

8-2009

Stigma Cities: Dystopian Urban Identities In The United States West And South In The Twentieth Century

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STIGMA CITIES: DYSTOPIAN URBAN
IDENTITIES IN THE UNITED STATES
WEST AND SOUTH IN THE
TWENTIETH
CENTURY

by

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A dissertation presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy in History
Department of History
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August 2009

UMI Number: 3372127

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THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend that the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

Jonathan Lavon Foster

entitled

Stigma Cities: Dystopian Urban Identities in the United States West and South in the Twentieth Century

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

History

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August 2009

ABSTRACT

Stigma Cities: Dystopian Urban Identities in the United States West and South in the Twentieth Century

By Jonathan Foster

Dr. David Wrobel, Examination Committee Chair,
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This dissertation examines how historical events and representation of those events relative to the wider historical context have allowed the media, opinion setters, and the ordinary public to use the names of San Francisco, California, Birmingham, Alabama and Las Vegas, Nevada as denigrating adjectives and the effect of this usage on those cities. Exploration of Birmingham's image as a racist city, San Francisco's as a gay Mecca, and Las Vegas, Nevada's as an adult playground or sinful city serves this purpose. These case studies support a central argument that the nature of place-based stigmatization's influence depends upon ever-shifting cultural values and historical context.

Ultimately, this dissertation contends that ideas rival roads, master plans, and political organizations in importance with respect to their impact on urban areas. When considering the perceptions of Birmingham, Las Vegas, and San Francisco, one can see links between ideas and actions, mentalities and physical structures. In the case of Birmingham, local concerns over national perceptions of the place have resulted in a devastating level of anxiety as the city's identity rapidly changed on the national scene

from overwhelmingly positive to irredeemably deviant. In Las Vegas, the city's reputation lacks the dramatic break found in Birmingham's and has long played a direct role in its survival and prosperity. Yet while the city has prospered from being a place where one can do what is not acceptable elsewhere, "sin city" marketing has increasingly caused problems as the city has grown into a major metropolis complete with families and more mainstream aspirations. San Franciscans have tended to be more accepting of their mental placement as a Gay Mecca. Here, a long and continuous history of detachment from the American "norm" in popular portrayals, has created more of a *laissez faire* attitude. The idea of a gay-friendly city has directly impacted the city in recent years as its population has embraced the gay tourism industry and emerged as a pacesetter in regard to gay rights.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

At times, the production of this dissertation has seemed a long and arduous process. Yet this process would have undoubtedly stretched on without end if not for the extraordinary help and support of my dissertation committee, mentors, and a number of dedicated archivists, friends, and family.

I wish first to acknowledge my dissertation committee. From the genesis of this project as a paper in his western history seminar, my advisor, dissertation committee chair, and friend David Wrobel proved invaluable. Throughout the entire process, his enthusiastic support has never wavered. He has challenged me intellectually, consistently provided thoughtful insights on different angles that I might explore, and patiently guided me through rough patches. He also exhibited a degree of interest in my work beyond anything that I had experienced previously in my educational endeavors. I could not have found a better advisor. Eugene Moehring has also contributed to the completion of this manuscript and my intellectual development. He has never failed to offer expert advice and suggestions when I have sought them or to leave me in awe of his vast knowledge of history. Similarly, Thomas Wright always proved accessible. I am thankful for his excellent advice and editorial precision. Without him, there would also have been a couple more large omissions from the story. Likewise, John Tuman served as the perfect outside committee member. He always took his role seriously, showed an interest in my progress, and offered advice from perspectives that I overlooked. Overall,

I consider myself extraordinarily lucky regarding the composition of my dissertation committee.

I have also been lucky enough to rely on the exceptional comments and suggestions of a number of additional historians both in the preparation of this dissertation and in the years of study that preceded it. I am indebted to Andy Fry and Colin Loader for their understanding of the process, consideration, and for the many valuable suggestions that they provided from their respective fields of history. Special thanks are also in order for Greg Hise, who provided very useful critiques of the dissertation's introduction. Classes, discussions, and assistantships that I have had with Greg Brown, Raquel Casas, Andy Kirk, and Janet Ward have also contributed to my intellectual development and the successful completion of this project. I also consider myself privileged to have known the late Hal Rothman and thankful for the advice he always offered so freely--be it on Las Vegas, surviving as a doctoral student, or life in general. Before arriving at UNLV, professors Jack E. Davis, Raymond Mohl, James Tent, and George Liber helped tease out the nature of my historical interests. Without any one of them, I would never have made it to point of preparing this dissertation.

A number of librarians and archivists provided expert assistance with my research. I wish to thank James Baggett at the Birmingham Public Library's Linn Henley Research Library Archives, Mary Force at Delta Airlines Corporate Archives, and the expert staffs of the San Francisco Public Library Archives, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collections, and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archives. Without the guidance of these knowledgeable individuals I would have been, quite literally, lost.

Several friends and associates have also played a major role in the completion of this dissertation by patiently listening to me discuss my project and offering fresh insights and suggestions for its refinement. Many fellow graduate students have, at points along the way, helped me flesh out and refine my ideas. These include, in no particular order, Garron Maloney, Jeffrey Richardson, Michael Duchemin, Liesl Carr Childers, Michael Childers, Aaron McArthur, Julia Stetler, Michelle Turk, and Peter Gough. Additional friends whose input I am thankful for having received include Benjamin Dao, John Siazon, and the late Andrea Kornegay Smith.

Finally, I will forever be thankful for the support of my family throughout the entire dissertation process. My mother and father, Kaye and Lavon, have always offered the heartfelt encouragement that I have needed in order to persevere. Without them, this project would have been impossible. Likewise, the unyielding support of my parents-in-law Sissel and Rolf has meant more to me than they will ever know.

But the main inspiration behind this dissertation's completion, and for all else that I attempt, is my lovely wife and the twins she now carries. Over these past few years, she has kept me moving forward, always challenged me intellectually, and brightened my days. I cannot fathom having finished this without her. So it is Marianne, the perfect wife and the sparkle of my life, to whom I dedicate this dissertation.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: BOXES OF CITIES AND PEOPLE

Considering Urban Stigmatization

On August 20, 1984, United States Ambassador to the United Nations Jeanne Kirkpatrick stood poised to address a large and boisterous crowd. As Kirkpatrick began her remarks, one can safely assume that a few onlookers recognized her as an unlikely speaker for their venue. But in the years that followed, few would remember the shock of the lifelong Democrat standing before the Republican nominating convention to endorse Ronald Reagan. Instead, two phrases coined by Ambassador Kirkpatrick would take firm root in the American lexicon and political discourse. From that night forward, those critical of the Republican agenda stood vulnerable to the accusation of belonging to an unpatriotic “blame America first crowd,” headed by those detestable “San Francisco Democrats.”¹

Kirkpatrick left little doubt to the meaning of “blame America first crowd.” She related how the Democratic Party of her younger years—the party of Kennedy—had changed so drastically by 1984 as to be unrecognizable. Placing particular emphasis on foreign policy and action, Kirkpatrick chided modern Democrats for finding only fault in the actions of their government. Whenever a challenging event occurred internationally, they quickly pointed to American culpability, before hiding their head in the sand like the

proverbial “ostrich.” To Kirkpatrick, and those who applauded her that night, these Democrats had ventured into disloyal territory by acknowledging American responsibility for events ranging from the killing of 241 Marines in Beirut to the spread of Marxist ideology in Central America.²

The ambassador was not so forthcoming or precise in her explanation of the intended meanings of “San Francisco Democrat.” The most trusting among us could, perhaps, believe that Kirkpatrick was merely referencing the fact that the Democratic Party had held its convention in the California city only a few weeks previously. Yet, when taken in the context of the times, even the least cynical must concede that the type of placement Kirkpatrick was attempting went beyond geographic.

