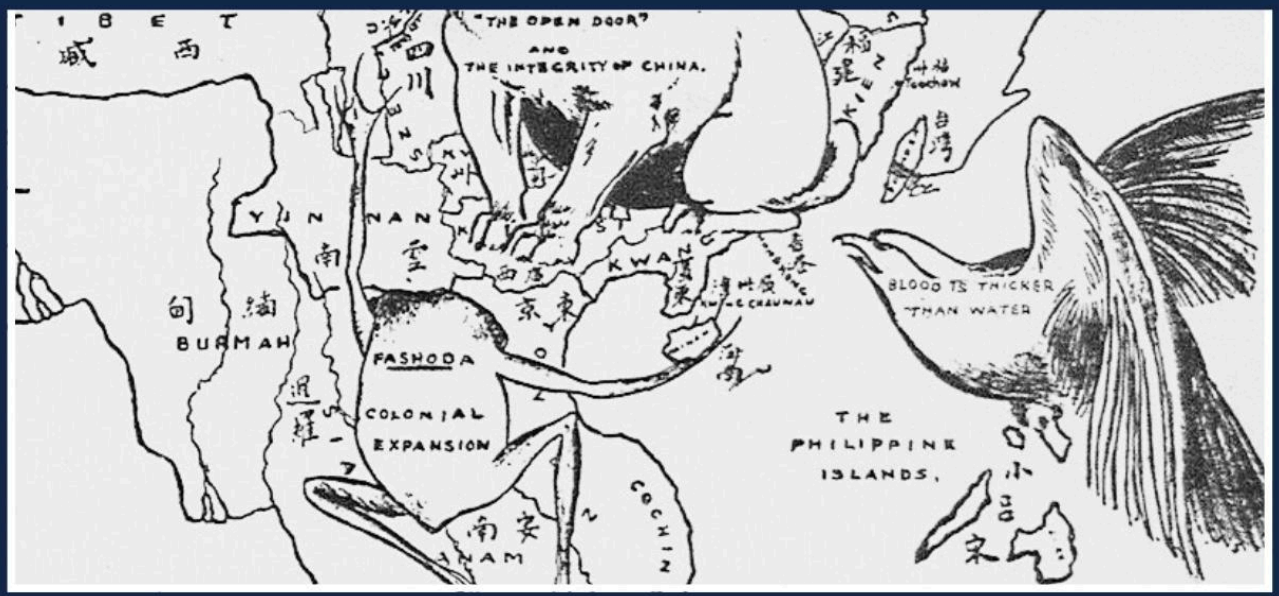
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

UNDERGRADUATE HISTORY JOURNAL at ILLINOIS

Fall 2025
Volume 5, Issue 1



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About the Journal

The Undergraduate History Journal at Illinois is a peer-reviewed, double-blind, historical research publication, run by students at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, that strives to provide undergraduate students with the opportunity to share their research and gain exposure for their writing. The journal is committed to high standards of writing, a broad sampling of areas of research, and the integrity of academic research.

The journal is double-blind peer-reviewed by a group of student editors. Once submissions are chosen, they are reviewed multiple times by our teams of editors, before being published in one of our issues.

Acknowledgements

The journal would like to thank its authors for their work, our hard working editors for their tireless efforts to continue to push the journal towards higher standards of quality and output, the University of Illinois history professors and faculty for their advice and dedication to academic study, our undergraduate advisor Stefan Djordjevic for his plentiful advice and support, and librarian and professor Merinda Hensley for her enthusiasm towards the journal and her efforts to support the journal's publication.

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The Lawful Desecration of the San Francisco Peaks

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The San Francisco Peaks sprawl across the Colorado Plateau of North Central Arizona. Its three major peaks (Fremont, Agassiz, and Humphreys) attract recreational tourists and American Indian religious practitioners alike. The Peaks became embroiled in conflict in the late 1970s after these two groups clashed over the expansion of a ski resort on Humphreys Peak. This clash, which resulted in the Court of Appeals case *Wilson v. Block*, called attention to the sacred nature of the Peaks for American Indians, particularly the Navajo and Hopi tribes. It marked a climax in the federal government's long involvement in the Peaks and an even longer history of local tribes' relationship with the Peaks. Between 1848 and 2008, the US government created and then upheld circumstances that violated the San Francisco Peaks' sanctity for the Hopi and Navajo tribes. Its acquisition, colonization, and recreational development of the Peaks denigrated the sacred site; the courts then upheld these actions, allowing the harm to continue unchecked.

The story of the San Francisco Peaks begins at least 93,000 years ago, when the mountain range was formed by multiple volcanic eruptions. Today, the mountains sit on the edge of a crater that formerly housed one such volcano.[1] The Peaks are in Coconino County of North Central Arizona on the Colorado Plateau. The first of its three major peaks, Humphreys, boasts the highest point in the state at 12,633 feet and is named after a surveyor who was active in the area from 1851 onward.[2] The next tallest is Agassiz, named in 1867 after a fossil surveyor from Harvard. Finally, Fremont stands as the third-tallest peak, unsurprisingly named after yet another

[1] U.S. Geological Survey, "San Francisco Mountain," *U.S. Geological Survey*, last modified July 18, 2022, https://www.usgs.gov/volcanoes/san-francisco-volcanic-field/science/san-francisco-mountain.
[2] Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. "San Francisco Peaks," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed April 27, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/place/San-Francisco-Peaks.

American expeditionary: John Charles Fremont, the "Pathfinder of the West," who governed the Territory of Arizona on the tail end of his long career exploring and warring across the US.[3] The naming conventions of the Peaks give the false impression that white Americans were the first to assert their presence in the region. On the contrary, Paleo-Indians first occupied the area as far back as 15,000 years ago. The Peaks are known by at least eleven other names today, ten of which come from local tribes that existed long before Humphreys, Agassiz, and Fremont arrived—Acoma, Apache, Havasupai, Hopi, Hualapai, Mojave, Navajo, Southern Paiute, Yavapai, and Zuni.[4] Of these tribes, the Hopi and Navajo became the face of the movement to protect the Peaks as a sacred site beginning in the 1980s. Their names for the mountains are *Nuva'tukya'ovi* (Hopi) and *Dook'o'oosłíid* (Navajo).

The Peaks have been part of the Hopi people's homeland in Northeastern Arizona, called *Hopitutskwa,* for at least one thousand years.[5] Spanish conquistadors and explorers led by Francisco Vásquez de Coronado in 1540 were the first European expedition to make contact with the Hopi, and also the first to encounter the Peaks.[6] The Spanish were involved in Hopi life from 1629-1700, during which time Christian missionaries suppressed their religious practices. This eventually ended in revolt and the assassination of Christian converts by Hopi traditionalists. The Hopi lived free from heavy colonial pressures once more, until the 1850s brought United States Indian Agents, smallpox, and increased vulnerability to Navajo

[3] U.S. Forest Service, "History of the San Francisco Peaks," *Coconino National Forest*, last modified July 18, 2022, https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/coconino/learning/history-culture/?cid=fseprd1107872.
[4] This tribe prefers to identify itself with the term "Dinè". In order to maintain accordance with the language used in the majority of sources, the term "Navajo" will be used in this work; U.S. Forest Service, "History of the San Francisco Peaks."
[5] "Hopi" in Southwest, 3rd ed., ed. Laurie J. Edwards, 1069-1089. Vol. 3 of *UXL Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes* (Detroit, MI: UXL, 2012) *Gale eBooks* (accessed April 28, 2025). https://link-gale-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/apps/doc/CX4019400079/GVRL?u=uiuc_uc&sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=8d1386d7.
[6] The Spanish named the Peaks "Sin Agua", or "without water"

intrusions that they had suffered on and off throughout their shared history. The Hopi reservation was established in 1882; their proximity to the Navajo territory and past tensions led to various land disputes, but the reservation now occupies about 1.5 million acres in Navajo and Coconino Counties of Arizona.[7] It does not include any part of the Peaks, despite their deep religious and cultural significance to the tribe.

In order to understand the Hopi's determination to protect the Peaks, one must first understand their role in the tribe's religion. The Hopi traditional religion maintains a strong presence in the tribal community: as recently as 2011, 90% of tribal members were practicing it.[8] Their religious beliefs center on the idea of an underlying, undefined "sacred" that permeates everything, living and non-living. Prayer is usually viewed in practical terms, i.e., "for rain, crops, health, and long life."[9] The San Francisco Peaks are the home of the Kachinas, or *katsinam,* spirits that are the reincarnated souls of ancestors who ferry messages between the people and the gods, as well as bring rain. Hopi people leave prayers for the Kachinas at the Peaks. They also collect Douglas fir and feathers from the mountains for religious ceremonies. Songs about the Kachinas confirm their relationship with the Peaks: "They are preparing themselves [for a journey] / Over there at the snow-capped mountains [San Francisco Peaks]. / The clouds From there, they are putting on their endowments [of rain power] / To come here."[10] As the home of the Kachinas and a place for prayer and the collection of ritual materials, the religious value of the Peaks to the Hopi is clear: this mountain range is a sacred

[7] Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, "Hopi Tribe," accessed April 27, 2025, https://itcaonline.com/member-tribes/hopi-tribe/.
[8] Laurie Edwards, "Hopi."
[9] John D. Loftin, *Religion and Hopi Life*, (Indiana University Press, 2003), 25, *ProQuest Ebook Central*, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uiuc/detail.action?docID=149191.
[10] Maria Glowacka, Dorothy Washburn, and Justin Richland, "Nuvatukya'ovi, San Francisco Peaks: Balancing Western Economies with Native American Spiritualities," Current Anthropology 50, no. 4 (2009): 547–61, https://doi.org/10.1086/599069.

site. This conclusion is key to understanding the harm done by the US federal government to the Peaks, according to the Hopi.

The other leading tribe in the fight to protect the Peaks is the Navajo. The Navajo are evidenced to have lived in the Southwest since the eleventh century.[11] The boundaries of their traditional homeland are marked by four sacred mountains—*Sis Naajinii* (Blanca Peak in Colorado), *Dibe Ntsaa* (Hesperus Peak in Colorado), *Tsoodzil* (Mount Taylor in New Mexico), and *Dook'o'oosłíid* (Humphreys Peak of the San Francisco Peaks in Arizona).[12] Similar to the Hopi, they encountered, exchanged, and clashed with Spaniards in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Land disputes with the United States began in 1848, when the US laid claim to Navajo territory under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The Navajo resisted, and in response the US exiled them to Fort Sumner, New Mexico, from 1864-1868. The journey, known as the "Long Walk," and life on the small reservation were deadly for many. Finally, in 1868, they were granted a reservation on part of their traditional homelands.[13] Today, the reservation has grown to 17 million acres in New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah.[14] Part of it is in Coconino County, Arizona, which the San Francisco Peaks and part of the Hopi Reservation also occupy. However, despite this proximity in the same county, the Navajo reservation does not include any part of the Peaks.

Like the Hopi, the Navajo hold religious beliefs that incorporate the San Francisco Peaks; these beliefs inform their protest of the US government's involvement with the

[11] "Navajo," in Southwest, 3rd ed., ed. Laurie J. Edwards, vol. 3 of UXL Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes (Detroit, MI: UXL, 2012), 1109–33, Gale eBooks (accessed April 28, 2025), https://link-gale-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/apps/doc/CX4019400081/GVRL?u=uiuc_uc&sid=bookmark-GVRL&xid=a2926b4f.
[12] "History: The Navajo," *Utah Indians*, accessed April 28, 2025, https://utahindians.org/archives/navajo/history.html.
[13] Laurie Edwards, "Navajo."
[14] "Administrative Boundaries," Diné Nihi Kéyah Project – Navajo Nation Land History, Law and Custom, accessed April 28, 2025, https://dinelanduse.org/boundaries/.

mountains. Navajo religion centers on the natural order and harmony of the world. Accordingly, religious practices are intended to restore order and maintain a reciprocal relationship with both the natural and supernatural worlds. The Navajo pray to Holy People, who represent aspects of nature; to name a few, Earth, Moon, First Man, First Woman, and Changing Woman. The Holy People can offer aid and knowledge to those who reach out to them.[15] As previously mentioned, Humphreys Peak is one of four sacred mountains to the Navajo. Each mountain has unique powers and mythological associations. The Peaks are associated with "adulthood, physical strength, and the winds."[16] The mountain range is in the form of a "pregnant woman with knees propped up and torso lying toward the west as she faces east. The main part of her body is the San Francisco Peaks range, her breasts are prominent, and because she is trying to give birth, her legs are bent to the side toward the Grand Canyon."[17] The Peaks' male mountain partner is Hesperus, a peak of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. The Navajo make mountain bundles out of soil and other materials from the mountains to join the male and female and place it in the home. They also gather other ritual materials and perform ceremonies there. Accordingly, the Peaks have a dual purpose: a protective female entity and a ritually significant locale. The doctrinal and practical involvement of the Peaks in Navajo religion establishes them as a sacred site. By understanding the Peaks as a sacred site to the Navajo, one can better understand the affront of the US government's actions.

By the time the United States took interest in the Peaks, the Hopi, Navajo, and other

[15] Trudy Griffin-Pierce, "The Continuous Renewal of Sacred Relations: Navajo Religion" in *Native Religions and Cultures of North America*, ed. Lawrence Eugene Sullivan (New York: Continuum, 2000), 126.
[16] Robert McPherson and Perry Robinson, *Traditional Navajo Teachings Volume 2: The Natural World* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2020,) 22.
[17] McPherson and Robinson, *Traditional Navajo Teachings Volume 2,* 23.

nearby tribes had venerated them for centuries. The Americans' involvement began in earnest in 1851, shortly after the acquisition of Southwestern lands via the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. That year, the US Army Corps of Topographical Engineers sent a team to map and evaluate the land down the Zuni and Colorado Rivers, "determining [their] course and character, particularly in reference to [their] navigable properties, and to the character of [their] adjacent land and productions."[18] In the report they note the biodiversity of the Peaks and repeatedly extol its scenery, which "presented a beautiful appearance."[19] Arizona was incorporated as a territory in 1863, and Yavapai County (which included the San Francisco Peaks) was formed in 1864 along with three other founding counties. From there, the colonization of Arizona rapidly continued. In 1866, in the middle of the Navajos' exile, the Atlantic and Pacific Railway Act was passed. In order to reach the West Coast of the US, the act provided for a rail line "to the head-waters of the Colorado Chiquito, and thence, along the thirty-fifth parallel of latitude, as near as may be found most suitable for a railway route, to the Colorado River, at such point as may be selected by said company for crossing."[20] The expected rail line attracted settlers to the Peaks region. Many arrived in the 1870s and 1880s, making their livings logging, mining, and raising livestock.[21] Due to rapid development, Coconino County was carved out of Yavapai County in 1891; the new boundaries included the Peaks. The expansion of white settlements in this period correlated to the relegation of the Navajo, Hopi, and other local American Indians to reservations. Tribes were pushed out, and

[18] U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the Secretary of War, Communicating, in Compliance with a Resolution of the Senate, the Report of an Expedition Down the Zuni and Colorado Rivers, by Captain Sitgreaves*, 32nd Cong., 2nd sess., 1853, 4 https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/SERIALSET-00668_00_00-002-0059-0000.
[19] U.S. Congress, *Report of the Secretary of War,* 37.
[20] *1866, July 27 – 14 Stat. 292, Railroad and Telegraph Line Lands Act*, Hornbeck Collection – Historical Land Use in California, California State University, Monterey Bay, 4, accessed April 28, 2025, https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1014&context=hornbeck_usa_2_d.
[21] J.W. Byrkit, M.E. Hecht, and G.L. McNamee, "Arizona," Encyclopedia Britannica, April 26, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/place/Arizona-state.

white American settlers were moved in. In the process, the US government laid claim to the San Francisco Peaks by specifically excluding them from reservation boundaries and thus nullifying any legal or social tribal authority over them. The government knowingly facilitated the colonization of an already populated area, marking the first step toward the eventual desecration of the Peaks by the settlers' progeny.

The completion of the railroad at Flagstaff, Arizona, in 1883 planted the seed for the legal conflict over recreation on the Peaks a century later. Thanks to the increased accessibility of North Central Arizona via the railroad, "travelers from all over the world came to view the Grand Canyon, the San Francisco Peaks, the beauties of the Oak Creek Canyon, and the cliff dwellings in Walnut Canyon."[22] The government moved to facilitate this tourism by establishing the San Francisco Mountains Forest Reserve in 1898. President Theodore Roosevelt states in Proclamation 469 that "it appears that the public good would be promoted by setting apart and reserving said lands as a public reservation."[23] Ten years later, the Forest Reserve was consolidated with the Black Mesa, Tonto, and Grand Canyon National Forests "into one National Forest, which should be known as the Coconino National Forest."[24] At first glance, these measures appear to be protective for the San Francisco Peaks and therefore in line with the desires of those who consider it sacred. After all, both proclamations place limitations on settlement and development. However, there are two implications of converting the Peaks to public land that facilitated their desecration.

Firstly, national forests are property of the federal government and managed by the

[22] Platt Cline, *They Came to the Mountain: The Story of Flagstaff's Beginnings*, (Flagstaff: North Arizona University, 1976), 326.
[23] Theodore Roosevelt, Proclamation 469—Establishing the San Francisco Mountains Forest Reserve, April 12, 1902, The American Presidency Project, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-469-establishing-the-san-francisco-mountains-forest-reserve.
[24] United States Forest Service, Southwestern Region, Coconino National Forest, Arizona, 1908 Proclamation, Arizona Memory Project, 1, accessed April 27, 2025, https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/82176.

U.S. Department of Agriculture. This means that upon the establishment of the Peaks and the surrounding area as a forest reserve and then a national forest, decision-making authority went to Congress. Per the Transfer Act of 1905, which created the Forest Service, "The Secretary of the Department of Agriculture Shall, from and after the passage of this Act, execute or cause to be executed all laws affecting public lands."[25] This allocation of authority to the federal government squashed the little influence that local tribes might have had over the use of the Peaks. Now, not only were the Peaks outside of tribal jurisdiction, but they were also outside of any local jurisdiction. On top of that, the administration of the Peaks was beholden to the values of the federal government rather than private citizens. This was a challenge to any religious accommodation that local tribes may have requested because they would have to make the case that said accommodations would not cause the government to violate the Free Exercise Clause on public lands by promoting one particular religion. Indeed, this implication of federal ownership became a deciding factor in later rulings against tribes who hold the Peaks as sacred. The federal government successfully argued that accommodating tribes entailed unconstitutionally furthering their religions in violation of the Free Exercise Clause, which the administration of the Peaks was bound to because they were federal government property rather than tribal or private. Therefore, the allocation of the San Francisco Peaks as public land was another step away from its protection as a sacred site due to the implications of federal ownership.

Secondly, national forests were (and still are) popular recreation areas, thanks to decades of accommodation by the Forest Service followed by legislation that specifically designated recreation as a function of national forests (namely, the Multiple-Use Policy of

[25] *Transfer Act of 1905*, Act of February 1, 1905 (33 Stat. 628; 16 U.S.C. 472, 524, 554), accessed April 28, 2025, https://foresthistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Transfer_Act_1905.pdf.

1960). While the establishment of the Coconino National Forest did not make reference to recreation, the Forest Service increasingly provided for recreation on public lands. Some of the earliest regulations, from when the Forest Service was still known as the General Land Office, "stated that permits could be secured for the building and maintenance of sanitariums and hotels at mineral and other springs, and that land could be leased there for a fee for certain periods of time."[26] As time went on, demand for facilities increased, as did the Forest Service's accommodations. The Term Occupancy Act of 1915 even "permitted it to allow private use and development of public forest lands for terms of up to 30 years by persons or organizations wishing to erect summer camps, hotels, or other resorts."[27] Recreational development continued in this vein, and in 1960 Congress affirmed recreation as one of five essential purposes of national forests per the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act. This policy stated that "the national forests are established and shall be administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes."[28] As a result, the national forests would "best meet the needs of the American people."[29] The Hopi and Navajo tribes were not among the beneficiaries; the Multiple-Use Policy's encouragement of recreation was contradictory to their needs of the Coconino National Forest. Looking back to the religious uses of the San Francisco Peaks, tourism is contrary and disruptive to its role as a sacred site. For the Hopi, buildings and visitors occupied an area that was already home to the Kachinas. Development also endangered solitude for prayer, the safety of shrines, and the collection of ritual materials. For the Navajo, development acted as a genuine physical scar on the female entity that is the

[26] William C. Tweed, *A History of Outdoor Recreation Development in National Forests, 1891–1942 (Washington, D.C.*: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 1989), 1, accessed April 28, 2025, https://foresthistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/USFS_Recreation_1891_1942.pdf.
[27] Tweed, *A History of Outdoor Recreation Development in National Forests,* 10.
[28] *Public Law 86-517*, 74 Stat. 215 (1960), https://www.congress.gov/86/statute/STATUTE-74/STATUTE-74-Pg215.pdf.
[29] *Public Law 86-517*, 74 Stat. 215 (1960).

Peaks. Their prayer and ritual material collection was also threatened. Thus, the US government's claim of the Peaks as a national forest area facilitated and even encouraged acts of desecration.

The colonization, federal acquisition, and recreational development of the San Francisco Peaks, despite their religious significance to the Hopi and Navajo tribes, who occupied the land long before Americans, set the stage for two court cases that upheld the legality of their continued desecration. Historically, judicial rulings on sacred sites have not been favorable for American Indians. These disputes stem from the fact that "because so much Indian title to land has been lost … sacred sites and shrines may be hundreds of miles from where tribal peoples live."[30] As is the case with the San Francisco Peaks, these sites frequently end up as public lands and recreation areas. After all, sacred sites are often visually striking natural areas like Bear Butte, Rainbow Bridge, and of course the San Francisco Peaks. Because these sites are not under tribal jurisdiction, religious groups must invoke the Free Exercise Clause if they want to argue for any kind of accommodation.

