchor Barbara Walters asked about the perceived gap between his speeches and his actions: “People said to me, ‘You’re going to interview the President. Okay, ask him why he doesn’t pursue human rights in the Philippines. Ask him why he doesn’t do it in Chile. Ask him why he waited so long in Iran.’” Carter’s response to Walters was that governments in those countries and others had in fact felt the pressure from his administration and reacted accordingly, though he offered her national television audience no specific examples. Carter’s failure to delineate specific consequences for countries that violated human rights...
likely contributed to public perceptions that the administration’s actions did not live up to its stated intentions. Carter’s rhetoric about valuing human rights in foreign policy considerations contrasted sharply with signals sent during the Nixon and Ford administrations, which were mixed at best. A 1976 report written by Robert Hill, then U.S. ambassador to Argentina, about a meeting with Cesar Guzzetti, Foreign Minister of Argentina, states that Guzzetti found Hill’s expression of U.S. concern over human-rights violations in Argentina puzzling in light of a recent conversation he had had with U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in Santiago, Chile. Guzzetti said Kissinger had “hoped the Argentine government could get the terrorist problem under control as quickly as possible.” Kissinger’s statement was interpreted by Argentina’s President Jorge Videla (Guzzetti told Hill) as revealing that the United States’ “overriding concern was not human rights but rather that GOA [Government of Argentina] ‘get it over quickly’.”\(^{11}\) Similarly, a report from Carter’s Secretary of State Cyrus Vance offers details of a January 1977 meeting between a State Department officer and Victor Beauge, Political Counselor of Argentina. According to the report, Beauge sought assurances that embassy officials in Buenos Aires were delivering the same message about U.S. commitment to human rights as the State Department. “Beauge persisted, asking if these points had been made by new rpt [repeat] new administration. He said, ‘It is essential for your same message to come from all channels. This did not happen in past.’”\(^{12}\)

There are indications that the mixed messages continued into the Carter Administration. Unpublished notes written by Assistant Secretary Derian in April 1977 after a visit to Argentina reveal that a consistent message on human rights was an elusive goal early in the administration. She warned that the U.S. was sending “a dangerous and double message” to Argentina and other countries. “It is widely believed by our military and intelligence services that the human rights policy emanates only from the Department of State, is a political device and one with a short life due to its wide impracticability, the naiveté and ignorance of individuals in the Administration and to the irresponsible headline-grabbing of members of Congress,” she wrote. Derian recommended that Carter send a message to all branches of the military, the CIA, FBI and other intelligence agencies emphasizing the seriousness and permanence of the human rights policy, and that officials who were unable to comply with his directive “be immediately separated from their services.”\(^{13}\) The Argentinean confusion persisted well into the Carter presidency, as illustrated by a report prepared in September 1978 by the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) for Viron P. Vaky, Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs. The Argentinean government, the report stated, believed that “U.S. protests [about human rights] are largely perfunctory, a temporary outburst of moral fervor reflecting pressure from a few misguided human rights zealots in the Congress and non-governmental organizations.”\(^{14}\) It’s not clear from the report whether the confusion was a case of wishful thinking on the part of Argentinean leaders or
continued mixed messages from various U.S. official entities, but the end result was the same: an apparent lack of clear motivation for the Argentinean regime to reform its rights violations.

The Congress that served alongside Carter was not as ideal an ally in his human rights crusade as it might appear at first glance. While legislative acts such as those listed above attempted to tie foreign aid to respect for human rights, the term “human rights” was not clearly defined in any of them, leaving the granting or denial of aid more or less in the eye of the beholder. Complicating matters, Congressional supporters of tying aid to human rights abuses had differing agendas: some conservative members of Congress envisioned the legislation being used primarily against the Soviet Union and other leftist or potentially communist regimes; liberal Congressmen placed more emphasis on enforcing the restrictions against totalitarian regimes such as those in Latin America, including Argentina. This inherent tension within Congress, along with the Carter Administration’s insistence on applying the policy framework on a case-by-case basis, meant that no blanket definition of human rights or human rights abuses could be formulated that would apply to all countries. The policy’s implementation appeared uneven and seemingly arbitrary to observers – such as the general media – not aware of the painstaking work done by the Interagency Group on Human Rights and Foreign Assistance. This working group, headed by Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, worked throughout the first six months of Carter’s presidency to define the administration’s human rights policy.

The uneven nature of the policy’s application is evident even within a single country such as Argentina. All military aid to Argentina was halted during the Carter Administration, but it was not entirely by U.S. action. Secretary Vance announced a sharp reduction in military aid in February 1977, but it was Argentina itself that refused to accept additional aid as long as human rights conditions were attached. The reduction in aid also only applied to certain categories of military aid, with a rationalization that selling “non-lethal” supplies or existing parts for military weapons and systems was not covered by the ban. Congress, not Carter, implemented a more complete cutoff of military sales and aid to Argentina in October 1978. Similarly, economic aid to Argentina was reduced, as in the case of the denial of loan credits, but most other economic credits and loans from international financial institutions such as the World Bank were approved despite “no” votes or abstentions by the U.S. representatives – in Argentina’s case, this totaled 23 loans between January 1977 and August 1980 – making the policy’s effect more symbolic than concrete. The votes did serve to focus international attention on the U.S. position, however, and could be seen as part of the system of indirect pressure administered by the Carter administration.