By invoking the name San Francisco and linking the Democratic Party to it, Kirkpatrick succeeded in drawing a stark contrast between the masculine Ronald Reagan and his Republican Party and the supposedly weaker Democrats. In one stroke she saddled the Democrats with the urban mistrust that had characterized one strain of American thinking since the nation’s founding and, more specifically, the effeminate deviance associated with San Francisco by 1984. After all, in the preceding decade, city residents had drawn much national attention for having elected the nation’s first openly gay supervisor and passed a gay rights ordinance in the midst of the greatest national backlash against gay rights in the post-war period.³ Further, in the years prior, substantial national attention had focused on San Francisco and its gay population following the 1978 assassination of Supervisor Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone.⁴ This tragic event followed closely the city’s heated and much publicized role in the debate over California’s discriminatory and homophobic state Proposition 6—a local effort in a

nationwide push championed by singer Anita Bryant to repeal gay rights statutes and ordinances across the nation.⁵ Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, and most definitely by the time of Kirkpatrick's speech, the name San Francisco stood as a euphemism for homosexual and radically liberal.⁶

The usage of Kirkpatrick's phrase in the decades that followed has left no room for doubt concerning intentions. Cable news pundits continue to use "San Francisco" with surprising regularity to describe far-left political views or a perceived degree of homosexual leanings. On August 30, 2007, Chris Matthews threw out the phrase on MSNBC's *Hardball* in a discussion of Republican Senator Larry Craig's alleged predilection toward same-sex carnal activity in the nation's airport restrooms. In this instance, Matthews used the phrase to imply a level of hypocrisy on the part of Republicans who had often used "San Francisco Democrat" as a way of painting liberal Democrats as gay or gay-friendly. In a telling exchange, Matthews's characterization of this usage went unchallenged by even the right-leaning member of his panel.⁷ A couple of months later, Fox News Channel pundit Bill O'Reilly invoked Kilpatrick's original usage of San Francisco as adjective while bemoaning the city's liberal and tolerant values regarding sexuality. This was familiar ground for O'Reilly, who in the recent past portrayed the city on various installments of his show as teeming with "gay militants," controlled by detestable "secular progressives," and as "ground zero for anti-American activities"⁸ Such accusations are not that surprising, when one considers that the self-proclaimed "Culture Warrior" once, on his radio show, jokingly endorsed an Al Qaeda attack on San Francisco.⁹ And then, there is always ultra conservative and vitriolic talk radio host Michael Savage. As a transplanted New Yorker in the western port, the

blatantly homophobic Savage takes particular delight in labeling locals as “San Fransickos” due to their liberal stances on sexual orientation among other social issues.¹⁰

The point of the preceding, and that of this dissertation, is not to argue whether or not there are such a things as a “San Francisco Democrats,” “San Francisco” values, or any other discernable “San Francisco” trait. Instead, this work will examine how events and representation of those events relative to the wider historical context have allowed the media, opinion setters, and the ordinary public to use the name of a city as a denigrating adjective and the effect of this usage on the city itself. In addition to San Francisco, Birmingham, Alabama and Las Vegas, Nevada carry stigmas in the minds of at least some significant segments of the American population. The dissertation will examine how portions of the American public have labeled, stereotyped, and ultimately stigmatized these cities as deviant. In so doing, it will attempt to account for the development and perpetuation of stigmatized urban identities and how locals respond to the deviant label. I will accomplish this through case studies of these three American cities and their dealings with various degrees of stigmatization during the twentieth century. Exploration of Birmingham’s image as a racist city, San Francisco’s as a gay Mecca, and Las Vegas, Nevada’s as an adult playground or sinful city will serve this purpose. In the end, these case studies will support a central argument that the nature of place-based stigmatization’s influence—while always present—depends heavily upon ever-shifting cultural values and historical context. The effect of a stigmatized identity upon a city is relative to the stigmatizing characteristic’s importance in society at any given time. Carry-over of previously dominant perceptions of a city can also dull or sharpen this effect.

Ultimately, this dissertation contends that ideas rival roads, master plans, and political organizations in importance with respect to their impact on urban areas. While urban historians have greatly increased the knowledge of the city in regard to its physical, social, and political dimensions, they have not provided adequate attention to what people think of cities and the significance of perception to the trajectory of the city. By examining the reputations of Birmingham, Las Vegas, and San Francisco, this dissertation enriches the field by including the element of perception.

When considering the perceptions of Birmingham, Las Vegas, and San Francisco, one can see the links between ideas and actions, mentalities and physical structures. Also, this vantage point allows a clear view of the varying significance of identities and their relationship to wider historical context. In the case of Birmingham, I claim that local concerns over national perceptions of the place have directly influenced actions in the city. This anxiety has hit Birmingham exceptionally hard, as the city's identity rapidly changed on the national scene from overwhelmingly positive to irredeemably deviant. The discontinuity in the city's historical perception resulted in a greatly stressed urban population that subsequently and frequently divided over such local issues as the founding of a civil rights institute and the renaming of local landmarks for civil rights era participants.

In Las Vegas, the city's reputation lacks the dramatic break found in Birmingham's and has long played a direct role in its survival and prosperity. Here, the idea of being a place where one can do what is not acceptable at home has directly underwritten the city's success as a tourist destination. Yet, at times, some residents have exhibited anxiety over the promotion of Las Vegas as a "sin city." I claim that this discomfort and

its resultant impact on the city's direction is visible in the recent attempts of residents to censor local advertising. Moreover, external (non-resident) concerns about the nature of Las Vegas help explain and city officials' inability to attract professional major league sports franchises.

Where many Birmingham residents oppose any project that might reinforce the city's image through recollections of the past, and Las Vegans selectively embrace—depending on the issue at hand—attempts to appear either normal or outlandishly deviant, San Franciscans tend to be more accepting of their mental placement as a gay Mecca. Here, a long and continuous history of detachment from the American “norm” in popular portrayals, has created more of a laissez faire attitude. The idea of a gay-friendly city has directly impacted the city in recent years as it has officially embraced the gay tourism industry and emerged as a pacesetter in regard to gay rights.