In 1978 Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, which specifically called for tribes to have access to sacred sites (among other provisions). However, even after this legislation, the argument that tribes should be granted access to their sacred sites in order to accommodate their right of free exercise of religion still fell short in the eyes of the court, primarily because of a fundamental misrepresentation of American Indian religion. Scholar of history and environmental studies Andrew Gulliford explains:

> For traditional native peoples, the landscape includes not only the physical world of rocks, trees, mountains, and plains but also the spirit world. Indigenous Native American worship depends on a detailed and particular sense of place that goes back in

[30] Andrew Gulliford, *Sacred Objects and Sacred Places: Preserving Tribal Traditions* (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2000), 3.

> language and in stories for centuries, whereas Protestant Christianity has been evangelical, transportable, Bible-based, and not rooted in a particular landscape.[31]

This disconnect is clear in the rulings of *Badoni v. Higginson* (1977) and *Sequoyah v. Tennessee Valley Authority* (1979), the predecessors to the Peaks' own landmark legal battle. In both cases the court ruled that the flooding of sites sacred to the Cherokee and Navajo tribes, respectively, did not infringe on their free exercise because it had "no coercive effect on plaintiffs' religious beliefs or practices" and "these interests do not constitute 'deep religious conviction[s], shared by an organized group and intimately related to daily living.'"[32] Both rulings reflected a blatant disregard for how flooding a sacred site would be fundamentally damaging to those practicing land-based religions. In *Badoni*, the court even questioned the validity of the claims of religious significance at all. In these rulings, the court rejected testimony from the religious practitioners themselves, who emphasized the contrary. Instead, the courts chose to rely on their own interpretation of American Indian religions, which did not accurately reflect what the plaintiffs themselves told them.

The second common failure point for American Indian plaintiffs arguing sacred site cases is the fact that the sites are usually not under tribal jurisdiction. In both *Sequoyah* and *Badoni,* the courts' rulings included a dismissal of the free exercise claim altogether on the basis of insufficient property interest. The ruling in *Sequoyah* summarized this opinion succinctly:

> The free exercise clause is not a license in itself to enter property, government-owned

[31] Gulliford, *Sacred Objects and Sacred* Places, 67.
[32] *Sequoyah v. Tennessee Valley Authority*, 480 F. Supp. 608 (E.D. Tenn. 1979), 4, https://lira.bc.edu/work/ns/3a633117-e318-4f09-9cac-ae26e321606e/reader/952d76c2-77af-469a-ab9a-44ede2d3bf59; *Badoni v. Higginson*, 455 F. Supp. 641 (D. Utah 1977), https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/455/641/1415951/. The quote is from the ruling in *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, a landmark religious freedom case that ruled in favor of Amish families who wanted to exempt their children from compulsory education. The language in that ruling became a precedent that future religious freedom cases were compared to, including those of American Indians.

> or otherwise, to which religious practitioners have no other legal right of access. Since plaintiffs claim no other legal property interest in the land in question, aside from the statutory claims previously discussed, a free exercise claim is not stated here.[33]

This interpretation of the applicability of the First Amendment of the Constitution is strikingly narrow, as it appears to immediately dismiss any free exercise claims outside of the private sphere. This justification, along with the previously discussed negligence to consider what American Indian religious freedom calls for in practice, "represent[s] a disturbing failure of the judiciary as interpreter of constitutional law to apply the protections of the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment to Native American Indian claims to preserve sacred land."[34] The courts' narrow interpretation of the First Amendment in sacred site cases deprives American Indians of the ability to practice their religions unobstructed. American Indians thus find themselves repeatedly unprotected by the religious freedom provisions of the Constitution due to the courts' reliance on property interest as a deciding factor and their incongruous interpretation of what "free exercise" for tribal plaintiffs entails.

The Hopi Indian Tribe and Navajo Medicine Men's Association found themselves in this unforgiving legal landscape when they brought a case against the US Forest Service for its facilitation of the expansion of a ski resort on Humphreys Peak. The resort, known as the Snow Bowl, began operating in 1937, when the Forest Service built a road and a ski lodge. Small expansions and upkeep continued until 1977. That year, the operating permit was transferred to Northland Recreation Company, who quickly "submitted to the Forest Service a 'master plan' for the future development of the Snow Bowl, which contemplated the construction of additional parking and ski slopes, new lodge facilities, and ski lifts."[35] The Forest Service

[33] *Sequoyah v. Tennessee Valley Authority*, 4.
[34] Brian Brown, *Religion, Land, and the Law: Native Americans and the Judicial Interpretation of Sacred Land* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999),171.
[35] *Wilson v. Block*, 708 F.2d 735 (D.C. Cir. 1983), CaseText, 2, https://casetext.com/case/wilson-v-block.

approved a modified version of this plan. Various groups resisted the expansion, culminating in a US Court of Appeals case: *Wilson v. Block*. In 1981, the Navajo Medicine Men's Association, the Hopi Tribe, and local ranch owners Jean and Richard Wilson filed a consolidated lawsuit against the expansion. The suit centered on the Free Exercise Clause and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act due to the sacred nature of the Peaks. The plaintiffs argued:

> Development of the Peaks would be a profane act, and an affront to the deities, and that, in consequence, the Peaks would lose their healing power and otherwise cease to benefit the tribes … development would seriously impair their ability to pray and conduct ceremonies upon the Peaks, and to gather from the Peaks the sacred objects.[36]

Because the development would obstruct the tribes' abilities to engage with the Peaks in these various doctrinal and practical ways, they claimed protection under religious freedom laws.

The strength of these claims is apparent after consulting testimony from the tribes and known facts about their historic and religious relationship to the Peaks. The relationship expounded upon previously and further evidenced in the arguments made by the tribes before the court affirms their sacred nature and the burden the Snow Bowl expansion would place upon the plaintiff tribes. Despite this, both the district court and the appeals court ruled in favor of the expansion. The judges relied on *Badoni* and *Sequoyah* as precedent for this decision, once again disregarding American Indian religion and invoking the government's property interest as a trump card. The district court judge stated, "that as long as the Indians have continued access to the Peaks, the Snow Bowl will not impinge upon the continuation of all essential ritual practices."[37] This logic was invoked in sacred site cases before and after *Wilson*; most notably, the Supreme Court case *Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery Association,* in which the court ruled against various American Indian groups who requested that the construction of a road and

[36] *Wilson v. Block*, 4.
[37] Brown, *Religion, Law, and the Land*, 69.

timber harvesting in the sacred Six Rivers National Forest be blocked. Brian Edward Brown, scholar of history, religion, and law, eloquently describes the judge's assessment as a "reductive delimitation of religion to 'ritual practices,'" echoing the minority opinion that would be written by Justice Brennan for *Lyng* in 1988.[38] Indeed, this interpretation ignored the importance of the Peaks as an entity whose sanctity would be compromised by development, regardless of whether the tribes had the right to practice their rituals or not. This claim disregarded an essential feature of the plaintiffs' religious beliefs, which they testified to but were either not understood or ignored. This mischaracterization thus upheld the second question that came from *Badoni* and *Sequoyah*: property interest. The appeals court explained, "If the plaintiffs cannot demonstrate that the government land at issue is indispensable to some religious practice, whether or not central to their religion, they have not justified a First Amendment claim."[39] As expected, the court ruled that the Snow Bowl area was not indispensable to Hopi and Navajo religious practices, thus rejecting the basis of a free exercise claim on government property altogether.

The final decision in *Wilson* authorized the expansion of the Snow Bowl ski resort. This ruling was the greatest affront yet to the role of the San Francisco Peaks as a sacred site in a long history of harmful government decisions. The initial exclusion of the Peaks from Hopi and Navajo jurisdiction via the relegation of tribes to reservations in the 19th century, followed by the Peaks' designation as public lands as part of a National Forest, stripped the tribes of any legal property interest in them. The government's sponsorship of railroad construction, colonization, and recreational development facilitated the creation and use of the Snow Bowl ski resort. The *Wilson* ruling was made possible by this history that slowly desecrated the Peaks

[38] Brown, *Religion, Law, and the Land*, 69.
[39] *Wilson v. Block*, 9.

while simultaneously stripping the tribes of the ability to prevent it. The government relied on its own actions and legal precedents, formed on the basis of disregard or ignorance of American Indian religions, to justify yet another step down the road of desecration that it had begun over a century earlier.

This pattern did not end with *Wilson v. Block*. There is one more episode in this disturbing history: *Navajo Nation v. Forest Service,* a case that was tried at the US Court of Appeals and decided in 2008. The plaintiffs included the Navajo Nation, the Hopi Tribe, other American Indian tribes and individuals, and conservation groups. The dispute centered on the Snow Bowl's decision to use recycled wastewater to create artificial snow on the mountain for skiing. The tribes claimed that "the use of such snow on a sacred mountain desecrates the entire mountain, deprecates their religious ceremonies, and injures their religious sensibilities."[40] The plaintiffs invoked the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) of 1993, which expanded protections for free exercise of religion. The act was partially a reaction to *Lyng*, which ruled that "the free exercise clause of the First Amendment does not prohibit the federal government from timber harvesting or constructing a road through a portion of a national forest that is considered a sacred religious site by three Native American tribes."[41] The expansion of protections in the RFRA in response to *Lyng* gave tribes hope that the tide was turning on sacred land rulings.

Unfortunately, they were wrong. The court rejected their free exercise argument on the basis of insufficient evidence of "substantial burden" on their practices and the government's ultimate authority as the property owner. Similar to *Wilson v. Block*, the court disregarded the importance of the sanctity of the Peaks beyond the ability to perform ritual acts upon or

[40] *Navajo Nation v. U.S. Forest Service,* 535 F.3d 1058 (9th Cir. 2008), Native American Rights Fund, 2, https://www.narf.org/nill/bulletins/federal/documents/navajovusfs.pdf.
[41] Bridge Initiative Team, *Factsheet: Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA),* Georgetown University, March 16, 2021, https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/religious-freedom-restoration-act-of-1993-rfra/.

involving them. Because the artificial snow did not limit the accessibility of the Peaks for prayer and ritual material collection, the court argued:

> The sole effect of the artificial snow is on the Plaintiffs' subjective spiritual experience. That is, the presence of the artificial snow on the Peaks is offensive to the Plaintiffs' feelings about their religion and will decrease the spiritual fulfillment Plaintiffs get from practicing their religion on the mountain. Nevertheless, a government action that decreases the spirituality, the fervor, or the satisfaction with which a believer practices his religion is not what Congress has labeled a 'substantial burden' … on the free exercise of religion.[42]

This interpretation followed the reductive logic of all of the previously discussed sacred land rulings, which diminished American Indian religions to a set of practices. The Peaks are a living entity and sacred reality for these tribes; the court once again failed to acknowledge this. On top of that, the court argued that accommodating the tribes on federal land would be inappropriate because "giving one religious sect a veto over the use of public park land would deprive others of the right to use what is, by definition, land that belongs to everyone."[43] This argument fails to recognize that the land only became public after the government took it upon itself to oust local tribes from land they had occupied for centuries and declare it government property instead. This aspect of the ruling unsurprisingly ignores the historical context of the dispute and gives the government immense authority to reject free exercise claims.

Once again, the government's past decisions set the stage for further desecration of the Peaks. Just as in *Wilson v. Block*, the reservation system and designation of the Peaks as public lands in a national forest gave the court the basis to reject the Hopi and Navajo tribes' free exercise claims. Its reductive interpretation of American Indian religion led to the rulings in *Badoni, Sequoyah,* and *Wilson*, all of which served as precedent for *Navajo Nation*. The government created and then upheld the circumstances in this case that desecrated the Peaks.

[42] *Navajo Nation v. U.S. Forest Service*, 2.
[43] *Navajo Nation v. U.S. Forest Service,* 3.

Wilson and *Navajo Nation* enshrined in law that the Peaks do not deserve special considerations from the government due to their sanctity, whether that be redress for past offenses or protection from future ones. Consequently, any acts of desecration going forward are liable to go unchecked.

The San Francisco Peaks have been a sacred site for the Hopi, Navajo, and other tribes for centuries. Their sanctity has been repeatedly violated by the US government, beginning in 1848 and continuing into the modern day. The first offense was the colonization of Northeastern Arizona, which the government facilitated by constructing a railroad and confining local American Indians to reservations, whose boundaries did not include the San Francisco Peaks. The second major offense was the designation of the Peaks as a national forest, which led to their development for recreation and gave the federal government full jurisdiction over them. These early decisions set up the Hopi and Navajo tribes for failure in 1981 and 2008, when they took to the courts to defend their sacred site from the Snow Bowl ski resort on Humphreys Peak. In *Wilson v. Block* and *Navajo Nation v. Forest Service*, the tribes drew on their long religious relationships with the Peaks to request accommodations that would protect their sanctity. The courts ruled against them both times, relying on past precedents set from other sacred site cases that were born out of a fundamental misunderstanding or disregard of American Indian religion. The tribes' failure in court was justified by the earlier decisions of the US government, which stripped them of jurisdiction and disregarded the Peaks' religious significance in favor of recreational usage. These cases, particularly *Wilson*, served as the culmination of the government's desecration of the sacred site. The ruling stated once and for all that the site did not merit protection, despite the Hopi and Navajo's long history and relationship with it. The ruling in *Navajo Nation* confirmed the

finality of this decision. Each of these developments tells a story of the US government systematically setting itself up for success in its own courts. Thus culminated the 170-year process of desecration of the sacred San Francisco Peaks executed by the US government.

The harm inflicted by this history continues today, as private prayer and the gathering of ritual materials are still obstructed, and the sacred nature of the Peaks is compromised by Snow Bowl infrastructure and the use of wastewater for artificial snow. The Hopi and Navajo tribes are still fighting to protect the Peaks, primarily focusing on the wastewater issue that was raised in *Navajo Nation*. Since the favorable ruling for the Snow Bowl resort was given in 2008, activist groups continue to stage protests and call for boycotts of the resort. In a renewed attempt for official recourse, the Navajo Nation also filed a petition to the Inter-American Council of Human Rights. None of these efforts have succeeded; this is the legacy of the US government's decisions in action.

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The Unconceived Truth: 19th-Century Obstructions in the Bodily Autonomy of Crow Women

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Introduction

Throughout Indigenous Peoples' history, a painful and unrelenting pattern emerges: the narratives and hardships of Indigenous men are stories often amplified over those of Indigenous women by historians. Stories of the Zapatista Movement, the Chiapas' rejection of oppressive policies, and the Seminole people's resistance against the government are often recounted in history books. However, the cruelest injustice, often overshadowed, is how governmental institutions have encroached upon the most sacred and intimate element of Native tribes' existence: Native women's bodies and reproductive freedoms. Despite the United States' efforts to diminish the bodily autonomy of Crow women through deliberate and eugenic practices, Crow women and all Native women broadly have discovered successful outlets to preserve and safeguard their bodily autonomy throughout the early to mid-20th century.[44] Through the exploration of the Crow tribe, this research paper grants a more expansive lens into the reproductive barriers faced by many Indigenous tribes across the US.

Pre-European Contact Bodily Autonomy

Prior to the US government's involvement in the early 1900s, detailed data and documentation regarding Crow life were difficult to obtain, particularly regarding how Crow women asserted their autonomy. Brianna Theobald's *Reproduction on the Reservation: Pregnancy, Childbirth,*

[44] D. Marie Ralstin-Lewis, "The Continuing Struggle against Genocide: Indigenous Women's Reproductive Rights," *Wicazo Sa Review* 20, no. 1 (2005): 71–95; "Key Findings of Women of Color Reproductive Health Poll," 1991, *New Journal and Guide (1916-)*, Oct 02; Brianna Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Colonialism in the Long 20th Century*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

and Colonialism in the Long 20th Century was the only source that provided specific insight into Crow reproduction and birthing culture. Nevertheless, Southern Montana's Crow tribe and their social conventions remained relatively unaffected by Western influences—especially those relating to the reproductive and medical health decisions of Crow women and their children. Theobald, a historian and writer of Indigenous history, reported that "Crow women maintained a significant degree of sexual and reproductive autonomy prior to federal intervention."[45] They were able to freely govern their own decisions about their body without external forces—otherwise known as one's bodily autonomy.

Crow women maintained their bodily autonomy in a variety of ways. Reproduction was a liberating process for Crow women, with each experience being uniquely tailored to the individual. This was most often observed in the traditions that Crow women honored during their pregnancies. In the earlier phases of carrying a child, Crow women selected from a range of herbs and plants to incorporate into their diet, recommended by the elder women, herbalists, friends, and family. Most commonly, herbs such as calamus, tansy, and juniper were rationed by tribe members and given to pregnant women for their antibacterial and antioxidant properties.[46] Herbalists also provided remedies for women seeking to terminate unwanted pregnancies. In both circumstances, Crow women maintained significant degrees of autonomy, as the variety of treatments available for them reflected a broader framework of how women could independently make their own decisions about healthcare. For decades, Crow women navigated childbearing with the support of their "female generational networks" within the tribe.[47] These communal bonds formed tight-knit networks, as the child-birthing process was a space solely designated for

[45] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation,* 21.
[46] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation,* 21.
[47] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 20.

Indigenous women. Through their guidance, pregnant women were encouraged to engage in rituals such as avoiding eye contact with spaces in nature that looked deformed and communal prayer over the baby.[48] In regard to the delivery, Crow birthing culture had its own set of traditions. Mothers usually gave birth inside teepees and in close proximity to the outdoors, believing nature would grant them spiritual strength.[49] Mothers "labored in female-only space[s]," relying on the expertise of midwives and elder women to help deliver the baby and placenta.[50] During early interactions, the Europeans recognized the medical expertise that Native midwives and women had in the realm of childbirth, often keeping their distance to observe with interest. This showcases how Native women's expansive knowledge of their reproductive health garnered the respect of the Europeans.

This pattern of women-dominated settings can also be seen in the reproductive customs of women not seeking to have children. It was common for Indigenous women to participate in fertility ceremonies that honored their monthly menstrual cycles.[51] For young women experiencing menarche (their first period), they would be placed into seclusion, fasted, and encouraged to seek spiritual visions by their family members.[52] Avoiding men was also key to these ceremonies. Recurring themes of no male participation during these sacred traditions, both for expecting mothers and not, reinforce how Crow societies viewed reproductive practices as distinctly gendered spaces.

In Native social hierarchies, Crow women were highly valued for their ability to create life, a skill they leveraged to elevate their status within the rest of their community. Contrary to

[48] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 22.
[49] Becky Flournoy Matthews, 2002, "Wherever that Singing is Going: The Interaction of Crow and Euro-American Women, 1880–1945," Order No. 3044013, Auburn University.
[50] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation,* 15.
[51] Ewa Maria White, "Reclaiming the Native Mother: Native American Traditionalism and the Politics of Reproduction, 1960- 1980," Order No. 31234806, Brandeis University, 2024.
[52] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 11.

Western societies, Crow communities did not place women in a subordinate position to men. Lisa Udel, co-writer in *A Journal of Women Studies*, argues that this dynamic motivated mothers to pursue high positions within their communities, as "[i]n order to do motherhood well, women must have power."[53] Overall, the mid-15th to early 18th century demonstrates how Crow women honored and asserted their own agency in reproductive practices, exercising autonomy over their bodies at every stage of life without European interference.

Infringement of Bodily Rights: Crow Interactions with the US Government from the Early 20th Century Onward

The reproductive autonomy of Crow women was short-lived, as it ended once watchful eyes began tracking their health. The first time that Crow people came into contact with Americans in the early 1800s, they were forced to cede two million acres of land to the federal government by 1868.[54] Crow women's bodies came under threat as there was an increased federal presence surrounding women. This decline of autonomy was driven by a range of political and ideological factors, beginning with harmful portrayals that distorted and devalued the roles of Crow women. Writer Megan Benson from the *Montana Magazine of Western History* traces these stereotypes to the first federal supervisor of the Crow peoples: Henry Armstrong and his intolerant rhetoric.[55] His disdain for Crows was not only reflected in his allotment policies that removed Crow families from their communities, but also in the stereotypes he and other government officials perpetuated against them. Women, in particular, were deemed savages, immodest, and unhygienic mothers due to their adherence to traditional methods of healthcare.[56] Dr. Ferdinand

[53] "Revision and Resistance: The Politics of Native Women's Motherwork," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 22, no. 2 (2001): 43–62.
[54] Frederick E. Hoxie, "Searching for Structure: Reconstructing Crow Family Life during the Reservation Era," *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 3, 1991, 287–309.
[55] Megan Benson, "The Fight for Crow Water: Part I, the Early Reservation Years through the Indian New Deal," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, vol. 57, no. 4, 2007, 24–96.
[56] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 24.

Shoemaker's 1910 public healthcare initiative similarly embodied these stereotypes. Author Rebecca Wingo examines his research and highlights how Shoemaker compares and contrasts traditional daily life on the Crow reservation with modern allotment houses that Crow people gradually transitioned to living in. Among the hundred lectures, not a single image portrayed Crow traditional life in a positive light, only spotlighting the rampant tuberculosis and trachoma across the more culturally rooted living spaces.[57] Although Shoemaker's project was seen as an effort to improve living conditions at the time, it's understood today as a forceful imposition of Western norms, as it delegitimizes the traditional lifestyles and Indigenous practices of Crow women on both a public and national scale. This reveals how federal and public health initiatives systematically eroded Crow women's reproductive agency by devaluing their traditional knowledge and laying the groundwork for future interventions into their practices.

Following these stereotypes, the ideological push for pro-natalism (a social approach to promoting higher birthrates, typically under a nationalist agenda) further reduced the personal autonomy of Crow women. Throughout the 20th century, in response to a 46% rise in infant mortality on Crow reservations and a broader focus on public welfare, agencies such as the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) became more engaged in the healthcare of Indigenous mothers and their children.[58] Despite this heightened interest, the US government failed to acknowledge how its colonization efforts contributed to the rate of infant mortalities, attributing the infant mortality to Indigenous mothers instead.[59] This criticism reflects the Western ideology that

[57] Rebecca S. Wingo, "Picturing Indian Health: Dr. Ferdinand Shoemaker's Traveling Photographs from the Crow Reservation, 1910–1918," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, vol. 66, no. 4, 2016, 31.
[58] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 28.
[59] Barbara Gurr, "Mothering in Borderlands: Policing Native American Women's Reproductive Healthcare." *International Journal of Sociology of the Family* 37, no. 1 (2011): 69–84.

equated womanhood with motherhood, revealing how federal intervention often harmed women and diminished their value to only their reproductive and child-bearing roles.