The Advent of ‘Quiet Diplomacy’

Even while public sanctions were being attempted with mixed results,
behind-the-scenes or “quiet” diplomacy continued. During her visit to Argentina in April 1977, Derian delivered to regime officials a private rebuke of their failure to respect the human rights of their political opponents. As detailed in the notes of her visit, Derian was careful not to antagonize the Argentinean leaders. She expressed sympathy for their struggles with terrorists, and reaffirmed the ultimate sovereignty of the regime. Nonetheless, she strongly encouraged the Argentine government to return to internationally recognized standards of law, while refusing to condone the methods used against their opponents: “… Never concede that they are not violating human rights. Impress the serious nature of our concern and the fact that it is here to stay,” she wrote in a section of her notes titled “What I Told Them.”

A similar diplomatic strategy was outlined in a memo written by an unknown State Department staff member in May 1977 for Terence Todman, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, in advance of a trip to Argentina. The memo offers a series of “talking points” for Todman to use in his meetings with Argentinean officials. Among them: “The impression must be corrected that the Argentinean government is not in full control and must resort to mysterious right wing forces and unexplained disappearances to root out terrorism” and “We strongly urge the acknowledgment of all prisoners under detention, the restoration of due process, and the punishment of all excesses.” Once again, the quiet message being delivered to Argentinean officials is unambiguous: No excuses or rationale will be accepted for the continued violation of opponents’ human rights.

These efforts at quiet diplomacy yielded results. An August 1978 memo from Ambassador Castro to Secretary Vance reported, among other things, that “we believe that a number of these reported [interrogation] enters have been closed down as the Argentine security forces have reduced the scale of their anti-subversive operations.” And even as the Barbara Walters interview with Carter was being televised in December of that year, negotiations were ongoing through diplomatic channels between members of Carter’s administration and the government of Argentina for a full accounting to be made of detained prisoners, whose numbers had in fact already declined by more than half, from 8,200 in 1974 to 3,400 in 1978.

Once the efforts of quiet diplomacy began to pay dividends, the tenor changed in the conversation between U.S. and Argentinean officials. A private discussion in September 1979 between Townsend B. Friedman, political officer at the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires, and an unnamed “senior member of a major Argentine military intelligence organization” revealed that the attention of Argentinean leaders was beginning to shift from how to continue with or cover up their human rights violations to how to avoid being held accountable for them:

Some of those most deeply involved in the “dirty war” are terribly frightened that as the climate returns to normality they are being moved closer to the time when they must account for their acts and
suffer retribution. On the other hand, if the “dirty war” can be kept going they are protected … If the USG [U.S. Government] wanted to do something useful for human rights, he suggested, it would help establish a climate where it would be possible for the GOA to drop a curtain over the past or a curtain that would eliminate the fear that drives the men involved in the dirty war.\textsuperscript{24}

The Argentine military official seems to be asking Friedman to promise U.S. support of an amnesty policy to be implemented once the military regime stepped aside. Friedman believed this communication was a concrete indication that Carter’s quiet diplomacy was paying dividends. It was a reflection of similar conversations he had had with human rights activists in Argentina, one of them a “foreign correspondent who has been observing Argentina for several years” and a critic of the military regime. “Others in the human rights community are very pleased with our outspokenness,” Friedman reports.\textsuperscript{25}

The Argentinean government’s initial impression of Carter’s human rights emphasis as mere rhetoric rather than a serious policy probably played a role in the slowness of its response to U.S. calls to end its rights violations. As early as February 1977, U.S. officials were pressuring the Argentinean regime to publish lists of its thousands of political detainees, to re-establish laws to make future arrests a matter of public record, to allow prisoners to mount a legal defense.\textsuperscript{26} The Argentines did not begin to publish the lists until December of that year, and they were still not complete by March 1978, according to a memo from Raul Castro, U.S. Ambassador to Argentina, which also recommends that the U.S. concentrate further efforts on persuading Argentina to make “continued progress toward return to the rule of law.”\textsuperscript{27} The failure of Argentinean leaders to comply with an unpublicized agreement with the U.S. to release prisoners, as well as to allow access to prisoners by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, was the impetus in August 1978 for the State Department to instruct the Export-Import Bank to withhold more than $200 million promised for Argentina’s Yacyreta dam project.\textsuperscript{28}

Conclusion

Viewing these declassified U.S. government documents in sequence brings the scope, strategy and outcomes of the Carter Administration’s human rights-based foreign policy into sharper focus, at least as it was practiced in Argentina. A review of Carter’s foreign policy decisions during his presidency reveals unarguable inconsistencies in how the policy was implemented globally, and the uneven effectiveness of public sanctions such as cutting off foreign aid to violators of human rights. But the diplomatic memos and notes show that despite perceptions within the U.S. public, media, and Congress that inconsistencies in the policy rendered it ineffective, there was a steady, unswerving use of quiet diplomacy. What made
quiet diplomacy so effective was its consistency and persistence. Whether the envoy was Assistant Secretary for Human Rights Patricia Derian, Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs Terence Todman, or U.S. Embassy’s political officer Townsend Friedman, the message remained the same: U.S. respect for Argentina’s sovereignty coupled with a refusal to accept human rights violations and a belief that regardless of past action, the Argentinean regime was capable of reforming itself and once again implementing the rule of law. This diplomatic effort, combined with occasional public demonstrations that there would be consequences for continued violations – such as the Yacyreta dam project loan rejection – elicited positive if not cataclysmic changes in the scale of human-rights abuses being perpetrated by the military regime of Argentina.

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