In conducting this study, I have looked at a variety of primary and secondary source materials. I have purposefully cast my nets wide, always receptive to even the most unlikely characterization of the cities under examination. As the reputations of these cities are widespread and well known, sources have often appeared unexpectedly. In one example of this, I happened across a Norwegian language Looney Tunes comic book while shopping in Bergen, Norway. This particular comic, in which Daffy Duck and Bugs Bunny visited Las Vegas, offered numerous popular stereotypes of the city—from the mafia to showgirls to wild-eyed gambling.¹¹ I have also extensively examined the portrayals of the cities and reactions to these portrayals in popular magazines, newspapers, television broadcasts, movies, and on websites. Beyond this, I have conducted interviews of select individuals, consulted archival holdings in Birmingham,

Las Vegas, San Francisco, and Atlanta. In the end, this diverse mix of source material has allowed me insight into the identities of these cities as perceived on local, national, and international levels.

I do not intend the focus on these three cities to suggest that these are the only urban centers with stigmatized identities. Obviously, cities other than Birmingham, Las Vegas, and San Francisco have experienced negative labeling both in the United States and throughout the world during the same era.¹²

Central consideration will fall on Birmingham, Las Vegas, and San Francisco for several reasons. Each city has developed and maintained a widely held identity in the twentieth century. In each case, the media, politicians, intellectuals, and other purveyors of popular culture have made use of the city's stained identity during times long past the events that brought that identity into being. Because of this tendency, conversation regarding each city often refers to that city's stigmatized characteristic regardless of whether the issue under discussion relates to the stigma or not. In many ways, the public is so readily aware of these three cities' stigmas that the mere allusion to them by disseminators of information can evoke specific reactions among their targeted public. This is exactly what Kirkpatrick was attempting with her "San Francisco Democrat" tagline. That is also the case when a marketing campaign employs the phrase "What happens here, stays here," and when a journalist invokes "Bombingham" to link Birmingham's past to its present.¹³

This same retelling and continual evocation of stigma has also led to varied reactions by local populations. As we will see, elements of the population in some cities have struggled over how best to deal with the stigma and the historical actions that brought it

into being. Many have sought to ignore their city's past, fearing that dwelling on it in the present can only reopen old wounds and bring forth further damage to their home's reputation. Others have pushed to embrace the past as a manner of healing or, quite frankly, tourism promotion.¹⁴ As a result, these three cities offer a prime example of the volatility of public historical remembrance and its relevance to modern identity.

One can locate both this tension over and desirability of remembrance in a number of instances that I will examine in the forthcoming pages. In Birmingham, the long-drawn out construction of the Civil Rights Institute and recent attempts at renaming municipal institutions, roads, and landmarks after Civil Rights activists reveal the locals' divided opinion on how best to deal with a troubled past and stained present day identity.¹⁵ In San Francisco, the reactions to Harvey Milk's political campaigns, fight against the homophobic Proposition 6, his assassination, and the growth of the gay tourism industry provide insight into residents' views on the widespread image of their city as a "Gay Mecca."¹⁶ In Las Vegas, one can see, in the 1980s through the early 2000s, the conflicting desires of recently arrived suburbanites and casino and political officials over the marketing of the city. Should Vegas play up Sin City, organized crime, and consequence-free reveling, or should it mute such plays on its past in favor of new family-oriented residents? Anxiety over this issue has made the jump to action as locals have reacted to sexually explicit ad campaigns featured local billboards and similar advertisements on taxicabs.¹⁷

Another characteristic that sets these cities apart is the transformative quality of each location's identity over the twentieth century. Two of these cities have, at various times, been championed as exemplary of the exceptional American experience.

Birmingham, before America came to know it for racial violence, stood as a prime example of American industrial growth and the technological advancement of the industrial age.¹⁸ Conversely, Las Vegas has traveled the route from outcast to acceptance as the nation's attitude toward gambling changed over the course of the twentieth century. By the 1990s, Las Vegas's exponential growth and seeming perfection of the new service-oriented economy had commentators referring to it as the "last Detroit," of opportunity for working class Americans.¹⁹ Such praise and ideas, although very much defensible, ironically resulted in drawing in many of the aforementioned suburbanites who eventually questioned the marketing of sin that underwrote the city's post-industrial boom.²⁰ It is important to note, however, that the perception of All-American has not come to Las Vegas so completely and abruptly as it has traveled away from Birmingham.

As a last rationale for these choices, I freely admit to holding personal attachments to each of the three cities. In Birmingham, I spent the first thirty years of my life. The "Magic City" that became "Bombingham" will forever be the place where my roots run the deepest. I have resided in and studied Las Vegas from both casino floor (perhaps a bit too often) and dusty archive (casinos are much more fun) for over five years. This city of transient malcontents, families, professional and working class suburbanites, and wayward angels has become my second home and will forever be the place where I met my wife. Likewise, San Francisco captured a place in my heart from the first time that I read Jack Kerouac's magical accounts of post-war travels westward.²¹ This attraction has only been strengthened by the many times that I have awakened to its damp fog, walked its hilly streets, and commingled with its cosmopolitan and, at times, eccentric residents. In my opinion no other city in the United States can match the feel, the flare, and the

atmosphere of the city by the bay. Finally, my situation of being a southerner living in the West has contributed to my choice to examine southern and western cities. These are the cities I am most intimately acquainted with, and, as such, the cities that bear the strongest perceptual identities in my own mind. Thus, in the end, I have chosen these cities because they are close to my metaphorical heart, never failing to spark my creativity and whatever little intellect to which I may lay claim.

Stigma Theory

Although written in the field of history, this dissertation will incorporate and borrow ideas from other disciplines. Primarily, I will utilize concepts and theories developed by practitioners of sociology, psychology, and media studies. I feel that this study could not have been completed without such an interdisciplinary foundation. By looking to disciplines beyond history, it becomes possible to see the link between stigmatization and historical context.