For Crow women, this framework brought national scrutiny to their bodies, most evident in the 1920s during the OIA's "Save the Babies" campaign: a US effort to reduce infant mortality and abortions on Indian reservations. Government officials began to objectify Crow women's bodies, sending field matrons, doctors, and nurses to routinely examine Crow women. Allowing reservation doctors, specifically men, to "check whether or not they were fertile … or pregnant" was a deeply invasive and disorienting process.[60] White male intervention in these female-only spaces impeded Crow women's bodily freedoms, as the women had no say in undergoing deeply intimate examinations by strangers.[61] This expansive access to information even allowed US government officials to punish Crow women who miscarried or terminated their baby, subjecting them to fines or even jail time.[62] The Save the Babies campaign transformed reproductive care into a system of surveillance and punishment, leaving Crow women with diminished bodily autonomy and a deep mistrust of federal intervention.

The establishment and operations of reservation hospitals on Crow lands reflected both the federal government's pro-natalist agenda and its broader efforts to control Indigenous women's reproductive practices. Hospitals typically advanced a pro-natalism agenda, contributing to the increase in medicalized births on Crow reservations by 15% in the 1930s.[63] Through these assimilationist techniques, the US government aimed to transition Crow women away from their conventional medical practices and impose Western forms of healthcare. Many Indigenous women didn't trust reservation hospitals and were apprehensive of what kind of care

[60] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 28.
[61] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 29.
[62] Ralstin-Lewis, "The Continuing Struggle against Genocide: Indigenous Women's Reproductive Rights."
[63] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 32.

they provided.[64] Reservation hospitals were reported to receive minimal federal funding, and were staffed with doctors who refused to even touch some of their patients.[65] Reservation hospitals typically lacked the necessary resources and infrastructure to operate at the same standard as non-reservation hospitals. The Crow Indian Hospital, for example, was inadequately equipped to offer the level of obstetric and gynecological care necessary for the number of women on the reservation.[66] Miss Porter, a nurse from the Crow Creek Hospital, recalls witnessing a "pregnant mother painfully lying on a quilt on the floor as there were no more beds."[67] Despite pressure from the federal government to depend exclusively on this method of healthcare, Native women were left with minimal access to adequate care. The increase in pro-natalist ideology and growth of reservation hospitals catalyzed the imposition of bodily autonomy and limited healthcare access for Crow women—a significant shift away from the unmediated reproductive autonomy they previously held.

Finally, the rise in eugenics and the sterilization of Crow women represented the most striking assertion of federal overreach into Indigenous bodily autonomy. By the mid-20th century, medical rhetoric began reinforcing the belief that only Anglo-Saxon races should produce offspring.[68] Professional medical literature warned against racial mixing, and popular media and educational materials depicted non-whites as a threat to societal progress.[69] Fueled by existing stereotypes of Crow women and the presence of Indian hospitals on reservations in the mid-1930s, medical professionals began to advance the practice of eugenics, or in other words,

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[64] Jane Lawrence, "The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women," *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2000, 400–19. *JSTOR.*
[65] Thomas W. Volscho, "Sterilization Racism and Pan-Ethnic Disparities of the Past Decade: The Continued Encroachment on Reproductive Rights," *Wicazo Sa Review* 25, no. 1 (2010): 17–31.
[66] "Construction of Hospital on Crow Reservation," U.S. Congressional Serial Set, 1930, pp. 1-4. *HeinOnline.*
[67] "Miss Porter of the Crow Creek Hospital Writes," *The Indian's Friend*, vol. 6, no. 4, Dec. 1893, *Indigenous Peoples of North America.*
[68]Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 48.
[69] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 48.

the prevention of reproduction for certain races deemed 'undesirable.' The enforcement of eugenic-like procedures began to ramp up after a 1931 federal investigation exposed financial mismanagement and embezzlement at various federal reservations.[70] The federal initiative, *The Meriam Report: Problems of Indian Administration*, attempted to combat these issues by refurbishing hospital conditions and raising the standard of living for both federal workers and Crow people on the reservation.[71] Among these standards, *The Meriam Report* implemented social workers who played a pivotal role in organizing eugenic-based arrangements.[72] Social workers were permitted to conduct mental assessments of Crow women before any medical consultation—assessments that often distorted Crow women's statements by exaggerating the state of their mental health.[73] Simple health inquiries were reframed as indicators of mental illness and diminished mental capacity, thereby enabling medical professionals to justify interference in their reproductive autonomy. Combined with the pervasive stereotypes that framed Indigenous women as unhygienic, these practices opened the door for reservation hospitals to begin increasingly invasive medical procedures. Together, these developments reveal how eugenic-like practices became embedded in reservation healthcare as they took advantage of women on the reservation and stripped them of control over their bodies.

The process of how reservation doctors got consent for the sterilization procedure itself was also deceptive. When Crow women were presented with paperwork, they unknowingly signed mislabeled consent forms, believing they were agreeing to routine treatments, such as postpartum care, IUD insertion, or other temporary birth control procedures.[74] In reality, patients

[70] US Congress, House, Committee on Expenditures in the Interior Department: Hearing on the Matter of the Investigation of the Indian Bureau, April 9, 1912.
[71] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation,* 49.
[72] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation,* 46.
[73] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation,* 46.
[74] Lawrence, "The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women."

were unaware that the procedures were permanent sterilizations, carried out through tubal ligation, tying the fallopian tubes, or hysterectomies, the surgical removal of the uterus.[75] Doctors often redirected their medical care to prioritize sterilization over the patient's medical well-being.[76] Doctors were also "flexible" with what they considered essential to their patients' health, at times encouraging hysterectomies for the patient's "wellbeing."[77] A 1991 Reproductive Health Poll from Norfolk, Virginia, revealed that Crow women were disproportionately pressured into having hysterectomies performed on them, with doctors most commonly presenting this procedure as medically necessary for women with painful menstrual cramps or hernias.[78] Similarly, a reproductive poll of female minorities in the US reported that Native women were twice as likely to be surgically sterilized as any other women of color during the 1920s, exposing the alarming pattern of doctors bolstering sterilization under false pretenses. They received birth control pills with disguised labels to minimize the chance of pregnancy without their knowledge. In other medical contexts, women were also misled by their doctors.[79] The Indian Health Services, implemented by *The Meriam Report*, began using Indigenous women as "guinea pigs" for "intrauterine devices and experimental Depo-Provera shots … to diminish their fertility."[80] Ultimately, these abuses expose a disturbing legacy in which Indigenous women's bodies were subjected to medical decisions made out of the scope of their bodily autonomy.

[75] Lawrence, "The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women."
[76] Sarah A. Nickel, "'I Am Not a Women's Libber Although Sometimes I Sound Like One': Indigenous Feminism and Politicized Motherhood," *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2017, 299–335. *JSTOR.*
[77] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 51.
[78] "Key Findings of Women of Color Reproductive Health Poll," 1991, *New Journal and Guide (1916-)*, Oct 02, 1-9.
[79] "Beyond the Numbers: Access to Reproductive Health Care for Low-Income Women in Five Communities - Crow Tribal Reservation" Kaiser Family Foundation, 5 Dec 2019.
[80] Volscho, "Sterilization Racism and Pan-Ethnic Disparities of the Past Decade: The Continued Encroachment on Reproductive Rights."

Amid the growing momentum of government-backed sterilization, the Supreme Court's decision in *Buck v. Bell* affirmed the rise of state-sanctioned eugenics policies across the United States. In its 8-1 ruling, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of a medical procedure that had been performed on US citizen Carrie Buck without her consent. The procedure, a salpingectomy, in which portions of her fallopian tubes were removed and cauterized, was justified by the state on the basis of her supposed "feeble-mindedness." Although Buck was not Indigenous, her treatment closely mirrored the experiences of many Indigenous women, whose mental or social circumstances were similarly exaggerated to rationalize their sterilization.[81] This decision not only legitimized and mirrored similar procedures across hospitals on Indigenous reservations but also set a troubling legal precedent across the country that sterilization could be carried out under the false pretense of medical necessity. *Buck v. Bell* symbolized a profound setback for Crow women's bodily autonomy on a national scale, as it deepened false stereotypes and paved the way for more systematic targeting of Indigenous women's bodies.

Means of Resistance: Unity Among Indigenous Female Networks

Prior to federal intervention, Indigenous women occupied high positions alongside their male counterparts within their tribe. Their authority was typically grounded in their reproductive capabilities, abilities that were valued by their male counterparts rather than belittled. Once European authorities arrived, they attempted to elevate Indigenous men's status at the expense of Indigenous women.[82] By enforcing Western gender norms that subordinated Indigenous women, a disconnect grew between the men and women, particularly in terms of how men recognized

[81] *Buck v. Bell*, 274 U.S. 200, (1927).
[82] Martha Harroun Foster, "Of Baggage and Bondage: Gender and Status among Hidatsa and Crow Women," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 17 Aug. 2023.

women's reproductive rights.[83] This is exemplified in the Crow Tribal Council, where prior to the 1940s, Crow women were only represented through the male relatives of the tribe, despite the men having little understanding of the matters pertaining to the Indigenous women. Male leaders consistently resisted women's concerns, either ignoring their political participation or arguing for political claims to citizenship, which undermined the women's other needs.[84] This displays a broader, underlying pattern of how misogyny and patriarchal norms undermined Indigenous women's ability to defend their autonomy and bodily freedoms.

Nevertheless, Indigenous women drew strength from their communal bonds, relying on one another to advocate for their fundamental rights. They did this partly through their active roles within their communities, turning forms of oppression into constructive outcomes. The earliest documented example was the American Homemaker's Club in the early 1900s.[85] Originating in Canada and later reaching the US, these clubs were initially established to improve Indigenous women's domestic skills, such as cooking and household upkeep, as a form of assimilation.[86] Indigenous women extended their impact far beyond the kitchen, as the Lakota and Cherokee tribes were able to transform the club into a platform of social and political advocacy for Indigenous women. In doing so, they were able to regain a sense of agency and fight back against the US government's efforts at cultural conformity. Activist and former Crow Hospital nurse, Susie Yellowtail, exemplifies this, becoming the first female leader of the Crow Health Committee, one of the largest Indigenous public health committees that negotiated with

[83] Angela Parker, "Photographing the Places of Citizenship: The 1922 Crow Industrial Survey," *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 2, no. 2 (2015): 57–86.
[84] Nickel, "'I Am Not a Women's Libber Although Sometimes I Sound Like One': Indigenous Feminism and Politicized Motherhood," *American Indian Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2017, 299–335. *JSTOR*.
[85] Nickel, "'I Am Not a Women's Libber Although Sometimes I Sound Like One': Indigenous Feminism and Politicized Motherhood."
[86] Matthews, "Wherever that Singing is Going: The Interaction of Crow and Euro -American Women, 1880–1945."

America's Public Health Services.[87] Under her leadership, Yellowtail transformed the committee into an entirely female-led organization, forcing the government to negotiate directly with female tribe members rather than sidelining their concerns. Both commitments illustrate how, when presented with the opportunity, Indigenous women across the US leveraged their roles to bring progress and beneficial change to their communities.

Another form of collective resistance among all Indigenous women occurred when they united to navigate and push back against unprecedented social and legal barriers. Hidatsa women, for instance, were forced to adapt to the newly developing legal framework surrounding Indigenous divorce in the US. Federal courts prevented Indigenous women from leaving their husbands, especially after they had been legally registered as an American couple.[88] Through a series of public ceremonies, Hidatsa women symbolically reintroduced the (newly) single woman back into society—an open act of defiance against the US's legal restrictions. Equally difficult was Indigenous families' adjustment to urbanization and their move into bigger cities. Urban Indigenous people centers emerged as places of refuge and security, especially as Indigenous women were looking for jobs, affordable health insurance, and improved living conditions.[89] Not only did these centers provide essential resources, but they also fostered a sense of community amid the challenges of leaving their homeland and federal neglect. In both cases, it is evident that female networks played a crucial role in resistance and sustaining one another.

From a medical standpoint, women relied on their communities through their preservation of traditional healthcare methods. Even with the establishment of hospitals, women still heavily relied on herbs and other traditional methods of healthcare, despite disapproval from

[87] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation,* 37.
[88] Foster, "Of Baggage and Bondage: Gender and Status among Hidatsa and Crow Women."
[89] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 67.

government physicians and healthcare workers.[90] Often, herbal remedies were stored for safekeeping by women, allowing Indigenous people to avoid relying solely on federal hospitals, which didn't have much credibility among local communities. Herbs would even be discreetly transported by herbalists who would pass them from female to female.[91] Midwifery, much like herbal medicine, was its own form of resistance, as it reduced Indigenous women's reliance on hospitals. Through their efforts to deliver babies without federal intervention, midwives resisted US intrusion into the private lives of Indigenous women and gave them more autonomy in how they sought their own methods of healthcare. At times, Indigenous women even combined Western medicine with these traditional outlets.[92] Ultimately, the continued use of traditional medicine and midwifery allowed Indigenous women to assert agency over their reproductive health, preserving cultural practices and resisting the full imposition of federal medical authority.

Means of Resistance: Public Activism and Resistance

Alongside their reliance on female ties, Indigenous women also asserted their authority through public activism and speaking out against the injustice they faced. Although their sphere of influence varied, Indigenous women weren't afraid to vocalize wrongdoings at the hands of the US government. Crow women frequently took back agency during their time at reservation hospitals, rearranging furniture, sneaking in herbs and medicine, and even openly criticizing doctors.[93] These seemingly small acts of defiance were meaningful in how they reasserted their autonomy and challenged the rigid structures of US authority. By the 1950s, the US government shifted from interventionist policies toward a termination agenda, effectively relinquishing federal responsibility over all Indian tribes. This disproportionately affected Indigenous women.

[90] Foster, "Of Baggage and Bondage: Gender and Status among Hidatsa and Crow Women."
[91] Gurr, "Mothering in Borderlands: Policing Native American Women's Reproductive Healthcare."
[92] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, 77.
[93] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation,* 39.

The closure of vital services deprived the Crow tribe of the resources they had grown reliant on after being forced to abandon their traditional medicinal practices, eliminating essential healthcare and reproductive support. The Crow Indian Women's Club expressed their anger in a telegram they sent to Harry Truman, pleading with him to keep the hospitals open: "[t]here will be death for some Indian mothers and their babies born on the open prairies."[94] Through their letter, the Crow Indian Women's Club displays their political activism, as they not only fought for their own bodily autonomy but also the rights of other Indigenous women as well. These written forms of communication were also exemplified in *The Ottawa Citizen* newspaper, which described how Hopi, Navajo, and Crow women demanded justice against federal termination and the removal of Indigenous communities from their reservations in the 1970s. In the article, Phyllis Young, a Sioux woman who led the protest, condemned the US complicity in Indigenous genocide.[95] Through both everyday acts of resistance and organized political activism, Indigenous women consistently fought to protect their communities and assert their autonomy, especially when their health and cultural survival were at stake.

This activism is also exemplified by Women of All Red Nations (WARN). Composed of all women from 30+ Indigenous tribes, WARN articulated the earliest vision of Indigenous women's reproductive justice in the 1950s, protesting the forced sterilization of Indigenous women and the "genocidal motives" of reservation hospitals.[96] While WARN embraced feminist principles, these ideas diverged from Western feminism as they advocated for the preservation and embracing of traditional methods rather than individual expression or capabilities.[97] In the

[94] President (1945-1953 : Truman), Office of the President, 4/1945-1/20/1953, Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America.
[95] *The Ottawa Citizen,* November 28, 1980 (1973-1986), Nov 28,72.
[96] Theobald, *Reproduction on the Reservation*, Introduction.
[97] White, "Reclaiming the Native Mother: Native American Traditionalism and the Politics of Reproduction, 1960-1980."

Indigenous Peoples of North America Magazine, reporter Janet McClout took note of the "energetic and determined" WARN members, speaking to one who "pledge[d] support into holding US hospitals accountable for killing … babies."[98] This level of spirit was also seen at a 1970s civil rights hearing held in Washington, D.C., where WARN's article, *The Theft of Life,* was presented to Congress. There, they angrily expressed how Indigenous women were "political prisoners … victims of sterilization abuse who needed immediate justice."[99] Similarly, a news article depicts WARN activist Yvonne Warrow publicly pleading for the US government to stop the "destruction of our families and tribes."[100] Warrow shows how it's necessary to bring these sterilizations to light, arguing "[t]he more we get our message through to the people of the world, the more difficult it will be for the United States to ignore."[101] Overall, WARN maintained a strong public presence in condemning the US and relied on its public activism to demand systematic change.

Today, Indigenous Americans are building on their past resistance efforts to empower and give equity to the voices of their communities in the 21st century. Through the work of the Crow Tribal Court and its collaboration with the US government, the Crow tribe has become a separate "entity" from the US once again, delegating a chairwoman as the main authority over the court.[102] Within its governmental body, initiatives such as the Crow Legal Aid Office, the expansion of smaller judiciary courts, and the development of a constitution seek to aid and "rejuvenate the tribe's former authority."[103] Not only does this highlight the Crow's active

[98] The Indian Rights Association, 1882-1986: Series 2, Organizational Records, 1881–1989 Box 325, Folder 6. Historical Society of Pennsylvania. *Indigenous Peoples of North America.*
[99] US Commission on Civil Rights, *National Indian Civil Rights Issues: Hearing Held In Washington, D.C., March 19-20, 1979*, Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off, 1979.
[100] Lolita Lebron, "Let This Be a WARNing," *Off Our Backs* 8, no. 11 (1978): 9–9.
[101] Lebron, "Let This Be a WARNing."
[102] "Crow Tribal Courts in the 21st Century: Changing Paths - Strengthening the Vision.: Crow Tribe of Montana."
[103] "Crow Tribal Courts in the 21st Century: Changing Paths - Strengthening the Vision.: Crow Tribe of Montana."

engagement in politics and the political landscape of the US in the 21st century, but it also reflects a broader reassertion of Indigenous women's authority in leadership positions.

Conclusion

Through the course of the 20th century, the United States played a significant role in shaping, and often restricting, Crow women's access to reproductive healthcare. This control was deeply embedded in a broader agenda to control Indigenous people and undermine their sovereignty. Nevertheless, the sterilization procedures carried out by the Indian Health Services did more than perpetuate an agenda—they waged a war against Indigenous existence itself by robbing thousands of women of their ability to reproduce. Nevertheless, Indigenous women were not alone in this war for reproductive rights. The sterilization of Native women mirrored similar abuses happening in the African American community. During the Jim Crow era, African American women also underwent a disproportionate amount of sterilizations under the guise of public health and medical necessity.[104] Although African American women did not experience the same pressures of forced medicalization and erasure of traditional healthcare practices as Native women did, both groups fell victim to widespread medical malpractice and systematic abuse within the healthcare system due to eugenic ideologies. These parallels in history affirm the significance and necessity of my research. Not only does this topic allow readers to consider overlooked experiences faced by Indigenous women, but it also unveils a broader pattern of oppression faced by women in many marginalized communities. By bringing these issues to light, historians can move past the dominant male-centered narratives in the United States and instead reclaim stories that were previously neglected, untold, or erased. The unwavering

[104] Myla Vicenti Carpio, "The Lost Generation: American Indian Women and Sterilization Abuse," *Social Justice* 31, no. 4 (98) (2004): 40–53.

determination embodied in female figures such as the Crow women serves as a new source of inspiration as their legacy to protect their culture and identity continues to shape the present.

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Medical Malpractice: The Disaster of 1898 and the Iron Surgeon in Spain

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Editors: Henri Marchand, Lyndon Shi, Addison Perkins

> "Doctors of politics and family physicians will undoubtedly study the evil [of caciques]; they will discuss its origins, their classification, and their remedies; but the most alien to science who pays any attention to Public Affairs observes this singular state of Spain: wherever tact is applied, it does not find the pulse" - Francisco Silvela, 1898.[105]

The Spanish-American War is one of the most forgotten conflicts in American history. That is not the case in Spain. The effects of the war would shake Spain to the core and forever change its trajectory. After the loss of most of the Spanish Empire, a new political and literary movement known as the generation of '98 would arise. This movement reacted to the chaotic state of post-war Spanish politics in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most notable of these reactions was conservative writer and political thinker Jaquin Costa's conception of the Iron Surgeon, a hypothetical figure who would sweep in and take dictatorial power to repair the Spanish state. This concept formed the bedrock of Spanish nationalism for years to come and even inspired several would-be doctors. The varied reactions of the generation of '98 would define Spanish politics for the next half-century.

Firstly, the generation of '98 was the name given to a collection of Spanish writers, politicians, and other thinkers that emerged in the wake of the Spanish-American War. To understand the generation of '98, one must understand the ongoing geopolitical situation in Spain. On paper, Spain was a constitutional monarchy with a democratically elected congress, called the Cortes, but this was not actually the case due to widespread and open corruption.