Historians, after all, have largely ignored the phenomenon of place stigmatization. Beyond the work of Howard M. Solomon, few have been willing to advocate the centrality of ruined identities to their subject material. Solomon, to his credit, argued that the stigmatization of groups throughout history is central to understanding both the cultures they existed within and the groups themselves. Although arguing for the importance of cross-disciplinary input in the historical study of stigma, he did not address the issue of stigmatized cities.²²

In defense of other historians, examining such a perceptual process as stigmatization represents dangerous territory for the academic. The “mind” of America has admittedly

lacked consensus more often than not. The historical literature, nevertheless, plays an important role in informing this study. Several superb monographs on the three cities under examination provide key insights into their respective development. Among these, Glenn Eskew's *But For Birmingham* and W. David Lewis's *Sloss Furnaces and the Rise of the Birmingham District* prove indispensable in relating how an American industrial giant could rise from the pastures of north-central Alabama but could not overcome the racial divisiveness built into its very structure.²³ To truly understand the workings of political power in Birmingham, and the complex relations between the city's various interest groups, one must turn to Carl V. Harris's majestic *Political Power in Birmingham*²⁴. Out West, the journey of Las Vegas from dusty railroad stop to glittering example of the twenty-first century service industry cannot be told better or without heavy reliance on the excellent works of Eugene Moehring and Hal Rothman. Moehring's *Resort City in the Sunbelt*—the first comprehensive study of Las Vegas's development—provides a history of the city unmatched in its scope, detail, and insight.²⁵ Likewise, any examination of post 1980s Las Vegas that fails to consult Rothman's *Neon Metropolis* often and shamelessly, cannot be complete. His treatment of both the idea of Las Vegas and the place's spectacular success in the late twentieth century in harnessing the service economy stands unmatched.²⁶ Finally, in regard to San Francisco, Gray Brechin's *Imperial San Francisco*, Kevin Starr and Richard Orsi's *Rooted in Barbarous Soil*, and Herbert Asbury's *Barbary Coast* have provided invaluable background information on the city's development and its often raucous and entertaining characteristics.²⁷ With regard to the city's most recent incarnation, Nan Alamilla Boyd's path-breaking *Wide Open Town* and Dennis Meeker's dissertation "Come Out West," and book *Contacts Desired* have interpreted the process by which mass communication, local

activism, and the politics of daily life worked together to create the nation's most identifiable "Gay Mecca."²⁸

Some of the books mentioned in even this briefest of historiographical overviews hint at a more widely spread division in American thought toward cities. On the one hand, the reader can find progress displayed in each city's example. From Lewis's *Stoic Furnaces*, Birmingham emerges as a leading, albeit troubled example of American industrial might. Boyd and Meeker portray San Francisco as a spearhead of the cultural acceptance of gay rights. Finally, Rothman credits Las Vegas with leading the nation into the post-industrial age.²⁹ This favorable view of American cities as instruments or example of advancement or progress makes up one side of an ambivalent relationship Americans have had with their urban areas.

Americans have, since early on, conceptualized their cities as something different and often exceptional in regard to other world centers. Examples of this view appeared early in colonial times. Settlements in this new world were to be vastly different than the corrupt and old centers of Europe. Puritans also regarded their early villages as comforting advancements of order into and against the oft-perceived evil of wilderness.³⁰ The New England town, in this regard, was envisioned as a kind of beachhead against nature, savagery, and the corruption of mankind.

In the earliest years of independence J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, writing as the "American Farmer," celebrated the new nation's "fair cities." While writing of the nation's agrarian strength, Crevecoeur also alluded to the superiority of American towns. In these towns, one found only the titles of lawyer or merchant in comparison to the social stratifications of nobility in Europe. Likewise, no great division of labor and

wealth divided American cities like those that plagued European cities. Even the arch agrarian Thomas Jefferson realized the necessity of the American city by the latter years of his life. In 1816, having experienced the trials of the presidency and come to grips with the necessity and difficulty of international economic competition, Jefferson wrote that “we must now place the manufacturer by the side of the agriculturist.” In this regard, only the American city with its manufacture of goods could save the young nation from dependence upon foreign products.³¹ Likewise, one can scarcely accuse poet Walt Whitman of anti-urbanism later in the nineteenth century when he wrote so lovingly of his native New York. To Whitman, his beloved Manhattan was “the great place of the western continent, the heart, the brain, the focus, the main spring, the pinnacle.”³²

Americans could also find commentators such as Reverend A. D. Mayo combining both the idea of American rural exceptionalism with that of its exceptional urbanity. Mayo, in the mid nineteenth century, preached that the American city differed from the European city in that it was representative of the countryside and the people as a whole. In Mayo’s view, the backbone of America was rural and the city stood as merely “a convenient hotel” where the countryside comes to do business. This contrasted sharply to the European metropolis that was, in Mayo’s opinion, “a nation within a nation.” Such city-states as London, Paris, or Rome, concerned themselves with their own issues, at best ignoring those of the countryside as they lorded over rural residents.³³

Mayo’s view is not so anomalous if one considers, as historian Anselm L. Strauss has, that often throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, various cities based their claim to being the quintessential American city on a mixture of rural and urban, modern and traditional characteristics. Throughout American history, Strauss argues, it was not

uncommon for Chicago to be portrayed as an all-American “city of gardens” while Pittsburgh simultaneously reveled in its American virtue of progress and industrial power. The key is that the American population, along with American cities, are and have been a varied lot.³⁴

As a result, Americans have not always characterized their cities so favorably. One has only to look to the work of Mike Davis concerning Los Angeles and Las Vegas to see recent examples of an alternate, much less favorable view of the American city. In such works as *City of Quartz* (1990) and *Dead Cities* (2002) Davis slams the nation’s urban centers in a way that would make even that oft-quoted agrarian Thomas Jefferson blush with embarrassment. Davis sees only social ruin and cultural wastelands in such modern American cities as Los Angeles and Las Vegas.³⁵

Davis’s modern day anti-urban (or at least anti-Los Angeles and anti-Las Vegas) viewpoint is hardly surprising. An anti-urban current of thought runs throughout American history. As Morton and Lucia White argued in their classic *The Intellectual Versus the City*, city bashing has been a mainstay of American intellectualism since the nation came into being. In his *Notes on Virginia*, Jefferson observed that “the mob of the great cities add just so much to the support of pure government as sores do to the human body.”³⁶

This strain of anti-urbanism as espoused by Jefferson persevered throughout the nineteenth century. One can find evidence of it in the rhetoric of Andrew Jackson’s nascent Democrats, the nature-leaning musings of transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and even the gothic horror of Edgar Allen Poe. The promotion of western settlement in the post Civil War period by authors, boosters, and politicians alike carried on the American tradition of city bashing.³⁷ One prominent

example from this era that continues to influence American thought is Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. In *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain's protagonist flees almost constantly from the confines of ordered, structured, and built society to the freedom of wilderness. It is only there that he can find truth and goodness.³⁸

To be fair, several scholars of history and culture contend that the anti-urban bias in American popular literature is not so clear cut as first impressions suggest. Leo Marx, for example, uses the example of Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* to show a philosophical relationship between Twain and the transcendentalist writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. While this reasoning initially seems to support the idea of anti-urban bias in his works, closer examination reveals that Marx disagrees with assumptions of anti-urbanism being central to the transcendentalist philosophy. He feels Emerson's and Henry David Thoreau's main point consisted of the spiritual benefit one could obtain from temporary separation from ordinary reality. Place, be it urban or rural, served only as a secondary consideration at most. To view young *Huckleberry Finn*'s flight from structure as anti-urban is thus, in Marx's view, to miss the point. Along this same line of reasoning, referring to *Walden* as "bible of anti-urbanism," as did the Whites in *The Intellectual Versus the City*, becomes grossly overstated.³⁹