[105] Francisco Silvela, "España Sin Pulso," El Tiempo, August 16, 189

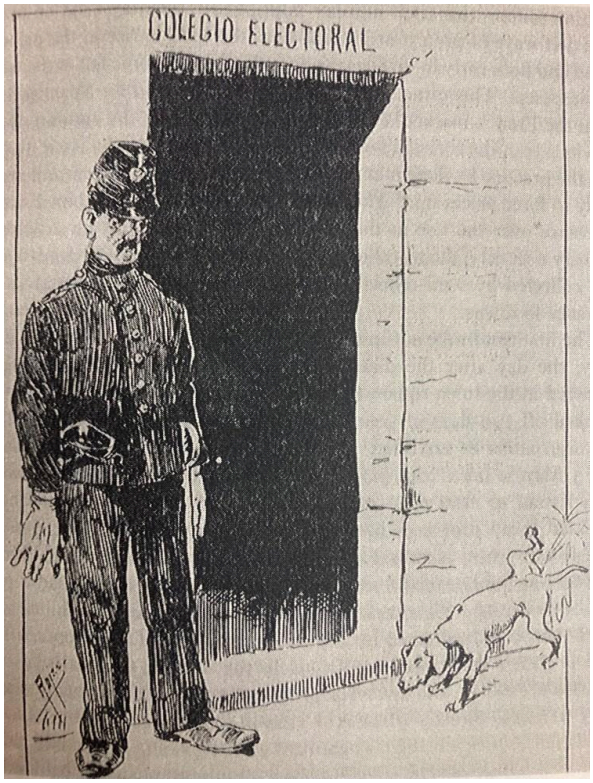
Not only did the king have the power to force any administration to resign and choose their replacements, but the Cortes was packed with power-trading bureaucrats who swapped with each other every electoral cycle, with no real competition amongst political parties.[106] Under typical conditions, the king appointed a governor, or power transitioned to the other party. These actions, which were themselves predetermined, were followed by the Minister of the Interior's call for local powerbrokers and their apparatuses (caciques) to "fix" the election. Votes would then be falsified on the local and federal levels, ensuring victory for whoever's turn it was to hold power.[107] Consistent displays of military force, local violence, and intimidation sustained this system. The illustration below, published by *El Cardo*, a Spanish satirical magazine, indicates the apathetic popular reaction against Spain's electoral system.[108] This image depicts a civil guard standing in front of a polling house. A dog is seen urinating on the doorway. The caption states, "Thank god someone's turned up!" This comic illustrates the widespread attitude of apathy in Spain: the elections were so thoroughly falsified that hardly anyone bothered to vote. This satire is something most Spaniards could find relatable, as historian Paul Preston describes:

> "Excluded from organized politics, the hungry masses could choose only between apathy and violence. Their apathy allowed the local authorities to fabricate the results without too much opposition. Violent resistance guaranteed arrest, torture, and perhaps execution."[109]

However, this apathetic atmosphere was beginning to change by 1891. Although the caciques worked best in rural areas, where it was easy to falsify elections, in industrialized areas, it was much harder to fudge elections or intimidate voters due to larger turnout and growing

[106] Paul Preston, A People Betrayed: A History of Corruption, Political Incompetence and Social Division in Modern Spain (Oxford: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2020), 27.
[107] José V. Ortega, "Aftermath of Splendid Disaster: Spanish Politics before and after the Spanish American War of 1898," Journal of Contemporary History 15, no. 2 (1980)
[108] "Las Elecciones," El Cardo, 19 Sept. 1898. (Image Scanned from source on footnote 10, page 105)
[109] Preston, "People Betrayed", 27

independent political groups like unions by the 1910s. With growing industrialization, electoral power began to shift away from local bosses and started to rely more upon popular sovereignty.[110] Gerrymandering and corruption stymied this, as well as the already broken constitution, but there was enough democratic pressure to force the stagnant parties to become more radical.[111] Emerging socialist and anarchist groups put further pressure on the system. This confluence of an intentionally flawed Cortez, combined with cracks in the already flawed system of power, brewed the perfect storm for the governing system to fall apart.



The Spanish-American War of 1898, during which the Spanish military was soundly defeated in repeated engagements with Americans, Cubans, and Filipinos, was the thunderous wake-up call to the state of Spanish society. To summarize the conduct of the war, the Spanish

[110] Ibid
[111] Preston, "People Betrayed", 57

army and armada were soundly defeated in repeated engagements with Americans, Cubans, and Filipinos. Many within the generation of '98, such as Costa, blamed the incompetent government for this failure. Before the war, observers within Spain thought the nation to be worthy of international respect. The loss in 1898 ruined that self-conception, because the mass of what remained of the Spanish Empire was greatly reduced. Already shrunken compared to its height in the early 1700s, the war caused some of Spain's last overseas territories to finally vanish from the map.[112][113] One can easily identify that, in the course of a few months, Spain went from a smaller but still substantial empire that spanned the globe to merely most of Iberia and a few middling islands off the coast: A drastic visual change that soured the hearts of many nationalists and imperialists. The economic consequences of losing these lands were significant:

> "The disaster exposed as a terrible delusion the belief that Spain was at least a middle-ranking world power, a belief that was a central component of the national culture. The loss of the last remnants of the Empire provoked a severe post-imperial crisis among sections of Spanish society… Spain's political system, its national character, and Spanish nationhood itself fell into question."[114]

All segments of the regime began to lose their luster, beyond military failure. Pointedly, that spring, Lord Salisbury, a respected British statesman and Conservative politician, delivered his famed "Living and Dying Nations" speech in London, commenting on the Spanish-American War as an inevitability; a living nation, the US, eating the remains of a dying nation, Spain.[115] This speech foretold a long series of disasters and political shake-ups

[112] Edward Stanford, "The Cyclopaedian or Atlas of General Maps Published under the Superintendence of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge with an Index to the Principal Places in the World," Library of Congress, 1867.
[113] James McConnell, "McConnell's historical maps of the United States, The Spanish-American War, 1898," The Library of Congress, 1919.
[114] Sebastian Balfour, The End of the Spanish Empire, 1898-1923 (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 1997), 49.
[115] "LORD SALISBURY ON THE NATIONS," New Zealand Herald, June 11, 1898, 3.

in Spain that created the Generation of ’98, a group of thinkers that sought to destroy the caciques and replace them with a superior system. They disagreed, however, on what that replacement was to be.

The regenerationist movement, led by a group of thinkers known as the Generation of ‘98, was one such movement that rose out of this national morass. Beginning in 1898, the movement would remain in its heyday until concerns regarding Spanish societal stability weakened with the economic prosperity of the First World War. Regenerationism was not a dictatorial movement at its inception:

> “Despite superficial similarities to the 1930s and 1940s authoritarian jargon, neither the intelligentsia (the ’generation of ‘98) nor the movement of popular protest organized by the Chambers of Commerce, were advocating such a philosophy. The constant attacks on politics, politicians, parliament, political parties, and elections, are no proof that there was a search for an authoritarian solution but rather struck at defects of the system from the standpoint of its own ideals.”[116]

The original generation of ‘98, the philosophical leaders of Regenerationism, was a wide confluence of poets, writers, politicians, and activists who held a wide swath of views.[117] Scholars debate whether the generation of ‘98 was as solid a body as is often assumed. Broadly, though, the generation of ‘98 was a literary and political movement that questioned the state of Spanish democracy and government. Certainly, when viewed through the lens of literature, the generation of ‘98 had diverse stylings and political opinions.[118] However, confining the definition of the generation within a literary standard and not a political one, overlooks the main goals of the movement. Additionally, keep in mind that the generation of ‘98 was merely a set of influential individuals whose writings would come to define regenerationism as a movement.

[116] Ortega, "Splendid Disaster," 326
[117] Antonio Machado, Campos de Castilla (Madrid: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 1912)
[118] Phyllis Z. Boring, "A TEMPORAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE GENERATION OF 1898," Romance Notes 16, no. 2 (1975)

The inspiration is not synonymous with the resulting whole.[119]

Regenerationists held largely similar beliefs about what was wrong within Spain and what was to be achieved. They believed that the caciques' system was rotten to the core and had to be replaced. Regenerationists differed strongly on the political means they pursued to achieve their goals of dismantling the caciques, overhauling the democratic system, investing in public works, and reforming education.[120] It largely broke into three sections: The Maurists, the Socialists, and the followers of Costa. Costa believed in a figure called the Iron Surgeon, an entirely new conception of dictator that he elaborated on in his monumental essays on the subject. These two alternatives to the Iron Surgeon are vital to touch upon, as it is difficult to capture how attractive the idea of this kind of dictator would be to Costa, and much of Spain, without discussing the other options that existed. It must be made clear how appealing that concept would have been to large segments of Spanish society. Maura, broadly, represented the bourgeois intellectualism of the generation of '98, which phrased regenerationism in a very patronizing way of having the intellectual class reform the government for the benefit of the unwashed masses.[121] Maura's government, having taken power in 1907, used violent repression and consistently despised tactics to crack down on rebellion. He was broadly seen as ineffective and not conducive to systemic change. Maura believed in a "revolution from above", but reflecting upon the man some time later, his generation of '98 peer Miguel de Unamuno stated:

[119] Ortega, "Splendid Disaster."
[120] Sebastian Balfour, "Riot, regeneration and reaction: Spain in the aftermath of the 1898 Disaster," The Historical Journal 38, no. 2 (1995)
[121] Miguel D. Unamuno et al., Short Stories by the Generation of 1898/Cuentos de la Generación de 1898: A Dual-Language Book (North Chelmsford: Courier Corporation, 2014)

> "Maura is a man of words and a lawyer. Very sincere and honorable but a lawyer concerned to prove an alibi. And even when he spoke of the rapid and radical revolution from above, he was [merely] coining… another phrase"[122]

More pointedly, Maura wanted to avoid republicanism at all costs: he was a conservative and wanted to retain the monarchy, believing that the Cortes must undergo dramatic change only for the sake of preventing the downfall of the king.[123] Maura and his supporters had prescient concerns, though, because socialism and its associated terrorism were on the rise.

The socialists saw Maura's reforms as useless because they sustained a corrupt system, and they disagreed with Costa's advocacy for a dictator. Socialist leader Manuel Azaña reflected upon this situation:

> "The Restoration proscribes the examination of the realities of the Spanish body; it could not progress within its lines and was condemned to sterility; or if it did progress, it was headed straight for its own destruction."[124]

Led by a variety of figures, such as leftist Pablo Iglesias, the above-mentioned Manuel Azaña, and inflammatory journalist Alejandro Lerroux, the Spanish left was quickly organizing. A large number of Spaniards began to join several different left-wing parties and associations with a variety of views. Many of these groups engaged in terrorism. Perhaps the most legendary was the La Mano Negra, an illusory group blamed for bombings and murders all over Spain. Whether they existed or not, the terror was real, and was being stoked by figures on the left, like Lerroux:

> "Young barbarians today, enter and sack the decadent and miserable civilization of this unhappy country, destroy its temples, finish off its gods, lift the veil of the novice nuns, and raise them up to the status of mothers to make the species more virile. Break into the property registries and make bonfires of its papers that fire might purify the odious social organization."[125]

[122] Balfour, "End of Spanish Empire, 204
[123] Preston, "People Betrayed"
[124] Manuel Azaña, "Tres generaciones del Ateneo" (lecture, Opening session of the academic year, Ateneo de Madrid, November 20, 1930).
[125] Preston, "People Betrayed" 73

Spain had been rocked with terror attacks by anarchist individuals for years, and despite the vast majority of the left not being complicit (excepting figures like Lerroux), they were characterized by terror. So, while Maura represented a facelift of the violent status quo, the left was represented by bomb throwers and arsonists, no matter their actual intentions.[126] This was a poor mixture that caused Costa and his auxiliaries to seek a third option.

Perhaps the most notable and most interesting of the generation of '98 was Joaquin Costa and his dictatorial concept of the Iron Surgeon. Costa saw the failures of the caciques and the failures of alternative democracy (Maurists and Socialists) and designed a third option: The Iron Surgeon. He builds upon this idea in his monumental work "Oligarchy and Caciquism as the Current Form of Government in Spain: Urgency and how to Change it". This work formed not just the basis of his third of the regenerationism movement, but also for the future dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. It would also become the bedrock of 20th-century fascist thought, cementing its importance to the regeneration movement and to authoritarianism as a whole in the eyes of historians. Costa spends the first few pages of this work discussing the caciques' system and its problems, summarizing it with a quote from his colleague Gumersindo de Azcárate:

[126] Balfour, "End of Spanish Empire, 204

> "There you have a full-length portrait of the cacique, the true master of Spain, the Catherine Wheel of its Constitution: Was Azcárate exaggerating when he defined caciquism as 'a new kind of feudalism, a hundred times more repugnant than the warrior feudalism of the Middle Ages?'"[127]

As discussed above, the regenerationists were almost in universal agreement on the issues of the caciques. What makes Costa unique is his solutions is his refutation, in chapter two, of the legalistic "within the system" approach of the more tepid regenerationists and those who wished to fundamentally preserve the Cortes, such as Maura. Costa indeed believes that a fundamentally corrupt system cannot be fixed from the inside:

> "A sick social state cannot be cured by a law: the evils born from the distortion or deficiencies of the will can only be remedied by healing or educating the will; external guarantees and combinations are only effective as auxiliaries to that ethical, dynamic action, and in function of it."[24]

Instead, he uses the metaphor of Spain being a sick and dying nation that needs a swift and decisive recovery that can only be performed by a skilled individual. Thus creating the fascistic concept of the Iron Surgeon through this metaphor:

> "The cacique must be repressed or [removed], I repeat, by means of external coercion, as a cancer or a tumor is [removed], and at the same time the vitiated blood of the social body that produced it must be purified, so that it does not re-emerge….To cure Spain of the cacique… supposes two different things: a surgical operation, with an almost instantaneous effect, and a medical treatment, with a slow and gradual [recovery].[128]

Who is the Iron Surgeon in geopolitical terms? Costa makes a compelling metaphor of a surgeon taking swift and decisive action to remove a tumor, but how does that manifest in real politics? Costa reiterates his desire for immediate change to avoid cataclysm. To this end, his Surgeon would require the ability to make changes unquestioned. They must also have an undying love for the country and shape it without corruption. Only via swift, dedicated action of an individual

[127]Joaquín Costa, Oligarquía y caciquismo: como la forma actual de gobierno en España : urgencia y modo de cambiarla (Madrid: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 1901), II,5.
[128] Costa, "Oligarquía y caciquismo", II,2.

can Spain be saved, and this kind of change necessitates a dictator.

> "This ruler, this liberator, who is to lead the nation out of the captivity in which it groans and disenchant liberty… must personally guarantee the effectiveness of the law; he must put himself in the place of [ineffective democracy.] That is what it all comes down to: he must cut with his own hand the bonds that oppress the law, and with the law… he must become the soul of the nation, by virtue of having become one with it."[129]

In this way, the dictator must be synonymous with the state and operate it personally. A dictator with absolute power is required. This power is needed both over the laws of the nation and the minds of its people. To create this power, the Cortes must be abolished entirely. Furthermore, Costa contends that democratic systems hastened the disaster of 1898, repeatedly citing the inefficiencies of democratic systems. This view was shared by many of his contemporaries, such as psychologist Rafael Altamira and politician Francisco Silvela.[130] Costa then introduces an interesting quality to the Surgeon: his eventual absence. Costa alleges that once this work is completed, the dictator must abdicate in favor of a rebuilt Cortes of strong leaders that is more beneficial to the people, with Costa stating: "The government 'of the worst' is replaced by that 'of the best.'"[131]

Costa included an addendum published in 1901 to his original 1898 work, and this three-chapter version was the version most widely known at the time. In this chapter, Costa engages in rebuttals against common detractions to his original work. Perhaps most interesting is the section titled "Surgical politics has nothing in common with dictatorship and is compatible with the parliamentary regime", in which he tries to defend the fascistic idea of the Iron Surgeon and separate it from the ideas of despotism of the time. (Note that the title of this section alone is incompatible with the phrasing of sections in chapter two.) In this section, he argues the components that make the Iron Surgeon truly different from period conceptions of feudal

[129] Costa, "Oligarquía y caciquismo", II,4.
[130]George L. Vásquez, "Altamira, the Generation of 1898, and the Regeneration of Spain," Mediterranean Studies 5 (1995).
[131] Costa, "Oligarquía y caciquismo:, II,4.

totalitarianism, thereby crafting a grave precursor to 20th-century fascism.[132] Costa separates his Iron Surgeon from a dictator, stating that while a dictator simply seizes the nation, the Iron Surgeon *becomes* the nation. Rather than operating state apparatuses, all apparatuses of the state must operate around the surgeon, basing their very function upon the ideology of the Surgeon.

> "The dictator… substitutes himself in place of all the Magistracies; Nothing more, the "iron surgeon" serves as an adjective complement according to the Constitution: he makes the laws govern, the Administration administer, the governor govern, the teacher educate, the inspector inspect… Police of the Police, watches over those in charge of watching; makes up for the deficiencies of all these organs with decrees and action;"[133]

The Surgeon not only operates the state, but the Surgeon is the figure that the state revolves around. This idea makes Costa's image of the Iron Surgeon unique and specifically prescient to 20th-century fascism. Costa is not describing a mere dictator or monarch, but a whole governmental system revolving around his Iron Surgeon. A variety of figures used this same rhetoric, which became emblematic of fascist political ideology. Clearly, despite Costa's imagining of the Iron Surgeon as a figure who would sweep in and repair not only the state but the nation with divine action, in reality, this imagined figure would prove to be a self-interested quack.

Years later, these ideas of dictatorship to save Spain would come to fruition during the 1923 coup of Primo de Rivera. While not central to the 1898 conception of the Iron Surgeon, the concept is very rarely discussed without discussing the leaders that would come from it, chiefly, Primo de Rivera. The Iron Surgeon was central to the rise of Primo de Rivera. He and others were directly inspired by Costa's work to form and justify their regimes, for Rivera echoed Costa's rhetoric to justify the new change in management.

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[132] Raymond Carr, Modern Spain, 1875-1980 (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1980)

[133] Costa, "Oligarquía y caciquismo", III,9.

> "The significance of [the coup] has been frequently expressed in medical metaphors for the obvious reason that Primo himself adopted the classic regenerationist image of the Iron Surgeon"[134]

Primo de Rivera echoed Costa's sentiments almost exactly when justifying his government. He used medical language and described himself as the long-awaited Iron surgeon. He combined this rhetoric with that of Mussolini in Italy, who was similarly inspired by Costa, at least in part.[135] Costa's writings formed the bedrock of ideology and rhetoric on which the most basic tenets of 20th-century fascism were founded. These strong illusions of the Iron Surgeon provided the backbone of justification for his rule. He swiftly gained popular and aristocratic support and even that of the king, in part due to his medical rhetoric. These illusions would only be maintained and strengthened by the Franco regime, which glorified de Rivera and portrayed his reign as Spain's second golden age in Francoist historiography.[136]

Spain is a fascinating case of corruption, ideology, passion, and failure. Despite its terrible corruption and mundane inefficiency, the constitutional monarchy known as the restoration system proved stable. However, the Spanish-American War would prove to be a breaking point. With the loss of prestige, empire, and respect for its institutions, the status quo of restoration Spain was doomed. This fall took 25 years to come to fruition with Primo de Rivera's coup, which, in turn, determined the next 57 years of Spanish political chaos. The critical and constructive political writings of the Generation of '98 facilitated this fall. This is especially true of Costa's ideas, which would go on to inspire the rhetoric of other dictators.[137] In this way, the outcry finally released by the Spanish-American War was monumental. The faces that represented the regenerationism movement, Maura, Azaña, and Costa, among others, would

[134] Preston, "People Betrayed" 154.
[135] Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945 (Oakland: University of California Press, 2004), 18.
[136] Alejandro Quiroga, "La Gran Guerra De los intelectuales: España en Europa," Ayer Revista de Historia Contemporánea 91, no. 3 (2013)
[137] Ben-Ghiat, Fascist Modernities

shape the nation's attitudes for over half a century. This came in the form of the Iron Surgeon, a concept that dominated not only Spain but nationalist sentiments around the world.

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One Hundred Days of Confusion: British Press perspectives on the Qing Dynasty's September 1898 Coup

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The Qing dynasty experienced a coup on September 21, 1898. After the Guangxu Emperor attempted to implement a reform program known as the Hundred Days' Reform, the Empress Dowager Cixi removed him from power and resumed her role as regent, a position she would hold until her death in 1908. British newspapers, namely *The Daily News* and *The Times*, actively reported on the coup's progression and commented on its ramifications for Britain's position in East Asia. This paper will explore the coup through the lens of the British press, including how they presented the coup as a struggle between two political parties, appealed to a constructed Chinese public opinion, and incorporated the Anglo-Russian rivalry into their publications. An examination of these reporting strategies reveals that the British press both influenced and was influenced by official British policy towards the Qing dynasty. Given that the British Empire had a limited presence in China at this time, British newspapers reporting on the coup tended to adopt an orientalist slant by assuming that China was radically and fundamentally different from the West. They also characterized China as a marginal region of their Empire in which British influence was restricted but important for checking Russian expansion. This explains why British newspapers reacted more strongly to the September 1898 coup, which was seen as having direct diplomatic ramifications, than to the Hundred Days' Reform, which was seen as a domestic Chinese project that did not concern British interests.

Context of the Hundred Days' Reform and the 1898 coup

The September coup ended not only the personal rule of the Guangxu Emperor, but also a short-lived period of reform that began on June 11, 1898, known as the Hundred Days' Reform. These reforms, which impacted education, the economy, the military, and the administration, were promulgated in response to foreign imperialism in China, exemplified by territorial losses against Japan during the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895 and the German occupation of Jiaozhou Bay in early 1898.[138] However, contemporaries did not consider these reforms to be radical, as they followed a precedent of the moderate reform established by the Self-Strengthening Movement after 1861; scholars such as Luke Kwong have similarly noted that there were "scarcely any surprises in the new programs."[139] The cause of the September coup, which ended the reforms, is a controversial topic amongst historians. Kwong, for instance, argues that Cixi instigated the coup because she believed in a conspiracy that Marquis Ito Hirobumi of Japan would take over the Qing government,[140] while Jack Gray argues that the reforms failed "because Chinese public opinion was still unorganized and inarticulate."[141] These early opinions impacted later historiography, which reflect similarly conflicted explanations given by *The Daily News* and *The Times* in 1898.

British newspapers were interested in Qing politics in 1898 because the latter was geopolitically and economically significant to the former. This was partly because the British held territorial concessions in China, including Hong Kong, parts of Shanghai, and the newly acquired territory of Weihaiwei. The limited geographic size of these concessions reflects the

[138] Luke S. K. Kwong, *A Mosaic of the Hundred Days: Personalities, Politics, and Ideas of 1898*, (Cambrdige: Harvard University Asia Center, 1984), 169-171.
[139] Kwong, *A Mosaic of the Hundred Days,* 173.
[140] Kwong, *A Mosaic of the Hundred Days,* 211.
[141] Jack Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions: China from the 1800s to 2000*, Short Oxford History of the Modern World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 134.