Cultural historian Warren Susman also maintains that other scholars have greatly exaggerated the idea of a dominant anti-urban bias founding American culture. He too offers a different interpretation of the supposedly arch anti-urbanist Emerson. Susman readily admits that Emerson was no "champion of the city." But, he argues that viewing Emerson as strictly anti-urban is an overstatement. Susman sees Emerson as yearning for a form of utopian socialism in which all people have equal access to the intellectual fruits

and progress of the city. In this regard, he does not see the city as purely evil, but rather as a place of intellectual production and societal advancement. The city needs only to be recast so that it exists primarily “to an intellectual purpose.” Further, Susman finds these themes to be repeated by Emerson’s contemporaries and those that followed. Quite simply, he argues that the possibilities of the city proved far more central to American cultural attitudes and production than did hatred and suspicion of the city. In the end, Susman feels that an anti-urban interpretation of a nation in which urbanization played such a vitally important role from the time of its founding onward, simply introduces far too many irresolvable paradoxes.⁴⁰

It is apparent from this brief discussion and the dissenting scholarly views that the United States has been neither singularly anti-urban nor pro-urban throughout its existence. Since the earliest days of European settlement in North America, locals have held varied perceptions of their cities. At any time, the urbanite, small town resident, or farmer could apply his or her ideal of America to its cities in a favorable light just as easily as in a negative light. In the end, it is all a matter of context. This context, in combination with contemporary or past events, allows the public to place a city in the appropriate conceptual box. Such a process is evident concerning Birmingham, Las Vegas, and San Francisco. With Birmingham, for example, residents, journalists, and boosters alike portrayed the city as an example of American progress and industrial might during the industrial age. Yet in the latter half of the twentieth century, as economic bases shifted away from manufacturing and issues of social equality took on greater significance, Birmingham fell out of favor and became identified primarily by its violent race relations.

Fields outside of history have, to their credit, displayed a greater openness to studying the development of these conceptual boxes and the significance of stigmatization. Social psychologists and sociologists have produced a particularly strong body of work on the subject. In particular, the pioneering works of Erving Goffman and Irwin Katz have contributed greatly to understanding stigmatization as an important and complex social process.⁴¹ From these and other social scientists, a definition and a framework present themselves, offering historians an exciting and potentially invaluable new way of looking at the perception of place over time.

The word stigma dates back to ancient Greek origins. In its original usage, a stigma represented a defacing mark, burn, or cut, applied to an individual with the intention of instantly exposing the person's "different" classification to any who might look upon him. Beginning in early Christian times, stigma expanded upon this dual meaning. On one level, the word referred to outward signs of physical disability and, by relation, bodily deviance. At the same time, many early Christians saw a connection between physical eruptions of the skin and an individual's proximity to holy grace. More recently, society has adopted a more complex and abstract usage of the word and concept. Stigma now refers as commonly to a suspected or confirmed association with a known deviant activity as it does with the outward appearance of any physical "abnormality." While still important in revealing some stigmas, physical markings are no longer required for all. Further, an action that a population might stigmatize in one culture or era might find complete acceptance in another. In sum, stigmatization is a social construct, ever changing and relative to the cultural mores of its respective era and setting.⁴²

Goffman offers the consensus definition of modern stigma as “an attribute that is deeply discrediting,” leaving the wider society with the impression that an individual “is not quite human.”⁴³ These attributes, while varying over time and place, normally discredit the stigmatized while confirming “the usualness” of others.⁴⁴ Goffman further argues that modern stigmatization takes on one of three main variations. These are physical “abominations of the body,” perceptual “blemishes of the character,” and stereotypical “tribal stigmas.”⁴⁵

Both conceptions of character blemishes and “tribal” stigmatization are particularly relevant for historical understanding of the stigmatization of place. Character blemishes result from direct actions perceived as outside societal “norms.” These deviations might include criminal acts, manifestations of mental or physical infirmities, or any other act perceived as contrary to normal expectations. Tribal stigmatization, by contrast, characterizes individuals as deviant simply because of their association with a larger group considered abnormal.⁴⁶ Thus, an outsider, having never met a particular southerner, might cast the individual as racist simply because prevailing stereotypes stress the South’s history of racial intolerance. At the same time, a westerner might enjoy a reputation as egalitarian resting merely on the public’s perception of the West as the nation’s most democratic region. More specifically, this dissertation suggests that, over time, residents of a city take on a tribal-type stigma directly issued from the identity of their respective city. For example, some one from a distant location might believe that former Las Vegas Mayor Jan Jones was a showgirl or dancer before taking office, simply because she resides in Las Vegas.⁴⁷

Media coverage can further perpetuate the stigmatization process. Once created, place-based stereotypes gain and retain popularity as journalists refer to the sensational events of

the past, although they often have no bearing on current activities. Further, as with people, popular stereotypes of the region within which the cities reside provide an easy intellectual reference for the journalist to employ. The local place, therefore, easily assumes the identity of both the abnormal event and its wider geographic and cultural placement. To this end, place stigmatization can be even more severe than stigmatization of groups or individuals.⁴⁸

Beyond content, the changing nature of mass media over the last two centuries has also influenced perceptions of place. Once the perfection of the telegraph broke the previous link between transportation and communication, the speed and reach of media embarked on an exponential trajectory that continues unimpeded. As Daniel Czitrom argues, this break “opened the age of electronic media” and helped change the world as people knew it.⁴⁹ In relatively rapid succession, movies, radio, television, and the internet flooded through this opening to propel humanity headlong into the communication age. Along the way, demarcation lines between culture and media became increasingly blurred. The term popular culture became almost synonymous with these new and ever more available communication mediums.⁵⁰

Television’s post-war rise exemplifies this exponential increase in information accessibility. The American embrace of television in the 1950s was staggering in its rapidity and scale. In 1948, Americans owned 400,000 television sets. Four years later, that number topped 19 million. Between 1948 and 1955, two-thirds of all American families purchased televisions. By 1960, an astonishing 89.4 percent of American households owned at least one television set. The average American at the end of the 1950s watched approximately five hours of television each day. Baby boomers viewed between 12,000 and 15,000 cumulative hours of programming by age 16.⁵¹ Television, with such astronomical

popularity and standardized programming, contributed significantly to shared generational identity and beliefs in the post-war period.⁵² Certainly, as we will see, the portrayal of cities and events in these television sets' images--as well as in print, radio, and ultimately online outlets--have influenced the degree of their stigmatization.