British government's aversion to expanding into Chinese territory and thereby injuring British trade interests.[142] Indeed, contemporaneous British politicians viewed China as a vast market that could be accessed and protected. Additionally, the Anglo-Russian rivalry was pertinent in British policy towards China in 1898. The rivalry, commonly referred to as the Great Game, primarily manifested in British and Russian attitudes towards India and Central Asia, but British anxiety towards Russian expansionism is also evidenced in press coverage of China.[143]

Historiography of Anglo-Chinese relations in the late 1900s

Many diverse studies have been conducted on Anglo-Chinese relations in the late 1800s. Scholars have applied orientalist lenses to Anglo-Chinese relations to varying degrees, as some disagree on the causes of European imperialism in China and the extent to which Western philosophy inspired reform in the Qing dynasty. Notably absent from these studies, however, is the lens of the British press and the insight it provides into the aforementioned historiographical disagreements. Further research reveals that British newspapers' attitudes towards the Qing dynasty were oftentimes orientalist, particularly in portrayals of Cixi as an inconsiderate autocrat, and Britain's limited imperialism in China created the conditions for a paternalistic attitude towards Chinese people, such as offering them protection from Russia. However, British newspapers did not strongly support the 1898 reforms themselves because they were not seen as relevant to British geopolitical interests. Viewing the September coup through the unique lens of British newspapers reveals that a complex and mutually-informing relationship existed between the press, their readership, and government policy.

[142] Gray, *Rebellions and Revolutions*, 116.
[143] Martin Ewans, *The Great Game: Documents* (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 1.

The Orientalist lens adopted by prior scholarship

The historiography of Anglo-Chinese relations in the late 19th century is largely concerned with the question of Orientalism and how it continues to affect present-day scholarship. David Robles convincingly shows that, during this period, Europeans often adopted an orientalist lens towards China, as they constructed radical and essentialist distinctions between the West and China. Though they differed somewhat on the precise nature of this distinction—Max Weber argued in 1913 that Chinese culture was fundamentally opposed to capitalism, while Giacomo Puccini saw China as exotic and mystical—most historians up to the mid-19th-century, like Karl Wittfogel, believed that China was civilized by Europeans in the 1800s: "It was only after the Industrial Revolution that the West was able to force an open-door policy upon the remote Chinese empire."[144][145] In the late 20th century, however, many European colonial empires dissolved, and Edward Said's critique of Orientalism led many scholars to criticize colonialism and the orientalist lenses that it had produced.[146] Zhang Pinggong, for example, criticized orientalism as an "inauthentic construct that exists in and for the West."[147] Certain contemporary scholars still uphold orientalism though: Evgeny Sergeev argued in 2013 that East Asia was medieval, socially apathetic, economically backward, and politically anarchic until it "[awoke] under the influence of innovations that were brought to them by many of the Great Game's 'players,'" the Great Game referring to the geopolitical rivalry between Britain and Russia.[148] British newspapers, then, were a medium through which orientalist views towards China were perpetuated, as they

[144] David Martinez Robles, "China and 'Orientalism,'" Oxford Bibliographies, 2015, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199920082/obo-9780199920082-0113.xml.
[145] Karl Wittfogel. *Oriental Despotism: a Comparative Study of Total Power.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 426.
[146] Robles, "China and 'Orientalism.'" https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199920082/obo-9780199920082-0113.xml.
[147] Zhang Pinggong, "Orientalism Revisited in the Chinese Context," *Linguistics and Literature Studies* (2019): 255.
[148] Evgeny Sergeev. *The Great Game, 1856–1907: Russo-British Relations in Central and East Asia*, (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2013), 330.

assumed its rulers to be despotic, its people to be unintelligent, and its borders as needing British protection.

The Imperialist Lens Adopted by Prior Scholarship

Historians also debate the question of how to define imperialism as a category in the history of Anglo-Chinese relations. Jianbo Zhou, a Marxist historian, defines Westernization as the adoption of a capitalist foundation and cooperation with the bourgeoisie class. Zhou argues that the Western imperialist presence played a crucial role in Qing reform and failure: "Facing serious foreign aggression, [the Qing government] more actively engaged in Westernization, but once the threat was removed, they returned to business as usual."[149] William T. Rowe, on the other hand, claims to describe a non-materialist approach that argues that Western imperialism in China began in earnest after the First Sino-Japanese War as a reaction to the rise of Japan and the fear that East Asians would destroy the West. According to Rowe, the "infinitely wealthier and more populous China" would pose an even greater threat than Japan if it pursued Western-style reforms. Therefore, Western powers pursued imperialism in China to prevent the country from reforming altogether.[150] However, British newspapers' paternalistic attitudes towards China, though indeed predicated on the presence of British imperialism in China, viewed the reforms neither as a threat to nor a result of said imperialism. Rather, the newspapers characterized China as a marginal piece of the British Empire in which British influence was restricted but important for checking the expansion of Russia.

[149] Jianbo Zhou, *Westernization Movement and Early Thought of Modernization in China: Pragmatism and Changes in Society, 1860s–1900s*, Palgrave Studies in Economic History (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 362.
[150] William Rowe, *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 323.

Analysis of *The Daily News* and *The Times*

Cixi's proclamation of the coup

On September 21, Cixi issued an edict that placed Guangxu under her tutelage. This was the first development of the coup, and it was mentioned in the September 22 issues of both *The Daily News* and *The Times*. The *News* reported:

> Rumors are current, which it is impossible to disregard, to the effect that the Empress Dowager has recovered her ascendency over the Emperor, who is said to be now practically in a state of tutelage.[151]

The *Times* reported:

> The recent Imperial decrees were mainly due to the influence of Kang-Yu-Mei [Kang Youwei]. Now Kang-Yu-Mei [Kang Youwei] has been ordered to leave Peking. The Empress Dowager has assumed charge of the government. She will be present at all Cabinet meetings and audiences, see all memorials, and approve all edicts before they are issued. This is equivalent to the virtual restoration of the regency. The early reinstatement of Li Hung Chang [Li Hongzhang] is expected as the result.[152]

Both newspapers were conscious that Cixi's power was being "recovered" in some manner, revealing that her days in power from 1861 to 1889 remained present in the British consciousness, an idea corroborated days later in an interview with Wu Tingfang. The *Times* mentioned the anticipated reinstatement of the diplomat Li Hongzhang because, as evidenced in later reports, he was viewed as a close ally of Cixi and as a panderer to Russian interests.

This was also not the first time that British newspapers had reported on China. For example, Li Hongzhang's removal from office was mentioned in the September 21 issue of *The Times*.[153] A *Daily News* report from the same day, meanwhile, referenced the *Times*' reports on how Britain, the Qing dynasty, and Russia jointly negotiated loans for constructing a railroad in

[151] "The Emperor of China in a State of Tutelage." *The Daily News*. September 22, 1898.
[152] "China." *The Times*. September 22, 1898.
[153] "China." *The Times*. September 21, 1898.

China.[154] Clearly, Qing politics were already relevant to British diplomacy by September 1898, so the need to report on the coup was obvious.

The Daily News' speculation on Cixi's motives

The Daily News speculated at length on Cixi's motivations for launching the coup after overcoming the initial shock of the September 21 edict. Some theories are provided in the following passage:

> So long as [Guangxu] continued [to be] subservient and a mere figurehead, the Dowager Empress allowed him to occupy the throne in peace, but as soon as he attempted to act upon his own initiative, she reasserted her authority and compelled him to resign… The suddenness of the coup is stated to be due to the determination of the Dowager Empress to prevent the success of the Marquis Ito's mission.[155]

The "Marquis Ito's mission" refers to Hirobumi Ito's visit to Tianjin and Beijing in mid-September. The September 15 issue of *The Daily News* states that Ito's visit was intended to create an alliance between the Qing dynasty and Japan,[156] revealing the newspapers' predisposition towards interpreting events in China through a diplomatic lens

The September 23 report also speculated on Cixi's motives by quoting A. R. Colquhon's "China in Transformation," which held an orientalist attitude towards Cixi. It reads:

> For many years past the politics of Peking have been swayed by a bitter Palace feud, the young Emperor and his party on one side and the Empress-Dowager on the other. Of a passionate nature and imperious will, inspired by purely selfish considerations, the late Regent continues to dominate and even terrorise the Emperor, who is of terrible physique and incapable of wielding the authority which belongs to him.[157]

This evaluation of Cixi, similar to aforementioned reports, is overwhelmingly negative. Her depiction as a jealous autocrat is distinctly orientalist in tone, and fits within the framework of oriental despotism expounded by Karl Wittfogel in his eponymous book: "The common

[154] "The Chinese Railways." *The Daily News*. September 21, 1898.
[155] "Chinese Emperor Resigns in Favour of the Empress." *The Daily News*. September 23, 1898.
[156] "The Far East." *The Daily News*. September 15, 1898.
[157] "Chinese Emperor Resigns in Favour of the Empress." *The Daily News*. September 23, 1898.

substance in the various Oriental societies appeared most conspicuously in the despotic strength of their political authority."[158] Colquhoun's evaluation also claims that party conflict accompanied the personal animosity between Guangxu and Cixi, revealing that British observers imposed a narrative of conflict between two political parties onto the wider narrative of the September coup. Although this narrative is reminiscent of party conflict in the British parliament, it does not mention the role of reform and conservatism in the September coup.

The urgent interview with Kang Youwei in The Times

Speculation towards the cause of the coup, and reporting on the coup in general, was sparse in *The Times* until September 26. Two competing viewpoints were provided in this report, both from Chinese officials. The first was that of Kang Youwei, who was ousted by the coup:

> [Kang] further stated that recent events were entirely due to the action of the Manchu party, headed by the Empress Dowager and the Viceroy Yung Lu [Ronglu], and including all the high Manchu officials. The latter were displeased at the Emperor's leaning towards the Chinese Reform party, and decided to restore the Dowager's Regency."[159]

Similar to Colquhon, Kang claimed that the coup was the result of conflict between two political parties, revealing his Western interventionist sympathies. More evidence of this appeared in a later section of the report: "Kang-Yu-Wei urges that England now has an opportunity to intervene and restore the Emperor to the Throne, whereby she [England] would earn the gratitude of the Chinese people."[160] Kang pandered to the paternalism felt by the newspaper's readership by mentioning the "Chinese people" because he was aware of the British public's ability to influence official British foreign policy. My conclusion, drawing from contemporary reports from newspapers like *The Times*, corroborates that of Luke Kwong, who says that Kang "drew

[158] Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 1. Sexism may have also motivated this negative portrayal of Cixi in the newspapers.
[159] "The Situation in China." *The Times*. September 26, 1898.
[160] "The Situation in China." *The Times*. September 26, 1898.

neat generalizations in dichotomies: [Cixi] versus [Guangxu], reaction versus reform, Manchu versus Han Chinese," though Kwong does not comment on how British newspapers specifically used these dichotomies in their explanations of the coup.[161]

Finally, Kang constructed the coup as a joint Cixi-Russian operation:

> The Dowager's party is bound by an understanding with the Russians, whereby the latter, in consideration of the support of Russian interests, undertake to preserve Manchuria as the seat of the dynasty and to maintain Manchu rule in China.[162]

In doing this, Kang struck at the worst fear of the British readership in regards to East Asia: Russian expansion. Kang therefore urged the British to not only protect the interests of the Chinese people, but also their own. His personal motivation was to be reinstated in power alongside Guangxu, while *The Times* wanted to make the narrative digestible, paternalistic, and fear-inducing to capture the interest of its readership.

The reassuring interview with Wu Tingfang in The Times

The second viewpoint featured in *The Times* on September 23 was from Wu Tingfang, the Qing ambassador to the United States. This interview was also paraphrased in the September 24 report of *The Daily News*.[163] Presented immediately after Kang's interview in *The Times*, Wu commented on the causes of the coup and its implications (or lack thereof) on diplomacy:

> Dynastic reasons are solely responsible for the change. Doubtless, the recent reformatory edicts had something to do with it; certainly no foreign Power could have any influence in such a matter. It is equally absurd to say that the change is inimical to the interests of Great Britain—or of any other nation for that matter. The Dowager has always been friendly to England, as was shown during her former regency.[164]

Wu consciously appealed to the newly-incumbent Cixi in his attempt to curb foreign interest in the coup as he, unlike Kang, was not ousted by the coup. Wu's assertion that "no foreign Power

[161] Kwong, *A Mosaic of the Hundred Days*, 226.
[162] "The Situation in China." *The Times*. September 26, 1898.
[163] "The Crisis in China." *The Daily News*. September 24, 1898.
[164] "The Situation in China." *The Times*. September 26, 1898.

could have any influence in such a matter" serves to refute Kang's claim that Russia had co-orchestrated the coup, further showing that British newspapers were anxious towards Russian expansion in China.[165]

British foreign policy in the interview with Lord Charles Beresford in The Times

Another notable interview from the September 26 issue of *The Times* was that of Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, who was in Singapore at the time. The given excerpt from his interview with *The Times* demonstrates how British foreign policy in regards to China was focused on opening trade and protecting the country from Russian economic and military intrusion:

> The position in China as regards British trade was, [Beresford] said, critical… He advocates a commercial alliance between Great Britain, Germany, the United States, and Japan. This, [Beresford] said, was bound to promote peace, which was Britain's chief interest.[166]

This attitude was also evidenced in the political cartoon below (see figure 1), despite being published in an American magazine by a Chinese artist, provides an apt visual representation of British attitudes towards China in 1898. The title of the cartoon, "How the Russian Bear Threatens China," reveals that the cartoonist believed Russia threatened China's integrity, mirroring the aversion towards Russia displayed in *The Daily News* and *The Times*. The British bulldog has the words "The Open Door" (meaning free trade) and "The Integrity of China" written on its body, showing that the cartoonist was aware of British paternalistic attitudes towards the Qing dynasty. The menacing Russian bear, with the word "conquest" written on its forehead, reflects British fears of Russian expansion in China. Finally, the confused look on the bulldog's face reveals that the cartoonist was not confident in the British government's ability to protect its own interests, perhaps because the British presence in China was rather limited.

[165] "The Situation in China." *The Times*. September 26, 1898.
[166] "The Situation in China." *The Times*. September 26, 1898.

HOW THE RUSSIAN BEAR THREATENS CHINA.—A STRIKING CARTOON BY A CHINESE ARTIST, ILLUSTRATING THE SITUATION IN THE FAR EAST.

Figure 1. *How the Russian bear threatens China. — A striking cartoon by a Chinese artist, illustrating the situation in the Far East*. Political cartoon. *Leslie's Weekly*. Courtesy of MIT Visualizing Cultures. 1900.

The role of reform in calls to save the emperor

Although the reforms themselves were mentioned in the newspapers, they were not depicted as relevant to British interests. The newspapers did make sympathetic comments about the effect of reform on the Chinese public; a report in *The Daily News* from September 23 laments the lack of implementation of reform policies stated that "The hopes of reform, so ardently desired by the intelligent portion of the Chinese, has now dwindled to vanishing point."[167] Although this quote is orientalist in its assumption that most Chinese people were unintelligent, it doesn't claim that the British ought to actively promote reform in China, as China was conceived as a sovereign country rather than a British colony. A *Daily News* issue from September 16 (when the reforms were still in place), conversely, criticized the rapid speed of the reforms and gave no mention of British foreign policy:

> But in the opinion of most of the Chinese and old European residents the changes are too sweeping, and tend to excite irritation in the official classes… [The Emperor's] efforts are welcomed by all enlightened Chinese, who, however, counsel moderation.

The only instance in which reform was positioned as favourable to British interests was in Kang Youwei's *Times* interview on September 23, and even then only tangentially so. He said:

> His Majesty is convinced, however, that it is impossible to overcome the opposition without the assistance of England, which he endeavoured to obtain for his recent progressive measures.[168]

Earlier, Kang also stated that "England now has the opportunity to intervene and restore the Emperor to the throne, whereby she could earn the gratitude of the Chinese people." Here, the restoration of Guangxu, rather than of the reforms, is the primary justification for British intervention; the reforms are merely a corollary to restoration.

[167] "Chinese Emperor Resigns in Favour of the Empress." *The Daily News*. September 23, 1898.
[168] "The Situation in China." *The Times*. September 26, 1898.

This focus on Guangxu, rather than on the reforms, was present in other reports as well. The September 24 issue of *The Daily News* claimed, omitting any mention of reform, that Guangxu "desperately needs foreign protection in this emergency. There is a consensus of opinion among Englishmen here that now is Great Britain's opportunity."[169] This excerpt proposes that British geopolitical aspirations for restoring Guangxu to the throne were popular amongst the British public and the reintroduction of progressive reform to China was, conversely, of little consequence. In fact, the association between Guangxu, Kang Youwei, and reform was so feeble that the *News* claims in the same issue that "[Kang Youwei], the leader of the Reform Party, [is] accused of being the instigator of a plot to murder the Emperor,"[170] while the September 26 issue of *The Times* claims that Kang was instead charged with "conspiring against the Empress Dowager."[171] It is clear that, at least by the time of the September coup, the content of the Hundred Days Reform was confusing or of little interest to the newspaper's readership.

The Qing dynasty as a liminal space in the British psyche

Why, then, didn't the newspapers wish for the Qing dynasty to pursue Westernizing reforms? I argue that, because British newspapers conceived the Qing dynasty as existing between barbarity and civility, reform in China was seen as neither necessary nor enforceable. This attitude is seen in contemporaneous British attitudes towards the Empire's firmly barbaric and civilized regions.

For example, in 1883, historian John Seeley divided the British Empire into five regions (excluding the British Isles): Canada, the West Indies, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand,

[169] "The Crisis in China." *The Daily News*. September 24, 1898.
[170] "The Crisis in China." *The Daily News*. September 24, 1898.
[171] "The Situation in China." *The Times*. September 26, 1898.

and India.[172] Evidently, Seeley did not consider British territories in China to be a significant part of its empire. This absence can also be found in Joseph Chamberlain's 1897 speech, in which he defined two types of territories of the British Empire. First, there were the "self-governing colonies," to which he extended a "sentiment of kinship. We think and speak of them as part of ourselves… as part of the British Empire, united to us."[173] Such colonies included Canada and Australia, where the ruling elite was white and British. The second type of territory, Chamberlain argued, were the ones in which "the native population must always vastly outnumber the white inhabitants."[174] The sentiment towards these territories was "a sense of obligation." We feel now that our rule over these territories can only be justified if we can show that it adds to the happiness and prosperity of the people."[175] These attitudes conceived of China as existing between civility and barbarity because the Qing dynasty was strong enough to govern on its own terms yet vulnerable enough to be a theater for geopolitics. So, British newspapers believed that reform in China was neither necessary nor enforceable.

Conclusion

The attitudes expressed by *The Daily News* and *The Times* towards the September coup shows that the British press interpreted the progression of the September coup through a lens of conflict between two political parties. These newspapers were also concerned with how the Chinese public and the Russian empire reacted to the coup. Furthermore, the British press viewed China paternalistically, but only to a certain extent, with China existing in between civilization and barbarity. So, calls for the British government to restore Guangxu to the throne relied on

[172] John Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, (1883). In Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, eds., *The Fin de Siecle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880-1900*, 1st edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 136.
[173] Joseph Chamberlain, "The True Conception of Empire," (1897). In Ledger and Luckhurst, *The Fin de Siecle*, 138-139.
[174] Chamberlain, "The True Conception of Empire." In Ledger and Luckhurst, *The Fin de Siecle*, 139.
[175] Chamberlain, "The True Conception of Empire." In Ledger and Luckhurst, *The Fin de Siecle*, 139.

anti-Russian rhetoric rather than claims that reform would benefit China. Orientalist attitudes accompanied this paternalism, though they primarily manifested in negative portrayals of Cixi as a jealous despot.

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Reversing the Narrative: How the Tuareg Saving Heinrich Barth's Expedition (1849-1856) Upends Prevailing Perceptions

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Introduction

In September 1850, an exploratory expedition funded by the British government involving the prominent German explorer Heinrich Barth (d.1865) found itself in Tintellus, a small town in contemporary central Niger, around 200 kilometers northeast of Agadez.[176] It aimed to reach Bornu in Central Africa, evaluating the lands it traversed for their value to avaricious European powers looking to expand trading influence into Africa. However, in such sparsely populated Saharan desert regions, organized political authority was difficult to establish, and thus, indigenous groups were typically nomadic in nature. These wandering tribes freely exercised power, often in the form of attack and theft, posing a threat to the safety of those using desert networks, like the expedition. As such, Barth laments the presence of some of these wandering tribes, like the Tuareg, who repeatedly harassed their caravans and whom he viewed as barbaric.[177] He produces this admonishment despite that the main mechanism that enabled the safe travel of the expedition was the hired Tuareg guides offering protection and intimate knowledge about the lands they traversed. Employing Tuareg guides as important networks of assistance was paramount to making Barth's expedition, which lasted from 1850 to 1858, possible.

[176] Barth, Heinrich. *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*. D. Appleton, 1857.
[177] Barth, Heinrich. "Barth an Lepsius, 12.09.1850," September 12, 1850. Original letter not preserved, printed in: Thaddäus E. Gumprecht, "About Dr. H. Barth and Dr. Overweg's investigative trip to Lake Chad and inner Africa. Second report based on the communications received by May 1, 1852", in: Monthly reports on the negotiations of the Society for Geography in Berlin, 1852, pp. 189–396.

In Timbuktu in 1854, at what can be seen as the climax of Barth's expedition in Africa, Barth was further helped by local authorities who also extensively recruited Tuareg help. After entering Timbuktu, leaders of a nearby kingdom called Hamdullahi demanded Barth's extradition and arrest. Under the pretense that he had a religious obligation to protect a foreign visitor, a prominent noble of Timbuktu, Ahmad Al-Bakkay (d. 1865), moved against Hamdullahi to protect Barth. At the center of Al-Bakkay's move was recruiting the favor of the local Tuareg, who backed and engaged militarily to protect Barth. Despite these various examples of collaboration with the Tuareg across West Africa, the Tuareg's social perception among local groups and onlookers alike situated them as recipients of vitriol and vilification throughout West African history. Outside groups, namely colonizers, have typically characterized the Tuareg as obtruders of civilized society- aggressive, barbaric marauders who aim only to destroy. However, far from a monolithic group, the Tuareg have acted divergently from these negative perceptions. Examining Barth's expedition and his numerous beneficial interactions with the Tuareg throughout reveals discrepancies between persisting, incomplete, and harmful negative historiographic and cultural perceptions of the Tuareg and their actual collaborative conduct.

Below, I will examine the social perceptions of the Tuareg, namely the widespread negative perceptions of Western observers, and juxtapose them with the Tuareg's interactions with Barth's expedition. I will first give a general overview of the Tuareg to provide a background on who they are. Then, I will examine how the way in which the Tuareg were perceived by foreign actors as lawless marauders resulted in harmful impacts on Tuareg groups. By examining the letters from Barth's expedition, I will show the various ways in which the Tuareg's actions diverged from these harmful perceptions. Instead, their assistance towards Barth shows how the Tuareg helped to uphold systems of trade and political stability in the Saharan

world. The sources examined documenting Barth's expedition and interactions between himself and the Tuareg in the 1850s are letters written by Barth during his travels, contained in a database created by the University of Duisburg-Essen in Germany.[178]

Literature Review

The Tuareg are nomadic people of the Sahara in West Africa, ethnically congruous with Berbers from North Africa. Before the introduction of colonialism, the Tuareg traditionally occupied desert spaces void of an organized political structure. The Tuareg were thrust into their nomadic lifestyles by the geography of the Sahelo-Saharan region they occupied. Rainfall in the region is limited to a few wet months per year, making vegetation, irrigation, and ultimately large, sedentary societies impossible to sustain. As such, the traditional lives of the Tuareg were defined by the stock-breeding of camels, which were used for transport and nourishment, as well as goats, sheep, and cattle.[179] Of paramount importance to the Tuareg was maintaining constant access to water and pastures to sustain their herds, resulting in their nomadism as they practiced transhumance, a process of migrating to where resources are seasonally most abundant.[180] This nomadic nature defines the Tuareg's traditional existence as it forms the basis of their geopolitical and economic strategies.

The Tuareg was defined by raiding, partially because it certainly represented a constitutive aspect of Tuareg society. Aided by their nomadic maneuverability, raiding presented a viable opportunity to gain resources, with Tuareg raiders typically striking faraway targets to

[178] Letters from Barth's expedition have been compiled in a database by the University of Duisburg-Essen (https://heinrich-barth.ub.uni-due.de/). The database contains around 1,680 letters from sixteen archives around Europe. The University of Duisburg-Essen has made these letters publicly available on a website, where both the original and transcribed versions of the letters can be viewed. The letters remain in their original languages, and are in a variety of languages, though are principally German. I used the transcribed editions of the letters in my research. Translated quotes were done so by myself.
[179] Alesbury, Andrew. "A Society in Motion: The Tuareg from the Pre-Colonial Era to Today." *Nomadic Peoples* 17, no. 1 (2013): pg. 110.
[180] Alesbury,"A Society in Motion" in *Nomadic Peoples* (2013): pg. 110.

limit the risk of retribution. Raiding normally occurred after the first rains of the season to ensure their animals' access to water and pasture.[181] While raids offered economic opportunities, they also provided participants with a level of honor, as raiding held a degree of significance within Tuareg social hierarchies. The warrior class of the Tuareg, the *Imajeghen*, served as ruling nobles and were the most significant and powerful of the Tuareg classes. The military power of the *Imajeghen* strengthened their authority, placing them at the top of the social hierarchy.[182] *Imajeghen* militaristic-based social authority would be further boosted given success in raiding, with successful raiders provided additional social clout and prestige. During these raids, raiders took as much as they could carry, focusing on camels but taking other goods, like slaves or valuables.[183]

The perception of the Tuareg for Western observers has been primarily shaped by these raiding practices. A French report from 1896 on Timbuktu, a Saharan city heavily intertwined geopolitically with Tuareg influence, provides insight into perceptions of the Tuareg. The report, written by Felix Dubois, describes the Tuareg as descendants of the Spanish Moors, who, as a result of being forced into nomadic lifestyles, "lost all notions of law and authority" as their "souls and brains became seeped in vice."[184] For Dubois, the outcome of the claimed incivility of the Tuareg is their tendency to raid: "augmented from the meagerness of their herds," the Tuareg resorted to "the level of vagabonds, thieves, and brigands."[185] Dubois's unsparing depiction is largely consistent with Europeans' views of the Tuareg throughout their era of colonial involvement in Africa.

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[181] Alesbury, "A Society in Motion" in *Nomadic Peoples* (2013): pg. 109.
[182] Alesbury, "A Society in Motion" (2013): pg. 109.
[183] Alesbury, "A Society in Motion" (2013): pg. 109.
[184] Dubois, Felix. *Timbuctoo the Mysterious*. Translated by Diana White. New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896.
[185] Dubois, *Timbuctoo the Mysterious*, 1896.

These negative perceptions about the Tuareg from European observers had extremely damaging consequences. Tuaregs would have perceived the Europeans as hostile invaders encroaching on their traditionally controlled land, explaining why the majority of interactions between Tuaregs and Europeans would have been hostile in nature. Indeed, much of the hostility that the French experienced during their colonial control in West Africa was retributive raids from Tuaregs. It is important to establish that raids against colonial elements were not indiscriminate attacks, instead more closely resembling organized military efforts attempting to disrupt the French-imposed colonial authority. The Tuareg fought the French with guerrilla warfare, which they saw as the most effective form of combat because it suited their nomadic mobility and familiarity with the terrain of the region.[186] Guerrilla warfare was a fairly common and consistent means by which various colonial subjects resisted colonial authority. However, the Tuareg's guerrilla action, as a result of their prevailing social stigma, cemented in the eyes of the French their rather atypical steadfast categorization as raiders. Accordingly, the French targeted Tuareg groups with many counterraids serving as retributive action. The resulting violence levelled against the Tuareg was not atypical within colonial Africa. Tuaregs were targeted indiscriminately. Mass killings and public displays of corpses were used to terrorize local populations, cattle and slaves were taken en masse, and dissidents were tortured.[187] The French justified this extent of violence by claiming they were quelling the "hostile Tuareg" who terrorized Timbuktu and the surrounding region. The persistent cultural negative perceptions of the Tuareg most directly provided the platform for this violence to occur.

[186] Hall, Bruce. *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960*. African Studies 115. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011 139-140.
[187] Hall, Bruce. *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa*, 2011, pg. 136-137.

The likeliest reason for the vitriol toward the Tuareg within the Western imagination was not the Tuareg raiding, but instead the underlying resentment of Tuareg resistance to European colonial efforts throughout the 19th century. An American report by anthropologist Horace Miner on the history and social condition of Timbuktu and its surrounding region upholds the myth of the "hostile Tuareg." This is done by framing the history of the Tuareg largely within the context of their military interactions, including their role in capturing Timbuktu before the rise of ruler Sonni Ali in 1468, and in their looting of Timbuktu throughout its subsequent history.[188] The propensity to focus on violent aspects of Tuareg society seemingly arises from the legacy of European experience with Tuaregs throughout their establishment of colonial rule. Miner describes several instances wherein Tuareg aggressiveness served to rebuke European attempts to penetrate into African lands. He describes 'hostile Tuaregs' violently pushing British expeditions away in 1806 and 1826, in addition to later instances of French experiences with Tuareg attacks while they attempted to reach Timbuktu in 1887 and 1893.[189] The abundance of negative encounters, from the perspective of Europeans, over the course of several decades with the Tuareg, with comparatively few positive ones, provides the basis for prolonged European antagonism towards the Tuareg people.

Rarely mentioned in colonial-era Western accounts on the Tuareg is that raiding, while valued socially by the Tuareg, certainly did not constitute the entirety of their existence. Their nomadic condition, in addition to maneuverability in conflict, also lent extraordinarily well to participation in the vast trading networks of the Sahara. As Andrew Alesbury asserts, their presence across the Sahara provided widespread access to local markets, a position seemingly

[188] Miner, Horace. *The Primitive City of Timbuctoo*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953.
[189] Miner, *The Primitive City of Timbuctoo*, 1953.

taken advantage of by the Tuareg, as their migratory movements often "coincided with the movement of goods" along trade routes.[190] In addition, the Tuareg, being the only group present in large swaths of the otherwise uninhabitable Sahara, had essentially sole authority to dictate trading practices in the desert. Alesbury exemplifies the extent to which the Tuareg used this position to assist Saharan trade, maintaining that "Tuareg nomads controlled the safe passages between the markets of the Mediterranean and Sudan, establishing 'an infrastructure of brokers, landlords, traders and craftsmen to supply accommodation, banking, brokerage, storage and other services to the trans-Saharan trade.'"[191] While this position helped sustain the Tuareg locally, many of whose consumption relied heavily on imported goods, it also enabled the success of the many enterprising foreign traders of the region and the general flow of goods across the system.

The involvement of the Tuareg in regional trading, which required the maintenance of stability and cooperation across the region to succeed, incentivized Tuareg groups to collaborate with other political authorities. Abdelkader Zebadia provides a glimpse into precolonial relationships between the Tuareg and traditional landed political authorities, namely Ahmad Al-Bakkay, a religious and political leader in Timbuktu during the time of Barth's expedition. During a political schism between Al-Bakkay and the Hamdullahi caliphate, who believed that Barth should be arrested due to his non-Muslim identity, Al-Bakkay moved to protect Barth. The Tuareg backed Al-Bakkay, a move that, as Zebadia notes, both reinforced Al-Bakkay's decision to protect Barth and enabled his ability to do so.[192] For Zebadia, the Tuareg's backing of Al-Bakkay in this political crisis highlights the Tuareg's general cooperative attitude at the time

[190] Alesbury, "A Society in Motion" in *Nomadic Peoples* (2013): 106–25.
[191] Alesbury, "A Society in Motion" in *Nomadic Peoples* (2013): 106–25.
[192] Zebadia, Abdelkader. "The Career and Correspondence of Ahmad Al-Bakkay of Timbuctu." University of London, 1974, pg. 224-267.

with respect to Timbuktu's authority. Al-Bakkay recognized the political authority of the Tuareg in the region, and emphasized maintaining a "good relationship" with them and to "keep peace among them."[193] Chief among Al-Bakkay's desires was to "keep the northern routes open for caravans," a policy decision that aligned with the Tuareg's political position as controllers of much of the local trade network.[194] Barth's own account of this debacle in Timbuktu provides insight into how the Tuareg's cooperation during this event transcends Tuareg collaboration merely at the direction of Al-Bakkay as suggested above. For the Tuareg, such collaborative efforts were not sporadic, as trading and protection even took precedence over violence throughout Tuareg society.

The Tuareg and Barth's Expedition

In May 1850, Heinrich Barth's expedition arrived at Murzuq, a city in contemporary southeastern Libya at the gates of the Sahara on the periphery between lands under organized authority and the open, virtually empty, desert. Barth describes Murzuq as "die erste große Station unserer Reise" (the first major stop of our journey), where "hort . . jede Autorität auf und beginnt ein bloßes Verhandeln" (all authority stops and mere negotiations begin).[195] For Barth, arrival in Murzuq represents a stark contrast in the nature of the expedition. It is in Murzuq that Barth's expedition first meets and "negotiates" the establishment of protective authority with the Tuareg of the Sahara. Through the protective authority Barth negotiated throughout his expedition, the Tuareg acted as guides and guaranteed his passage across the Sahara. This

[193] Zebadia, "The Career and Correspondence of Ahmad Al-Bakkay.", 1974.
[194] Zebadia, "The Career and Correspondence of Ahmad Al-Bakkay.", 1974.
[195] Barth, Heinrich. "Barth an Lepsius, 07.05.1850," Original letter not preserved, excerpts printed in: Ritter, Carl, "About Dr. Barth's and Dr. Overweg's Accompaniment of J. Richardson's Travel Expedition to Lake Chad and Inner Africa: According to the Original Reports Received from Various Quarters to the Society for Geography of Berlin and its members, at the End of July 1850", in: Monthly Reports on the Negotiations of the Society for Geography of Berlin, 12, 1851, pg. 81-132.

occurred as a function of the Tuareg's general oversight over the Saharan trade routes. The Tuareg exercised authority in other ways to assist Barth as well. For instance, in 1853 they collaborated with the local authority, Ahmad Al-Bakkay in Timbuktu, to provide military protection for Barth against Hamdullahi. Ultimately, the various ways in which the Tuareg assisted Barth throughout his expedition to ensure his safety paints a very different picture of their character than damaging colonial-era Western perceptions suggested. Tuaregs were not subversives who terrorized indiscriminately, but were rather instrumental in maintaining the stability of social and political networks across West Africa.

Prior to Murzuq, within North African lands under political authority, travel was simpler, steadier, and safer. Guides within lands of landed authority, as outlined by Barth when he describes his previous guide on the road to Murzuq, primarily served the role of naturalizing visitors to the local cultural, social, and political conditions of regions. However, the path after Murzuq in the political void of the Sahara becomes considerably more dangerous, with the security for travelers provided by landed regional authorities gone, so the role of the guide was expanded to include providing protective services. These services were obtained by travelers by negotiating deals with whoever was directly capable of providing them safety. Given that the Tuareg were the most prominent group with proper military authority within the desert, travelers, traders, and explorers, like Barth, primarily recruited Tuareg protectors as their guides.

As such, Barth's expedition was required to recruit a Tuareg guide in Murzuq to assist them for the next leg of their journey, as "da erst Morgen ein Curier nach Ghat abgeht, um 3 Tuareghäuptlinge von dort herzuholen, die uns escortieren sollen" (tomorrow morning a courier from Ghat is leaving to get 3 Tuareg chiefs that should escort us). Barth hired numerous Tuareg

guides throughout the course of his expedition.[196] For the expedition, the recruitment of guides was so important that it was considered analogous to the procurement of other life-sustaining resources, like food or camels. New guides were obtained in similar fashion to how other such goods were. When Barth's expedition arrived at new population centers, alongside replenishing supplies, new guides- more adept at providing the authority of security over the next leg of the journey- were hired. They were forced to remain in these population centers until guides were successfully procured and available to join their caravan. Often, delays in the availability of guides would result in lengthy stays of up to several months in population centers. In Murzuq, Barth expresses dismay at having to stay put in the hot desert town for "einen monatlichen Aufenthalt" (a monthly stay) while waiting for the arrival of their Tuareg guides.[197] The necessity of having to delay an expensive expedition for such lengths of time is indicative of how necessary Tuareg guides were in enabling the success of Barth's expedition.

The distinction of Tuareg guides as being "chiefs" is crucial in characterizing the protection provided by Tuareg guides. In November 1850, in Tintellus, Barth's guide, a Tuareg chief named Annur, looked to assist the expedition to the town of Zinder. However, Annur had to attend to a salt caravan, leaving his servant, Zingina, to be Barth's guide. Barth declined this state of affairs. He, and Zingina himself, expressed concern over Zingina's "Ansehen" (reputation) amongst the tribes of the region and thus, his ability to coordinate safe travel within their

[196]Barth, Heinrich. "Barth an Lepsius, 07.05.1850," Original letter not preserved, excerpts printed in: Ritter, Carl, "About Dr. Barth's and Dr. Overweg's Accompaniment of J. Richardson's Travel Expedition to Lake Chad and Inner Africa: According to the Original Reports Received from Various Quarters to the Society for Geography of Berlin and its members, at the End of July 1850", in: Monthly Reports on the Negotiations of the Society for Geography of Berlin, 12, 1851, pg. 81-132.
[197]Barth, Heinrich. "Barth an Lepsius, 07.05.1850", May 7, 1850. Original letter not preserved, excerpts printed in: Ritter, Carl, "About Dr. Barth's and Dr. Overweg's Accompaniment of J. Richardson's Travel Expedition to Lake Chad and Inner Africa: According to the Original Reports Received from Various Quarters to the Society for Geography of Berlin and its members, at the End of July 1850", in: Monthly Reports on the Negotiations of the Society for Geography of Berlin, 12, 1851, pg. 81-132.

lands.[198] For the guides to be able to protect travelers from raiders and bandits in the Sahara, they were required to wield a significant amount of military power. Since Tuareg chiefs belonged to the *Imajeghen* and were of a higher, more eminent political status, they had the authority to assemble those under their influence and wield the necessary power to act as guides. Given the necessity of military success for *Imajeghen* to establish these considerable statuses, being able to display militaristic capability, despite potentially being a sign of aggression for onlookers, was important in establishing the efficacy of guides.

The involvement of *Imajeghen* in acting as guides demonstrates the importance of providing protection within the Tuareg social hierarchy, with even their most significant figures seeking to engage in these practices. Protecting travelers and merchants came as a result of economic incentives presented to Tuareg chiefs to maintain trade, rather than disrupting it. This mutually beneficial arrangement ensured the free flow of goods and capital across the Sahara, a crucial trade only able to be sustained by Tuareg protection. The Tuareg, in turn, benefited from the subsistence of local markets as they utilized locally traded goods for their migratory practices. Evidenced by their protective presence at dangerous desert trade routes across the region, thriving for mutually beneficial arrangements defined the Tuareg's outward relations rather than acting in rogue and isolationist ways. Collaboration, not raiding, better helped the Tuareg realize desired outcomes.

It is this context which shows why the Tuareg assisted Barth throughout his journey across the Sahara, with another notable incident again in Timbuktu in 1853. Barth, after Hamdullahi ordered his extradition to their control, was coerced into remaining in Timbuktu. He

[198]Barth, Heinrich. "Barth an Lespius, 22.11.1850," November 22, 1850. Original letter not preserved, printed in: Thaddäus E. Gumprecht, "About Dr. H. Barth and Dr. Overweg's investigative trip to Lake Chad and inner Africa. Second report based on the communications received by May 1, 1852", in: Monthly reports on the negotiations of the Society for Geography in Berlin, 1852, pp. 189–396.

references the case of Alexander Gordon Laing, the first European to visit Timbuktu, who was killed in 1826 by similar enemies during an attempt to escape the city, believing that he would most likely be killed in the same way should he try a similar maneuver.[199] Instead of attempting to manage the situation independently, Barth put his faith in regional authorities who pledged themselves to his protection, namely Ahmad Al-Bakkay, who had spiritual power within the city, and the Tuareg tribes Al-Bakkay recruited, who provided the military defense against Hamdullahi.

Barth's journals indicate the extent to which the Tuareg acted for, and indeed were crucial to maintain, his protection in Timbuktu. While Barth himself attributes credit for his protection from Hamdullahi to Al-Bakkay, it was the Tuareg who, most directly, deterred Hamdullahi's advance on him on the ground. Barth admits that Al-Bakkay "indeed has no military power of any kind at his hand."[200] Instead, it is the Tuareg chief Auab of the powerful local *Tingérĕgíf* tribe, who provided the physical muscle behind Barth's protection, with Barth describing the mobilization of one hundred *Tingérĕgíf* horses for his protection.[201] Barth also mentions other Tuareg tribes, such as the *Auelímmĭden*, who would likely have extended similar support.[202] Establishing the extent of Tuareg military power in Timbuktu is crucial to characterizing their actions with regard to Barth. As the eminent military authority in the region, Tuareg tribes had the autonomy to self-determine how they wanted to act. They certainly were not under Al-Bakkay's thumb, instead, they heeded Al-Bakkay's spiritual authority because they saw tangible benefit in aligning with it- the maintenance of a favorable power ruling the city. While Al-Bakkay was responsible for organizing Tuareg tribes against Hamdullahi, it was the Tuareg's

[199] Barth, Heinrich. "Barth an Beke, 14.12.1853," December 14, 1853. FB Gotha, PGM 39/1.
[200]Barth. "Barth an Beke, 14.12.1853," (1853).
[201]Barth. "Barth an Beke, 14.12.1853," (1853).
[202]Barth. "Barth an Beke, 14.12.1853," (1853).

military force, which was voluntarily provided, that offered the actual opposition that was operationally impossible for the weaker Hamdullahi to overcome. It was the Hamdullahi's inability to overcome the Tuareg's military power that prevented their march on Timbuktu and ensured the protection of Barth.

Per Barth's descriptions, the *Tingérĕgíf's* military power extended throughout the region adjacent to Timbuktu, encompassing much of the Niger River around the city. As an extension of this widespread authority, local Tuareg tribes afforded Barth and those friendly to him protected travel around the region in addition to protection against the Hamdullahi. After Barth left Timbuktu, the Tuareg leaders organized his protection to Gao, a city situated further east along the Niger River. This protection occurred independently of the interests of Al-Bakkay. In 1854, during his approach to Gao, Barth writes about a gathering of Tuareg leaders:

> "einen Congreß hier versammelt der vielleicht noch einst in der Geschichte der Aufklärung dieses Welttheiles einen Namen bekommen wird. Die Häupter der Kelissuk oder der gelehrten Klasse der Tuareg sind gestern angekommen und Alkuttabu mit den Vornehmsten der freien Imōshar oder der Kriegerkaste wird morgen erwartet. Gegenstand dieser Conferenz bin theils ich selbst oder vielmehr die den Engländern gewährte und zu gewährende Sicherheit und mein Fortkommen theils Bakay's eigene Angelegenheiten mit Bezug auf die Verhältnisse Timbuktus und der westlichen Tuareg"[203]
>
> (A congress has gathered here that will perhaps be given a name once the history of this continent becomes more known. The head of the Kelissuk, or the scholarly class of the Tuareg, arrived yesterday, and Alkutabu, accompanied by the most distinguished of the free Imoshar, or the warrior caste, will be expected tomorrow. The subject of this conference is partly myself, or rather that of safety to be granted to the explorations of the Englishmen and myself, and partly the leader in Timbuktu who assisted me, El Bakay's, business with exports, concerning their relationships with Timbuktu and the western Tuareg)

Barth's protection was not just spurred by opportunism in *Imajeghen* ranks, but from the Tuareg's social hierarchy, as the social authority of the region, seeking to use their power to provide his safety. The Tuareg's leadership outside of Timbuktu acted wholly autonomously on

[203] Barth, Heinrich. "Barth an Familie, 28.06.1854," June 28, 1854 FB Gotha, PGM 39/1.