Regardless of the dissemination process, the public has not reacted toward stigmatized places in a strictly uniform manner. While most outsiders react negatively to the stigmatized, that is not always the case. Often, even though the public views a person or place as deviant in certain ways, a level of pity, curiosity in the unusual, or even a proclivity to pull for the underdog leads outsiders to cast the stigmatized in an improved light. As social psychologist Irwin Katz argues, this inconsistency results from an ambivalence central to the relativism of the stigmatization process. An individual or society may harbor feelings of both love and hate for a person, group, or place at the same time. Depending on the accepted cultural mores of a time and setting, a degree of oscillation between the emotions often presents itself in the larger society's dealings with "others."⁵³

One must expect such variation in reaction, as these cities, like the states and nations in which they exist, are not of one, two, or even twenty shared mindsets. They are comprised of individuals each with their own agency, own backgrounds, and own opinions. Although the context of the time and traditions helps to form their thoughts, there are no chains, puppet strings, or overarching conspiracies to control their actions. At most, as this dissertation argues, changing historical context suggests certain ideas and paths to the individual.

That is not to say that all hope is lost of finding meaningful patterns within the history of place stigmatization. On the contrary, one can see within the myriad scatter of action and reaction, the ever-present influence of historical context on beliefs and actions

concerning stigmatized cities. This process first illuminates the way in which ideas born of historical event can influence a time, and then reproduce themselves in subsequent generations. Concerning this process of reproduction and influence, this dissertation relies on the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu concerning habitus and multi-form capital. Quite simply, Bourdieu defines habitus as a “system of enduring dispositions” created by and relative to a person’s historical placement in society and culture. It is, as Bourdieu asserted, “history made into a body.” This incorporation of context and personal dispositions bridges generations through education, similar circumstances, and other cultural interactions. It is, in the end, a “feel for the game” on the individual’s part, influencing the perception of choices offered in any specific historical setting.⁵⁴

In regard to this study and the stigmatization of its select cities, the relevance of Bourdieu’s “enduring dispositions” resides in the portrayal and perseverance of perceptions of cities. Social interactions—including the media, personal, and academia—almost constantly reinforce accepted perceptions of localities. Ultimately, as in the case of Birmingham’s relation to violent racism, San Francisco’s to homosexuality, and Las Vegas’s to vice, the perception becomes the unquestioned reality. Journalists write of racial problems when covering bomb blasts in Birmingham, presidents associate corporate trips to Las Vegas with wasteful hedonism, and the promoters of family “values” equate San Francisco with homosexuality.⁵⁵

Obviously, the prevalence of habitus leads to stereotyping. The stereotype thus becomes central to the stigmatization of place. As a phrase coined by social commentator Walter Lippman in the 1920s, stereotype has taken strong root in the English language and American culture. As Lippman pointed out, stereotypes are a necessary part of life in the

modern age. Quite simply, the amount of news available to the individual increased dramatically during the latter half of the nineteenth and exponentially throughout the twentieth century. With increases in population, dispersal, technology, and events, journalists could not hope to explain in detail the background of all events, just as the reading public could not dream of consuming such explanations in their entirety. People needed easily recallable characterizations to make sense of the world's happenings. Lippman understood this, and used the word stereotype to describe the role of preconceived notions in society:

But modern life is hurried and multifarious, above all physical distance separates men who are often in vital contact with each other, such as employer and employee, official and voter. There is neither time nor opportunity for intimate acquaintance. Instead we notice a trait which marks a well known type, and fill in the rest of the picture by means of the stereotypes we carry about in our heads. He is an agitator. That much we notice, or are told. Well, an agitator is this sort of person, and so *he* is this sort of person. He is an intellectual. He is a plutocrat. He is a foreigner. He is a "South European." He is from Back Bay. He is a Harvard Man.

Here, after having given his definition of the stereotype, Lippman expands upon its ubiquitous and necessary existence:

The subtlest and most pervasive of all influences are those which create and maintain the repertory of stereotypes. We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And those preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception....Were there no practical uniformities in the environment, there would be no economy and only error in the human habit of accepting foresight for sight. But there are uniformities sufficiently accurate, and the need of economizing attention is so inevitable, that the abandonment of all stereotypes for a wholly innocent approach to experience would impoverish human life.⁵⁶

One can see that stereotypes, as originally explained by Lippman, were not entirely negative. Rather, the stereotype existed as a required element of understanding.

Lippman further argued that individuals were well aware of their use of stereotypes and the inaccuracies therein. Because of this, people tended to cling to their generalizations “lightly” and “to modify them gladly.” Whether or not the stereotype became dangerous depended upon the preconception’s “character” and the “gullibility” with which the individual embraced it.⁵⁷

While the stereotype may have found self-reflexive acceptance in the 1920s, certain types of stereotypes had definitely fallen out of favor by the century’s latter decades. A growing self-awareness of racism and inequality brought about by the Civil Rights and other social movements of the post-World War II period helped usher in the demise of the acceptable, overt racial stereotype. That is not to say that such stereotypes disappeared instantaneously and completely. Rather, their grossest forms became taboo in popular forms of media and discourse. Racial stereotypes most likely remain privately held and publicly flaunted in less recognizable forms. For example, politicians might operate according to the assumption that African American citizens cannot obtain true equality without the help of government institutions.⁵⁸ While well intentioned, this course of action reveals a paternalistic stereotype held by the politician in regard to racial self-sufficiency. But at least mainstream newspaper and magazines no longer employ such overtly stereotypical headlines as “The Coolies and the Negro,” “Negroes Also Have Feelings” and “The Negro Point of View.”⁵⁹

Despite the long overdue demise of the explicit racial stereotype, Lippman’s justification of generalizations remains cogent to some degree. With communication technology and availability increasing at unimaginable rates, the need for mental shortcuts in understanding one’s world has grown incredibly. If one could not employ

generalizations of some sort, one certainly could not make sense of a world gone mad with twenty-four hour cable news, the internet, and saturation level advertising for every conceivable product known to humanity. Generalizations subsequently continue to serve an important “informational function” in modern society by reducing the required amounts of information needed to come to a conclusion. In so doing, the generalization reduces the amount of effort needed to process information to a manageable level.⁶⁰

The stereotype has subsequently never vanished. Instead, its use remains strong and perhaps a bit more ominous as people have lost their self-reflexivity concerning it. Although the self-proclaimed sensitive and tolerant individual of the late twentieth century might never have considered the deliberate use of stereotypes to describe a race of people, they continued to do so unwittingly about place.⁶¹ In effect, the vanquishing of the racist stereotype has opened the door for a widespread and equally dangerous usage of other preconceptions. The removal of the most blatant and damaging stereotypes has allowed society a false sense of accomplishment in the belief that all stereotypes have been revealed and rightfully condemned. Where individuals tended to be knowledgeable of the stereotype and its origins in the past, today it goes largely undetected. Society has, therefore, failed to heed Lippman’s warning about the dangers of stereotypes; indeed, it has fallen into the very gullibility of which he warned.⁶²