Barth's behalf, motivated by a vested personal interest and not just from either Al-Bakkay's wishes or geopolitical gains from countering Hamdullahi. As the eminent powers of the region, and acting as their own independent authorities, the Tuareg acted foremostly with altruistic intentions for Barth. This behavior is incompatible with Western depictions of the Tuareg as immoral, uncivilized, or inherently hostile.

Conclusion

Throughout Heinrich Barth's expedition, Tuareg groups were crucial in maintaining his safety. The Tuareg had several motivations for helping Barth, like the maintenance of beneficial trade routes or adherence to spiritual authorities like Ahmad Al-Bakkay, but ultimately, they chose to display affinity towards Barth. This inclination differs sharply from traditional perspectives on the Tuareg, especially from colonial-era Westerners, who exclusively referred to the Tuareg as hostile, aggressive, and uncivilized. Through these accounts, Westerners dehumanized the Tuareg, justifying their exploitation and wars of conquest against Tuareg groups. Instead, the Tuareg are multifaceted, disregarded, and disparaged throughout history unfairly.

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“Voices Off Camera”: Women, Media, and the Performance of Legitimacy in Motorsports History

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Figure 1: Isabella Robusto Racing at the DuQuoin State Fairgrounds Racetrack. August 31st, 2025, taken by Liam Crider.

“It’s ground to a halt! And here comes the Porsche! Oh my goodness! Oh my goodness! It’s come to a halt, and Toyota have had the Le Mans 24 Hours snatched from them! Snatched from them! And Porsche are going to win Le Mans!”[1] The 24 Heures du Mans is the most prestigious endurance race in the world, having first been held in 1923.[2] In the 2016 edition, Toyota had the win snatched out from under them in the final three minutes of the race, and John Hindhaugh’s call perfectly encapsulated the emotions of the moment; agony for Toyota, elation for Porsche.[3] There have been other memorable moments, Ford beating Ferrari in 1966, the 1955 Le Mans Disaster, the Mazda 787B becoming the first rotary-powered car to win in 1991, and Peter

Dumbreck's flip in the Mercedes CLR in 1999.[4] Yet, amid all the iconic moments from the Circuit de la Sarthe, one historical result has faded from public recollection: Odette Siko's fourth-place finish at the 1932 24 Hours of Le Mans, which, to this day, remains the best finish for a woman in the race's history.[5] Her achievement received little attention beyond a routine post-race classification, where it was acknowledged in a single sentence.

While contemporary motorsport outlets such as Jalopnik have highlighted Siko's fourth-place finish in retrospective articles, these pieces primarily frame her as a curiosity of racing history rather than exploring her life, background, or broader career. As a result, little is known about her beyond her performance behind the wheel.[6] Still, her performance in the 1932 race offers a perspective from which to track the uneven trajectory of women's roles in motorsport, marked by progress, but also regression. While motorsport remains one of the few physical sports where men and women directly compete under identical rules, equipment, and scoring, a comparative historical analysis of four female pioneers, from Odette Siko's endurance racing at Le Mans to Janet Guthrie's Indianapolis 500 campaign, reveals that women's participation has been shaped less by merit than by institutional barriers and media framing. This pattern persists in the digital era, where the marketing-driven rise of drivers like Hailie Deegan and Toni Breidinger underscores the tension between athletic legitimacy and marketable identity.

The Process of Belief

In 2023, a nonprofit group called More Than Equal, founded by 13-time Formula One Grand Prix winner David Coulthard, conducted a survey of roughly 13,000 motorsports fans, including 3,200 women respondents, exploring fan attitudes towards women in racing.[7] 66% of women respondents said that they don't believe that women have aspirational role models in racing.[8] This, compared to just 11% of male respondents.[9] The gap suggests that male fans assume the

mere presence of women in the sport suffices as representation, while female fans distinguish between visibility and true legitimacy. This was one of many findings from the study, which was "the largest ever conducted on female participation in elite motorsport."[10] This underscores how recent and fragile institutional efforts to meaningfully integrate women into motorsport, especially as drivers, are. All-female single-seater series such as the W Series (2019) and F1 Academy (2023) have only emerged within the past few years, while purpose-built, all-female race teams like the Iron Dames have been on the grid for only seven years, since 2018.[11]

This recent push is also reflected in the academic literature regarding women racing drivers. One of the earliest scholarly examinations of media portrayals of women racing drivers came from Cuneen et al., whose 2007 article "Advertising Portrayals of Indy's Female Drivers: A Perspective on the Succession from Guthrie to Patrick" analyzed how drivers such as Janet Guthrie, Lyn St. James, and Sarah Fisher "were most often [depicted as] strong and athletic or displaying athleticism" in Indy 500 Speedway Fan Programs, Danica Patrick's entry in 2005 "substantially changed all aspects, particularly portrayals, as she was often photographed in sexually suggestive manners."[12] The article was narrow in scope, only looking at advertisements in official Indianapolis 500 programs published between 1977 and 2006. In 2009, Cuneen, along with Sally R. Ross and Lynn L. Ridinger, would return to the topic in an article titled, "Drivers to divas: advertising images of women in motorsport". While the evidence they used was the same 21 advertisements analyzed in the 2007 article, the 2009 article used Roobina Ohanian's source credibility model to examined each advertisement's persuasiveness.[13] The 2009 article took an analytical angle towards women racing drivers, whereas the 2007 article took an empirical angle.

In 2016, Jordan Matthews and Elizabeth Pike undertook an endeavor to comb over a hundred years of media coverage of women racing drivers, all published in one newspaper, The

Times. Their work explores "the participation and experiences of women, with particular attention to the role of the media in representing and encouraging female participation."[14] However, Matthews and Pike limit their scope to how The Times represented British women racing drivers. This narrow framing overlooks the fact that women from France, Poland, Germany, and the United States had been competing in organized forms of motorsport since the 1890s, well before the period their study examines. While they do cover how the end of the Second World War saw a renewed marginalization and trivialization of female participants within newspaper coverage, they focus on how population loss across the European continent resulted in increased fears of women racing drivers dying in racing accidents, whereas the present analysis examines the rise in appearance-based coverage after the Second World War.

Some of the most recent literature comes from Desiree Campbell, a PhD student at Northumbria University who wrote a dissertation titled, "Still Something of a Boys' Club? Representations of Women Motor Racing Drivers in British Newspapers Between 2010 and 2020". While Campbell expands on the work done by Pike and Matthews, examining "479 articles from six British national newspapers" instead of sourcing all of them from The Times, she confines herself to only a decade of coverage. This limited her ability to explore the evolution in media coverage of women racing drivers. Her findings showed that "despite an overall increase of 200% in the number of articles about them from 2010 to 2020, women racing drivers were barely visible in British newspapers' racing driver coverage".[15] However, the scholarship remains unclear on whether this coverage centered on British women specifically or women in global motorsport.

Historians of women's sport have long shown that legitimacy is never just about performance; it's about cultural gatekeeping. Susan Cahn's Coming on Strong and Allen

Guttmann's Women's Sports: A History both argue that women athletes were framed as novelties, threats, or spectacles regardless of results.[16] From Babe Didrikson to Billie Jean King, anxieties about respectability and sexuality followed them into every arena. Motorsport scholarship rarely cites this work, but the parallels are unmistakable: when Sara Christian was described as having an "attractive complexion" on a NASCAR grid, she was running the same gauntlet that other women athletes had faced for decades. The surface, engines instead of tennis courts, changed, but the skeptical playbook did not.

On the technology side, scholars such as Ruth Schwartz Cowan, Ruth Oldenziel, and Jennifer Light have shown how women's technical competence has been hidden, minimized, or confined to domestic spaces. Oldenziel's work on the Fisher Body Guild illustrates how mechanical tinkering was gender-coded as male play, while Light's "When Computers Were Women" uncovered how wartime programming was erased from official narratives once the field professionalized. Put these findings alongside Odette Siko repairing gearboxes or Michèle Mouton mastering a Group B rally car, and the tension is obvious: women proved mastery over machines that symbolized danger and technical virtuosity, yet coverage framed them as novelties or, worse, as "attractive" accessories.[17]

Taken together, this broader historiography makes clear that women racing drivers were battling on two fronts: sport and machine. They were measured against athletic respectability while simultaneously denied technological credibility. The result was a double bind that the media eagerly exploited, packaging Guthrie, Deegan, and Breidinger as spectacles or brands rather than drivers. Cunneen, Pike, Matthews, and Campbell map the contours of that coverage, but placing their findings alongside Cahn, Guttmann, Cowan, Oldenziel, and Light clarifies the

larger point: women racing drivers are not outliers, but participants in a century-long struggle over whether women can ever be recognized as legitimate athletes and legitimate technicians.

Forgotten

This study steps beyond these fragmented approaches by situating women's participation in motorsport within a broader historical trajectory of media representation. Whereas existing scholarship has largely confined itself to case studies of advertising, single outlets, or limited time frames, this study adopts a comparative, century-spanning perspective. By examining media coverage of figures ranging from Odette Siko at Le Mans in the 1930s to Hailie Deegan and Toni Breidinger in today's stock car racing, the comparative approach traces how legitimacy has been alternately granted, withheld, or commodified. In doing so, it argues that the evolution of media coverage is less a story of increasing visibility than of persistent tension between spectacle and credibility, tensions that continue to shape how women are positioned, remembered, and marketed in motorsports.

Odette Siko had already competed in the previous two Le Mans 24-Hour races before the 1932 showing, finishing seventh overall and first in the 1.5-litre class on debut in 1930 when she raced alongside fellow Frenchwoman Marguerite Mareuse, a wealthy heiress who fielded a privateer Bugatti Type 40 for herself and Siko. In L'Auto, a French newspaper that covered "automobilisme, cyclisme, athlétisme, yachting, aérostation, escrime", Mareuse and Siko's entry onto the 1930 grid was reported in April with a level of skepticism, viewing the pair as a novelty, but was treated with respect, focusing on the drivers' past accomplishments instead of their appearances. "A valuable driver, Mme Mareuse has already proven herself. Didn't she achieve an unusual performance for a woman by finishing second in the Rallye du Touquet 1929 after covering the 2,306.564km of the Cadiz-Amiens Le Touquet route at the wheel of a 5 CV

Peugeot, with only one passenger on board?"[18] While the phrase "unusual performance for a woman" is condescending by modern standards, the whole quote serves to recognize Mareuse's achievements behind the wheel of a rally car as a reflection of skill and talent, treating her as a serious competitor. The newspaper said of Siko, "We do not know Mme Siko, but the fact that she was chosen as a teammate by Mme Mareuse gives us reason to believe that she too, is endowed with excellent qualities."[19] Instead of fretting over how she may perform due to her status as an unknown driver, the newspaper gives Siko credibility through her association with Mareuse based on merit instead of sponsorship or marketability. This contrasts with today, where sponsorship, marketability, and even appearance are prioritized more than demonstrated performance or racecraft.

In the June 23rd, 1930 edition of L'Auto, published on the day the 24 Hours of Le Mans finished, Mareuse and Siko's finish was reported in the same fashion as their male competitors. This included the finishing positions listed for the nine cars that finished reported in a standard fashion, providing the car manufacturer, the car number, the drivers, the distance covered, if the car was equipped with a turbo, what tires the car had on, and the distance covered, with Mareuse and Siko's seventh-place finish reported as "Bugatti number 25 (Mme Mareuse–Mme Siko), 1,497 cc, naturally aspirated, Dunlop tires, covering 2,164.701 km."[20] Further down the page, a series of five photographs occupies the center layout, positioning the race visually as a shared stage between male motorsport icons and the women's entry. Two images show the grid before the start and the winning Mercedes mid-race, and sandwiched between them is a picture of Mareuse in the number 25 with the caption, "The valiant women's team, composed of Mme Mareuse (at the wheel) and Mme Siko, finished in an excellent position, with a Bugatti."[21] This caption offers a respectful recognition of their on-track performance, affirming the legitimacy of

their entry in the race as capable drivers, given their "valiant" effort on track. While the term "valiant" carries a slightly romanticized tone, it does not ridicule their performance; rather, it conveys respect for the women's effort. The note that they finished in "excellent rank," though vague in isolation, becomes clearer when read alongside the finishing order at the top of the page, which confirms their seventh-place result. This framing allows the magazine to acknowledge their competitive legitimacy without resorting to comparison with male competitors, an approach that contrasts sharply with contemporary media coverage, which often emphasizes women racing drivers primarily as "firsts" or "onlys." The way the photo itself is positioned in the paper treats their appearance as one of the race's major storylines, not just a minor curiosity, or even worse, something to be sidelined entirely, a pattern that, in contemporary motorsport media, often manifests as placement in sidebars, diversity segments, or algorithm-driven novelty clips on social and broadcast platforms." In summation, the coverage of Siko and Mareuse in 1930 points to a unique paradox: women had fewer chances then, often needing large sums of money to afford entries as privateers in races like Le Mans, but those chances were taken more seriously by newspapers then than many women are by television and social media today.

But it was the 1932 running of the event for which Siko is remembered by die-hard endurance racing fans. That year, she fielded a privateer entry of her own, an Alfa Romeo 6C, which she co-drove with Frenchman Louis Charavel, who raced under the pseudonym Sabipa. The 6C's 1746cc S8 supercharged engine qualified the car for the 2.0-litre class, which made up a total of three entries in a field of 26 cars. The race was one of attrition; seventeen cars failed to finish, including the other two entrants in the 2.0-litre class. Siko and Sabipa brought their Alfa Romeo home in fourth overall and took the class victory. To this day, Siko's fourth-place remains

the highest finish for a woman racing driver in the event's storied history, as even 93 years later, through decades of technological revolutions, driver academies, safety reforms, and professionalization, no woman has surpassed Siko's finish. At the time, Match l'Intra reported her finish as follows: "Mme Siko and her co-driver Sabipa covered 2,417.594 km. It is a very fine performance, all the more compelling given that Mme Siko drove for more than 12 hours and that, having shared the hardship, she can now rightly claim the honor."[22] This coverage is an evolution from the 1930 quotes from L'Auto, moving from polite recognition of her participation to a more explicit celebration of her endurance, effort, and driving stamina. Match l'Intra emphasized the stamina required to drive more than twelve hours in a 24-hour race. The publication made it clear that Siko earned recognition not because she was a woman, but because she completed the feat itself.[23] Contemporary motorsport media often praises women racing drivers as "trailblazing" or "inspiring," a framing that sets them apart from their male peers. Match l'Intra did not use that language. It praised Siko with the same respect typically given to male endurance racers. There's nothing that says her finish is exceptional because she was a woman; instead, her skill and effort spoke for themselves. She'd go on to compete at Le Mans once more in 1933, failing to finish after a crash on lap 120. After that, she switched her focus to rallying, competing up until 1939. Like many of her contemporaries, her career ended at the onset of the Second World War, and she passed in relative anonymity in 1984. But for those few years in the early 1930s, she garnered the respect of both the garage and the press, not because of her looks or marketability, but because of her on-track performances in one of the most grueling endurance races in the world.

Bat Country

The first season held under NASCAR sanctioning was the 1948 NASCAR Modified Division, which ran a total of 52 races.[24] It was 1949 when the first NASCAR Strictly Stock Series season was held, which featured a total of eight races, all on dirt.[25] The first of those eight races was held at Charlotte Speedway, a three-quarter-mile dirt track located in Charlotte, North Carolina.[26] Among the 33 cars on the entry list was Sara Christian, who became the first woman to compete in what is now NASCAR's premier division. That morning, The Charlotte Observer featured a report on Christian's entry into the race that captured the shift in how women racers were perceived in reports during the postwar years. Said the Observer's sports editor, "A feminine complexion was added for today's 150-mile strictly stock car classic at the New Charlotte Speedway when Sara Christian, attractive Atlanta woman driver, was granted permission to test her skill against the male speedsters and verified her qualifications by qualifying for 13th position in the starting field today."[27] From the outset, the language reveals how the paper framed. Instead of being regarded as another competitor, she's treated as a novelty, as a "female complexion" on a grid of 32 male drivers. Whereas L'Auto and Match l'Intra treated Mareuse and Siko's entry into the 1930 24 Hours of Le Mans with skepticism but acknowledged that they were in the race on merit, in contrast, The Charlotte Observer frames Christian not as a competitor but as a spectacle, describing her entry as a "promoter's option" meant to draw attention rather than as the result of merit.

That perception is reinforced later in the article, which states: "Race Director Bill France granted permission for her to try her skill in the long test."[28] The phrasing is telling. Christian wasn't simply a driver who entered and qualified; she was "granted permission," as if her presence required special allowance. Historian Daniel S. Pierce explains this dynamic directly in

Real NASCAR: White Lightning, Red Clay, and Big Bill France, noting that it was "all too apparent that [Bill] France, as always, was most interested in selling tickets, and if using the gimmick of women drivers would help, so be it."[29] Pierce stresses that France was not to be confused with a budding feminist. At the time, Bruton Smith and the National Stock Car Racing Association were hosting their own Strictly Stock race at Lakewood Speedway in Atlanta. In response, France offered a record "purse of $5,000, with $2,000 to the winner, to draw drivers to Charlotte."[30] A woman on the grid offered an irresistible hook. From a promoter's standpoint, it was a win-win. Cynics might show up to see her fail. Others might be curious to see how she stacked up against the men. But either way, it sold tickets. The press, including The Charlotte Observer, played its part in this marketing effort, downplaying her credentials even though she had a background in motor racing. "Mrs. Christian is not a newcomer in stock car racing. In fact, the Atlanta woman has a modified stock car which she has used to complete [sic] with men in other races".[31] The article acknowledges that Christian had competed before, but it still puts more emphasis on her being "granted permission" and needing to "verify" her qualifications—language that subtly delegitimizes her prior experience. It's as if her prior races didn't count, either because they weren't sanctioned or because they weren't long enough.

The greatest indicator of the shifting attitude towards women racing drivers by the press comes from a single word: "attractive." For this descriptor to come before anything about her qualifications, either her previous experience behind the wheel or her lap time and grid position in qualifying, indicates that it was her looks, her appearance, that made her credible in the world of racing. This prioritization of physical attractiveness over racing credentials signals a subtle but powerful shift in how female racers were evaluated, not by their ability behind the wheel, but by their marketability to the crowd. Christian entered NASCAR as a legitimate competitor. The

press, however, portrayed her as a spectacle, presenting her as a promotional attraction rather than a professional driver. Yet, despite the press and Bill France's view of Christian as a marketing gimmick, she became arguably the best women racing driver in early NASCAR competition, scoring two top 10s, one top 5, and a 13th-place points finish in 1949.[32] Sadly, as Dr. Pierce details in Real NASCAR, she broke her back in a crash at Lakewood Speedway towards the end of the 1949 NSCRA season, in which her car rolled seven times. Her husband, mother, and two daughters, scared as much as she was by the wreck, encouraged her to quit.[33] She made one last start in 1950 at Hamburg Speedway, saying she "just wanted to be sure I could." She finished fourteenth, besting nineteen other drivers.

The Good Left Undone

"[B]y the mid-1950s signs went up in the pit areas of most [NASCAR] tracks reading 'No Women Allowed.' The only woman one was likely to see in the infield of a racetrack… was the beauty queen who presented the victor's trophy."[34] USAC, or the United States Auto Club, which sanctioned the Indianapolis 500 between 1956 and 1997, as well as the USAC Champ Car series between 1956 and 1978, had a similar policy in place; until 1971, women weren't allowed in the press box of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, much less the pits or garage area. Whether a car owner, photographer, or beat reporter, women were denied access to the most important parts of the speedway until a woman reporter filed suit and won on the heels of second-wave feminism and the women's rights movement.[35] It would take another five years after the suit that a woman would attempt to qualify for and compete in the Indianapolis 500 when Janet Guthrie and her team submitted the entry fee for the 1976 Indianapolis 500 in March of that same year. She'd be paired with car owner Rolla Vollstedt with sponsorship from Bryant Air Conditioning, while Dick Simon would be her teammate. The car Guthrie was given to attempt to qualify for the

1976 Indianapolis 500 was a four-year-old Vollstedt chassis that had already passed through multiple drivers and carried a record of mechanical inconsistency.[36] Small-team budget constraints meant the car had been repeatedly rebuilt rather than replaced, including makeshift modifications such as relocating the radiators to the nose; an unorthodox solution that underscored how far the machine was from competitive parity. In other words, Guthrie entered the Indianapolis 500 not with cutting-edge equipment, but with an aging car that had a history of middling finishes and reliability issues. Yet the media narrative in May 1976 focused not on these structural disadvantages, but on the symbolic novelty of a woman attempting to qualify, effectively separating Guthrie's performance from the material context that shaped it.

In footage of Guthrie's rookie test, the narrator, Marvin Miller, remarks that "[h]er debut, considerably reported in the press, was somewhat overshadowed by a host of mechanical problems, which would've dampened the spirits of anyone less determined. Every time she set out to run the two-phase driver's test, something broke. It was as though a power higher than her frustrated chief mechanic, Rolla Vollstedt, was taking a deterring hand."[37] This reporter did not present Guthrie as a novelty in the same way The Charlotte Observer had portrayed Christian. He acknowledges that the car was mechanically unreliable. However, he fails to situate that unreliability within the car's prior history; specifically, that the same chassis had repeatedly broken for experienced male drivers such as Tom Bigelow and Denny Zimmerman. By omitting that context, the article framed Guthrie's struggles as individual rather than structural. As a result, the material disadvantages she faced throughout the month of May were obscured. On May 8th, 1976, the opening day of practice for the 60th Indianapolis 500, twelve cars took to the track. Guthrie's 72/75 Vollstedt was among them, but her teammate Dick Simon was the one behind the wheel for the shakedown run, during which the car "developed a serious oil-line leak"

that wasn't repaired in time for the 6:00 PM deadline when the track closed for the day.[38] The next day, Simon was testing the car again just before noon, only for the car to burn a piston. 20 minutes before the 6:00 PM curfew, Simon took the car to the track once more, only for there to be "a flash turbocharger fire" that had to be put out, leaving only a couple of laps left for Simon to practice.[39] It wouldn't be until May 10th that Guthrie finally took to the speedway, and even then her run would last only seven laps before the #1 "piston failed on the main straight," thus putting an end to her day.[40] The problems would continue throughout the month, and by Bump Day, Sunday, May 23rd, Guthrie made the choice not to attempt to qualify.[41] But in the coverage of her rookie test, none of those specific failures are mentioned, the loss of two full days of testing isn't mentioned, and the fact that her teammate could only manage 173.210 miles per hour compared to her fastest speed of 173.611 miles per hour isn't mentioned. The consequences of mechanical mismanagement aren't just a relic of the 1970s. Even in the era of corporate-backed superteams, media coverage often overlooks structural failures in favor of personal narratives about success or failure. A striking modern comparison can be found in Fernando Alonso's failed 2019 Indy 500 bid.

That year, two-time Formula One World Champion Fernando Alonso suffered a similar fate in his Carlin-affiliated McLaren entry, which had backing from Mission Foods, Dell Technologies, and Citi Private Bank, amongst other sponsors. After electrical issues brought his opening day practice to an early end, a crash on the second day resulted in the need for a backup car, which wasn't ready until the final day of practice as it wasn't painted "the proper McLaren 'papaya orange.'"[42] Because of this and other failures, including an improper gear ratio on his final qualifying run, Alonso was bumped along with the two cars directly fielded by Carlin. If an effort fielded by McLaren, a manufacturer known for winning races and championships, with

backing from major sponsors and a two-time Formula One World Champion behind the wheel can be bumped from the Indianapolis 500 after a "comedy of errors", how could Janet Guthrie, with a small, underfunded team in Rolla Vollstedt, with a car that was four years old and a driver in her second ever open-wheel race be expected to make the field amid even greater mechanical setbacks? And yet, contemporary reporting on Guthrie's 1976 attempt too often framed her as a symbolic figure of progress or failure, rather than a driver systematically let down by equipment, time, and team capacity, factors routinely overlooked in narratives about women racing drivers.

In 1978, Guthrie returned to the Indianapolis 500, this time fielding her own car, a 1977 Wildcat Mk 3 she'd purchased from George Bignotti of Patrick Racing. As detailed in her biography, "'George designed it for road-racing circuits. Wally Dallenbach tested it at the Speedway last year, but switched to the car he drove the year before. Wally qualified eighth at Mosport [a road-racing circuit in Canada] and finished sixteenth. Then he qualified eleventh at the last race at Phoenix, and finished sixth. Those were its only two races.'"[43] Instead of being hampered by outdated, woefully unreliable machinery, Guthrie was hampered by a car that wasn't even built for oval racing. But the Wildcat, with a DGS engine in the back, proved competitive, and a year after becoming the first woman to qualify for the Indianapolis 500, Guthrie qualified the Texaco Star fifteenth before securing "a ninth-place finish, a record for best finish by a female driver that she held until 2005."[44] Post-race, Guthrie was interviewed by Sam Posey, ABC Television's garage reporter. Posey himself had competed in the 1972 Indianapolis 500 and had competed in the 24 Hours of Le Mans nine times before interviewing Guthrie, contesting his tenth and final Le Mans race two weeks later. The first question he asked her was, "Janet, a lot of people said a woman could never drive 500 miles, and here you are. Tell us a little about the feeling of the race."[45] Guthrie's response to the question was to call the notion

"nonsense," explaining that she'd been "running these 500, 600-mile stock car races down south for two years now, and this is really easier".[46] By 1978, Guthrie had already contested one 600-mile NASCAR race and ten 500-mile NASCAR races, and yet the fans at home and the news media broadcasting the race still struggled to accept that a woman could race 500 miles. This was not a case of false equivalency. Guthrie had already completed multiple 500-mile races in NASCAR. The broadcast framed the distance as a barrier she had only now proven she could endure, despite her established record. This selective amnesia is a media reflex: repackage the familiar as unprecedented to manufacture a fresh "barrier-breaking" moment. The same script played out decades later when Heinricher Racing, an all-female lineup competing in the IMSA sports car series, was informed by Caterpillar, the construction equipment manufacturer, that it would not continue sponsoring the team in 2020, as the ability to promote an all-female 24 Hours of Le Mans lineup had been lost after Kessel Racing got the nod in 2019, ignoring that an all-female lineup had been on the grid in only the eighth ever running of the famed endurance race.[47] The desire for Caterpillar to be the sponsor of the first all-female Le Mans lineup cost Heinricher their primary sponsor, even though that title had been claimed long before Kessel Racing took the grid slot in 2019. So while Sam Posey's question wasn't malicious, it reflected the persistent trap in motorsport media: if a woman isn't the "first" to do something, she's often not seen as a legitimate competitor at all.

The Dirt Whispered

Yet even breaking that barrier does not resolve the issue. When a woman is the "first," her legitimacy is still contested; coverage shifts from outright skepticism to a more insidious emphasis on her body, image, or persona rather than her stage times and wins. Case in point: Michèle Mouton. Born in Grasse, France, she holds the distinction of being the first woman to

win a World Rally Championship event, the first woman to win a major rally championship, and the first woman to win the Pikes Peak International Hill Climb.[48] In 1982, she'd claim three rally victories on her way to second in the World Rally Championship for Drivers, behind only Walter Röhrl in the Opel Ascona 400. That season, she and teammate Hannu Mikkola of Finland, driving a pair of Audi Quattros, delivered Audi the World Rally Championship for Manufacturers, edging Opel by eight points, with Mikkola scoring two wins and Mouton three. Highlights of the rallies were shown on ITV's World of Sport in Britain, much like how NASCAR Winston Cup racing was aired on ABC's Wide World of Sports during the 1970s. Lasting only ten minutes, the highlights were the only way for most Britons to watch rallying without traveling to see it in person. One of these rallies, the 1982 Rallye de Portugal, marked Mouton's second win of her career and her first of the season. Despite these achievements, the ITV highlights of the race introduced Mouton as "Mikkola's attractive French teammate".[49] Instead of introducing her as Audi's number two driver or as the 1981 Rallye Sanremo winner, they instead introduce her with a descriptor of her appearance, despite her recent success as well as the fact that she won the rally. While male drivers like Röhrl, Mikkola, Jean-Luc Thérier, and Björn Waldegård were introduced as former world champions, experienced drivers, and rally winners, Mouton was relegated to the role of eye candy for the viewer at home. Davies's commentary, when boiled down, reads as, "Hey, look at this woman racer. Doesn't she look hot?" This sort of media coverage signified a worsening of the type of coverage women racing drivers received. Whereas Sara Christian came into New Charlotte Speedway with as little NASCAR-sanctioned experience as her male contemporaries, which some could say made it difficult to focus on on-track, performance-based merit, Mouton had twenty previous WRC starts, including her win in Sanremo in 1981. For Dick Davies and ITV to focus on her

non-racing attributes serves to discredit those accomplishments and reduce her to the oddity on the grid, the outsider who isn't meant to be playing with the big boys and their heavy toys.

When they do mention her recent success in the World Rally Championship, it's still framed through a lens other than performance. After the highlights show footage of Mouton winning the rally, commentator Dickie Davies says, "For Michèle Mouton and her equally charming co-driver Fabrizia Pons, a second world championship triumph in only six months."[50] While "charming" could mean nice, sweet, or kind, and isn't necessarily appearance-based, it still isn't focused on racing, even though she won the event. Although she had the firsts to back up her legitimacy as a competitor, ITV and Dick Davies made it their mission to discredit Mouton's accomplishments by putting her physical appearance and personality before her ability to wrestle a 1.45 tonne rally car around the tight gravel bends of the Sintra countryside. This is especially evident in Davies's last line of commentary, where he says, "No wonder the whole world loves Michèle. All that brainpower and beauty, too."[51] In a rally that she won by over thirteen minutes from Per Eklund in his Toyota Celica 2000GT, ITV ends the segment with another observation of her appearance. When drivers like Röhrl, Mikkola, Thérier, and Waldegård won, they weren't described as handsome, striking, or hunky. Even in contemporary coverage, such as Jamie Little's play-by-play on FOX for the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series, male winners are not described as 'handsome' or 'striking.' Aside from how male commentators regard male competitors, there's a double standard in how male commentators report on women racing drivers compared to how female commentators report on male drivers. For ITV to repeatedly emphasize Mouton's appearance and personality paints her as a spectacle, as someone who got on the WRC grid because of her looks, not because she worked her way up from co-driving for Jean Taibi in the 1973 Monte Carlo Rally to making her debut as a driver in 1974

before winning her class in the 1975 24 Hours of Le Mans. Her performance at Le Mans in 1975 was what attracted French oil company Elf to sponsor her. It wasn't her features or her "charm" that got her the sponsorship; it was her on-track performances. These accomplishments are diminished by ITV's coverage of Mouton and serve as a reminder of just how hard the media works to bring women racing drivers into disrepute.

This Ain't a Scene, It's an Arms Race

The four decades after Guthrie's 1978 Indy 500 run would see the likes of Lyn St. James, Sarah Fisher, and Katherine Legge attempt the 500, as well as Patty Moise, Shawna Robinson, and Danica Patrick, who attempted to race at Daytona in NASCAR.[52] Now, a new crop of women racing drivers competes in the likes of Indy NXT and the ARCA Menards Series. In today's context, visibility is not achieved solely through competitive results. The rise of technology has transformed how drivers are perceived, branded, and assessed through social media platforms, algorithm-based websites, and features in lifestyle publications. In this altered media landscape, a new priority arises: "What can you add to my brand?" which takes precedence over the question, "What can you achieve on the track?" This branding-centric approach is particularly pronounced in American stock car racing, especially within the top three NASCAR series and the ARCA Menards Series that it sanctions. In 2025, three women competed full-time in a major form of motorsport in the United States: Hailie Deegan, Toni Breidinger, and Isabella Robusto.[53] Deegan started in the NASCAR K&N West Series in 2018, moved to the ARCA Menards Series in 2020, spent three years in the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series, and in 2024 raced 17 races in the NASCAR Xfinity Series before she and her team parted ways.[54] This year, she raced in Indy NXT with HMD Motorsports, which had won both the Team's and Driver's Championship twice since they began competing in 2019.[55] Breidinger had a somewhat different trajectory, making

three starts in the ARCA Menards Series in 2018 before returning in 2021, making nine more starts. She'd race three races in the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series in 2023, one in 2024, and competed full-time in the Craftsman Truck Series with Toyota and TRICON Garage in 2025.[56] Finally, there's Robusto, who made her first start in the ARCA Menards Series in 2024 and competed in the series full-time in 2025 for Venturini Motorsports and Toyota.[57] These three drivers have raced solely in the era where "content is king," where your results on track don't matter as much as they used to.[58] That's not to say that they don't matter at all, but unlike Sara Christian, Janet Guthrie, and Michèle Mouton, who were judged by their appearance and harshly scrutinized for on-track performance, drivers like Deegan and Breidinger have been promoted up the NASCAR ladder even when their on-track performance has been weaker than that of their peers.

Almost Easy

Deegan's NASCAR career started in 2018 when she began competing in the NASCAR K&N Pro Series West at the age of 16, driving for Bill McAnally Racing, a team that was just coming off three straight drivers' championships, one by Chris Eggleston in 2015 and two by Todd Gilliland the following two years. She'd compete for the team for two years, becoming the first woman to win in the Pro Series West, which had existed under a variety of names since 1954.[59] Halfway through her sophomore campaign in the series, in which she scored two wins and finished third in the standings, she'd sit down with Dale Earnhardt Jr. on his podcast, The Dale Jr. Download, and assert, "I'm a racer, I'm not a model."[60] Her claim is complicated by the fact that, months earlier, she had posed in two separate photo shoots when she was a seventeen-year-old minor, with HOLR Magazine and the athletic brand Under Armour, the latter of which featured her in a form-fitting sports bra and yoga pants, promoting the company's Rush athleticwear line.[61] Before

she competed in the ARCA Menards Series, she was already being promoted as a brand ambassador. Her marketability was leveraged before her competitive résumé had developed. Under Armour posted its own video from the photoshoot three weeks after Deegan, when she was still a minor. Under Armour reported that the post, "attracted about 458,000 views" and that it was "'among some of the brand's highest engaged content recently.'"[62] This marked another institutional shift from drivers like Christian and Mouton, who were reported on from an appearance-based lens to a marketing-centered lens, as seen with Deegan. Even before she was eighteen, she was seen as a marketing tool for companies like Under Armour, and yet she tried to deny that label.

In an article from the Sports Business Journal, Jill Gregory, NASCAR's executive vice president and chief marketing officer, was quoted as saying, "'[Deegan's] social feeds are not lap times or how the car was running; she talks about her lifestyle, training regimen, what she's doing with her family — all the things fans want to know about their favorite drivers.'"[63] And yet, for how she branded herself to her fans, as a lifestyle instead of a driver, she was still lauded as someone who could eventually make it to the NASCAR Cup Series by NASCAR executives. Instead, in the five years after the Sports Business Journal article was published, Deegan ran a full season in the ARCA Menards Series, where she scored 0 wins, 4 top fives, and 17 top tens in 20 races.[64] She then ran three full seasons in the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series, where she scored 0 wins, 0 top fives, and 5 top tens across 68 starts.[65] Finally, she ran a partial season in the NASCAR Xfinity Series before her and AM Racing, the team she was competing for, agreed to part ways 17 races into the 33-race season.[66] And yet, in 2025, HMD Motorsports gave her the keys to one of their Dallara IL-15s in Indy NXT, where she finished 14th in points, tied for last amongst all full-time drivers with Tommy Smith, both of them scoring 202 points.[67]

Don't You Know Who I Think I Am?

However, if Deegan is the genesis of the marketing-over-merit era, then Toni Breidinger represents its apotheosis: Toyota signed her through its marketing department, citing her 2.5 million Instagram followers as the reason, rather than her competitive record. Lauded by Glamour as "one of the most successful women in racing today," and by herself as "'very competitive and driven,'" her on-track performances tell a different story.[68] While it is true she was the winningest driver in United States Auto Club competition, an asterisk must be put next to that stat, as her 19 wins came in the regional Western Asphalt HPD Midget Championship.[69] This series competed at tracks solely on the West Coast, and, in 2016, when she won the series championship, only three tracks were on the schedule.[70] For comparison, there were nineteen tracks on the 2024 ARCA Menards Series schedule and twenty-three tracks on the 2025 NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series schedule, including superspeedways, dirt, road courses, and short tracks. That variety exposes a driver's range: their ability to adapt to different cars, surfaces, and race strategies. Breidinger's résumé, limited to a narrow, regional subset on paved short track less than half a mile in length, limited her ability to gain experience. In the nine starts she had in the USAC Silver Crown Series, a national series, she had one top 10, zero top 5s, and zero wins. In 2024, Kaylee Bryson would claim the honor of being the first woman to win a USAC National Series feature at the same time Breidinger was racing full-time in ARCA.

According to Sports Illustrated, though, "[t]he last couple of years have… seen her results improve on the racetrack," yet my own observations from when I attended the 2023 NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series race at World Wide Technology Raceway reveal her results have plateaued instead of getting better.[71] In the race, Breidinger qualified 18th and finished 24th, one lap down.[72] Her average running position in that race was 24th; she climbed no higher

than 10th and fell no worse than 28th.[73] In her 27 starts in the Truck Series since, she's had an average finish of 25.1, an average start of 26.3, and four lead-lap finishes.[74] But the reason she has those competitive starts and is lauded by Glamour, People, and Sports Illustrated is that she's a marketing asset for Toyota. According to Paul Doleshal, group manager of motorsports for Toyota Motor North America, Breidinger is contracted through Toyota's marketing department rather than its driver development program.[75] Doleshal explained the reasoning directly: "Her large social media following was one thing that attracted Toyota to her."[76] So, according to Toyota itself, her 2.5 million followers on Instagram and 2.3 million on TikTok were the reason they signed her. Not her wins in USAC, not her Carolina Pro Late Model Series top 5s, but her social media visibility. Toyota's own marketing director noted that her large social following was central to her signing, suggesting that as long as she can sell Raising Cane's, 818 Tequila, and Coach to the masses on social media, Toyota will keep her employed, regardless of how she finishes on track. Thus, the criteria used to frame Breidinger as 'successful' emphasize social media visibility and commercial marketability rather than competitive records such as lap speed, finishing position, or race wins.

Invisible

That's not to say all women racing drivers today have been confined to the box of marketing over merit. In 2025, Isabella Robusto, "the first female to win a Legend Car national qualifier," contested her rookie season in the ARCA Menards Series.[77] While writing this paper, I had the opportunity to watch her race in the Southern Illinois 100 at the DuQuoin State Fairgrounds Racetrack (figure 2 in the appendix), where she qualified 8th and finished 4th on the lead lap, having run as high as 3rd and never fallen outside the top 8.[78] Across her 23 other ARCA starts, she has averaged a 7.2 qualifying position, recorded an average finish of 11th, and completed 17

races on the lead lap.[79] In the 2025 season, she made history as the woman with the most top 5s in a single season, with 9.[80] Despite these historic achievements, though, she does not receive the same press that Deegan and Breidinger currently do from the likes of People, Forbes, SB Nation, and even Motorsport.com. For reference, Breidinger had 4 top 5s across 65 starts, and all 4 came in a part-time season in 2023. Although she's done statistically better in a shorter amount of time, with 11 top 5s in 24 starts, Robusto fails to receive the same mainstream media attention that her contemporaries do.

Robusto does receive media coverage, but it primarily comes from niche, racing-focused publications like Sportscar365.com, thepodiumfinish.net, kickinthetires.net, and Autohebdo magazine. Autohebdo, a French magazine like Match l'Intra and L'Auto, said of Robusto: "At twenty years old, Robusto is driving this year in ARCA, the fourth national division, after a stunning debut in 2024. In four starts, she has simply finished in the top 10 three times, including two top 5s, one of them being a second place at Springfield."[81] Much like the French newspapers nearly a century ago that regarded Odette Siko with the respect she deserved as a racing driver, not as eye candy for the male spectators or a marketing tool to sell Dunlop Tires and Alfa Romeos to the audience, Autohebdo treats Isabella Robusto as a racing driver, as someone to be judged based on her on-track performance. The description of "stunning" for her 2024 debut is apt, considering that in her first three starts, she averaged a fourth-place finishing position. Breidinger averaged a finishing position of 13.33 across her first three starts, and Deegan averaged 12.33. Robusto, by comparison, averaged fourth. Her performance was immediately competitive in a way that her contemporaries' careers were not. Robusto doesn't harken back to racing's past solely from her media coverage, though. According to heavy.com, "she's doing all this while pursuing a degree in aerospace engineering at Arizona State University."[82] Similarly,

before she began her career in the SCCA, Janet Guthrie graduated from the University of Michigan and worked as an aerospace engineer with Republic Aviation. Even without the mainstream press coverage, Robusto harkens back to the days when merit took precedent over marketing, and a driver like Guthrie or Alan Kulwicki, with his mechanical engineering degree from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, could contend for top 5s, wins, and championships with a degree in one hand and a steering wheel in the other.

Entertainment, and Everything After

"All we are is entertainment, caught up in our own derangement… All we are are pretty faces, picture-perfect bottled rage, packaged, synthesized versions of you," Tim McIlrath snarls the first verse of "Entertainment" by Rise Against, the lyrics a fitting reflection of the current state of women racing drivers, where a driver's marketability, her ability to be "entertainment," is more important than her results on track. Kévin Estre, André Lotterer, and Laurens Vanthoor won the 2024 WEC Hypercar World Endurance Drivers' Championship because they got to drive for Porsche Penske Motorsport on merit, not because they were good-looking or had modeled for Calvin Klein. Joey Logano won the 2024 NASCAR Cup Series Drivers' championship because he got to drive for Team Penske on merit, not because he could sell Shell gasoline or Pennzoil motor oil to the viewer sitting at home.

Yet for the likes of Sara Christian, Michèle Mouton, Hailie Deegan, and Toni Breidinger, the press leverages appearance and marketing in ways that undermine their legitimacy as competitors. By contrast, Odette Siko at Le Mans in 1932, or Isabella Robusto nearly a century later in ARCA, were judged by niche racing outlets on the merit of their on-track results. Janet Guthrie, too, demonstrated endurance and skill at Indianapolis, yet was framed more as a symbol of progress than as a driver systematically let down by her machinery. Across these seven

figures: Siko, Christian, Guthrie, Mouton, Deegan, Breidinger, and Robusto, the history of women racing drivers reveals a shifting but persistent tension: legitimacy is rarely measured solely by performance. Instead, whether through novelty, symbolic "firsts," or marketable branding, women have too often been packaged as entertainment rather than respected as athletes. Until the press and sponsors recalibrate to value skill above spectacle, the best finish a woman can achieve may remain overshadowed by the story written about her.

What these histories make clear is that the question has never been whether women can drive a racecar. They have, across continents, eras, and machinery that would have broken lesser men. The underlying question has always been who holds the authority to define legitimacy. When credibility is granted only when it flatters the institution, when merit must present itself wrapped in novelty or marketable softness to be seen at all, the record becomes warped by the vantage point that produced it. To write women into motorsport history as competitors rather than curiosities is to refuse the terms on which their stories have been filtered, packaged, and sold. It is to insist that results, not narratives, are what endure. And when that standard is finally applied without caveat or asterisk, the archive looks very different—and the history of motorsport stops being a boys' club and starts being what it always was: a proving ground where speed, endurance, and skill have never belonged to one gender. To write women back into this history is not an act of novelty, but of accuracy. The record is not complete until they are recognized for what they have always been: racers.

Appendix

Figure 2: A photograph of Liam Crider meeting Isabella Robusto pre-race at the DuQuoin State Fairgrounds while holding an autographed draft of this study. Taken August 31, 2025 by Tommy Venturini.

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