In acknowledging the role of media in perpetuating stigmatizing stereotypes, I rely on the idea of a conservative media as put forth by Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann, Noam Chomsky, and Edward Herman. Nuemann’s “Spiral of Silence” theory suggests that individuals often remain silent rather than espousing ideas that run counter to the expected viewpoints of the majority. This lack of dissenting opinions increases the

perceptive strength of the “accepted” opinion, thus further limits any possible contradictions. Stereotypical perceptions of places thus go unchallenged.⁶³

Similarly, Chomsky and Herman’s “Propaganda Model of News Media” suggests that media operate in the interest of and at the whim of society’s elite and that it is in the best interest of these elites to have a stable society. A society that widely considers freedom of press and expression as a cornerstone of its existence threatens such stability. In such a society, people often wittingly or unwittingly use the media as a tool to suppress dissent. This suppression and the stability it brings about is, according to Chomsky and Herman, accomplished through a series of media filters that strain out unacceptably inciting aspects of coverage.⁶⁴

While the conspiratorial nature of media control by the power elites that permeates Chomsky and Herman’s Propaganda Model is questionable, the framework itself is not without merit. By looking at media from an institutional vantage point, one can easily find a conservative tendency in the manner of news coverage. That is not to say that journalists themselves are conservative—study after study has revealed a marked liberal leaning among journalists—but rather that they operate within conservative confines of what is acceptable news coverage.⁶⁵ Further, the uniformity with which forms of popular media and discourse other than news—such as film, television programs, novels, political comments—fall back on the accepted stereotypes of Las Vegas, Birmingham, and San Francisco, implies that such a conservative nature is widespread.

In the case of stigmatized cities, the historical situation in which people live—including those with the power to set opinions—have shaped their perceptions. As a result, the image presented of cities tends to be that which people expect, regardless of

the events resulting in media coverage. Market forces and professional considerations play heavily into this perseverance of established ideas. A journalist, editor, or politician has no reason to rock the boat and possibly upset advertisers and subscribers on a merely contextual issue, like location.⁶⁶ The path of least resistance is to invoke the established norm of the place in which the event has occurred, then move along and explore the event. The place is merely context for the happening. Unfortunately, this reliance on established stereotypes of place distorts the message by implying relationships between events and an erroneous context.

That is not to say that society and its people cannot change their perceptions of urban locations. To the contrary, it only takes the rare spectacular event in concert with a changed historical context to alter public and press conception of a location. In many ways, this process bears a striking resemblance to the “paradigm shifts” espoused by Thomas Kuhn in his seminal work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962).⁶⁷ Such a shift, as we will see, took place with the drastically changing perception of Birmingham. In the cases of Las Vegas and San Francisco, stigmatized identities have journeyed in the opposite direction toward more widespread acceptance in the twentieth century’s second half as their stigmatizing aspects of gambling, sex, and homosexuality, have lost a degree of their taboo nature in American society.⁶⁸

Structure

The chapters that follow will trace the development, perseverance, and, at times, changing nature of widespread perceptions toward Birmingham, San Francisco, and Las Vegas. Chapter 2 will focus on Birmingham and its path in perception from All-

American industrial boomtown to deviantly racist anomaly. Here, I highlight the importance of rapidly shifting historical context to city stigmatization. Chapter 3 picks up with the aftermath of Birmingham's shift to national outcast. In this chapter, I examine the implications of a troubled past and damaged identity on the actions of the present.

San Francisco serves as the setting and focus for Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Chapter 4 lays the groundwork by establishing the city's long-held reputation as somewhat exotic and only questionably "American." This exotic reputation takes on a more damaging element in the mid-twentieth century as the city becomes increasingly associated with homosexuality. I suggest that during this same period, San Francisco's association with homosexuality proved more insidious as the national cold war context cast homosexuals as dangerously un-American, aggressive, sick, and perverted. In Chapter 6 I then examine the maturation of San Francisco's identity in relation to homosexuality over the last three decades of the twentieth century. Here, the discussion revolves primarily around the significant years of 1977-1979 that witnessed a frontal assault by "values" voters on gay rights nationwide and a surprisingly vocal reaction in San Francisco. This period, complete with the election and assassination of Harvey Milk and successful defeat of the homophobic Proposition 6, marked the full emergence of San Francisco as the nation's perceptive Gay Mecca. The coverage of San Francisco closes with the city's rebounding from its association with the AIDS and acceptance of its place in the gay tourist industry and rights movement.

Chapters 7 and 8 address Las Vegas's attempts to control its own identity throughout its short existence. Although the youngest city in this study, Vegas certainly proves to be

the most active in regards to identity formation. In Chapter 7, I point out that this process has existed in Las Vegas since the city's infant years in the early twentieth century. Here, I point to boosters' attempts in the 1910s at defining Las Vegas as something other than a desert city in an attempt to draw settlers. I then move through the mid-century establishment of the city's sinful reputation. Chapter 8 focuses on the impact and occasional alteration of this sinful reputation in the last years of the twentieth century. During this time, Las Vegans struggle with how to keep their city's image risqué enough to survive as a leading tourist destination, while also attempting to deal with the desires for community norms that accompany its rapid population growth. At the same time, city proponents and leaders attempt to negotiate the seeming incongruity between advocating the lucrative "sin city" identity, nostalgia, and seeking prestigious and mainstream identifiers of having become a major city. Among these identifiers, I pay particular attention to the city's attempted relationships with major league professional sports.

Widely held characterizations have significantly influenced these cities' trajectories over the second half of the twentieth century. While displaying striking perseverance and reach, the stigmatized identities of Birmingham, San Francisco, and Las Vegas have not been immune to change. Perceptions of cities do not form and exist in a social void. Both the secret of their perseverance and of their change resides in the interaction with historical context. A greater understanding of this largely mental process of city stigmatization, will foster a greater understanding not only of how people think about cities in the way they do, but also of how significant these thought patterns are to the physical development of the city itself.

Endnotes

¹ “What the Leading Speakers had to Say,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 21 August 21 1984; “GOP Eats Up a Democratic Speech,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 22 August 1984.

² “The Speech by Kirkpatrick—A Democrat the GOP Loves,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 August 1984.; Larry Liebert, “GOP Opens Convention With Blast at Democrats,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 August 1984.

³ Herbert Gold, “A Walk on San Francisco’s Gay Side,” *New York Times*, 6 November 1977; “Homosexual on San Francisco Board Cites Role as Pioneer,” *New York Times*, 10 November 1977; “First Avowed Gay Supervisor: Official Marches to San Francisco Rites with His Boyfriend,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 January 1978; Les Ledbetter, “Bill on Homosexual Rights Advances in San Francisco,” *New York Times*, 22 March 1978; Thomas Collins, “The Homosexual Issue in Politics: Media in the Muddle,” *Newsday* 5 January 1976, 40-41; Bernie Bookbinder, “The Homosexual Issue in Politics: The Issue, Candidates Emerge,” *Newsday*, 3 January 1976, 4, 33; Bernie Bookbinder, “The Homosexuality Issue in Politics: 4-Year Climb to Respectability,” *Newsday*, 4 January 1976, 3, 19; Bernie Bookbinder, “The Homosexuality Issue in Politics: A Cautious Coming-Out Process,” *Newsday*, 6 January 1976, 6, 13.

⁴ Lacey Fosburgh, “Stunned Crowd Gathers Near Scene of 2 Slayings,” *New York Times*, 28 November 1978; Wallace Turner, “Suspect Sought Job,” *New York Times*, 28 November 1978; Les Ledbetter, “Two Deaths Mourned by San Franciscans,” *New York Times*, 29 November 1978; David Johnston, “San Francisco Mayor Slain,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 November 1978; “Bodies of Moscone, Milk to Lie in State in S.F. City Hall,” 28 November 1978; Michael Coakley, Milk’s Murder Stuns San Francisco Gays,” *Chicago Tribune*, 30 November 1978.

⁵ Michael Coakley, “Proposition 6 in California Aimed at Homosexual Teachers,” *Chicago Tribune*, 12 October 1978; Harry Kelly, “Carter Risks Ire of Gay Foes,” *Chicago Tribune*, 4 November 1978; John V. Briggs, “Letter to the Times: Proposition 6: Homosexuals,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 September 1978; Penelope McMillan, “Briggs Points to Gay Teacher in North as an Example,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 September 1978.

⁶ Martin Dennis Meeker, Jr., “Come Out West: Communication and the Gay and Lesbian Migration to San Francisco, 1940s-1960s,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 2000). Meeker argues that the equation of San Francisco with homosexuality became ubiquitous in the United States over the course of the 1970s.

⁷ *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, CNBC, August 30, 2007. Complete transcript in author’s possession and available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/20530774/>.

⁸ *O’Reilly Factor*, “Exotic Erotic: San Francisco Values Caught on Tape,” October 31, 2007. Complete transcript in author’s possession and available at

<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,306780,00.html>; *O'Reilly Factor*, "War on Terror Takes Turn for The Worse," January 09, 2009, Complete transcript in author's possession and available at <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,477484,00.html>.

⁹ Bill O'Reilly, *Culture Warrior* (New York: Broadway, 2007), 166.

¹⁰ *Michael Savage Show*, AM 720, Las Vegas, May 5, 2008.

¹¹ "Daffy og Kalle Kanin: Trøbbel og Tryllball," *Looney Tunes* (Oslo: Schibsted Forlag,, June, 2008), cover, 4-11.

¹² If comprehensive, the list of cities stigmatized in various ways would be quite long and inclusive. Some obvious examples include such former industrial giants of the rust belt as Cleveland and Detroit.

¹³ The "What happens in Vegas Stays in Vegas" tagline was developed by the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority in 2002. The slogan, despite significant resistance from some business and industrial leaders, proved so successful as to become synonymous with Las Vegas in the early twenty-first century. See Chris Jones, "What Happens Here, Stays Here Strikes Sour Note with Some at Conference," *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 18 December 2003; "What Happens Here Has Been Used Elsewhere," *Las Vegas Sun*, 22 July 2005. For use of "Bombingham" as a nickname for Birmingham in the post Civil Rights era see Glenn T. Eskew, *But For Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Clarence Page, "Pro-Life Until You Get in Their Way," *Chicago Tribune*, 1 February 1998; Marlon Manuel, "Birmingham Clinic Bombing: A City's Past Comes Roaring Back," *Atlanta Constitution-Journal*, 1 February 1998; Bruce Feldman, "Out of Control," *ESPN the Magazine*, 10 June 2002.

¹⁴ Birmingham offers the prime example of a city struggling over whether to embrace or bury its past. An example of this uncertainty in how to face manifest itself in the foundation of the Civil Rights Institute in 1992. For summaries of this see: Verna Gates, "The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute," *Alabama Heritage* 66 (Fall, 2002): 17-25; Richard Arrington, Jr., *There's Hope for the World: The Memoir of Birmingham, Alabama's First African American Mayor* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 169-78; Las Vegas, by contrast, offers an example of a city embracing what some might see as a colorful or even distasteful past in the hope of increasing tourism. As Mayor Oscar Goodman so eloquently put it, "at my first meeting as the mayor with the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, I began to muse out loud that we should be very proud of where we came from and that we should promote our uniqueness. We're distinctive in the sense that no other city has the background where it basically sprung up from the Mob. And there's a certain mystique that's attached to that....A certain glamour in its own way. The same way, I guess, that the Sopranos tickles one's interest. That's what Las Vegas does when people are thinking in terms of from whence we came." Mayor Oscar Goodman, interview by author, 19 September 2008.

¹⁵ “Jackson Visits Magic City: Shuttlesworth Ally Offers His Support,” *Birmingham News*, 27 June 2008; “Shuttlesworth International,” *Birmingham News*, 27 June 2008; Joe Kennedy, “Give the Reverend Shuttlesworth an Honor for Which He is Long Overdue,” *Birmingham News*, 29 June 2008.

¹⁶ Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982); Concerning the rise of San Francisco as a “Gay Mecca” see Nan Amilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A Queer History of San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Meeker, “Come Out West.”

¹⁷ Mayor Oscar Goodman, interview by the author, 19 September 2008; Adrienne Packer, “Racy Billboards to be Discussed,” *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 11 March 2004; Chris Jones, “Hard Rock to pay Fine for Riské Ads,” *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 23 April 2004.

¹⁸ “Alabama’s Show City,” *The New York Times*, 24 December 1899; “Alabama’s Leading City,” *The New York Times*, December, 31, 1899; “Iron and Coal Galore,” *The New York Times*, 7 February 1887; “New Riches Piled High,” *New York Times*, 10 February 1887; “A Change of Spirit,” *New York Times*, 6 September 1884; “Birmingham’s Big Jump,” *New York Times*, 30 September 1910; Charles A. Selden, “South’s Giant Stride From Pawnshop to Prosperity,” *New York Times*, 15 February 1920; Frank Bohn, “New South Throbs,” *New York Times*, 25 October 1925.

¹⁹ Hal Rothman, *Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 63-88.

²⁰ Packer, “Racy Billboards to be Discussed,” *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 11 March 2004.

²¹ Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, Penguin Books Edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 171-73. Kerouac’s character recalls his time in San Francisco as “the beatest time of my life.” See also Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* Penguin Books Edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1986).

²² Howard M. Solomon, “Stigma and Western Culture: A Historical Approach,” in Stephen C. Ainlay, Gaylene Becker, and Lerita M. Coleman, eds. *The Dilemma of Stigma: A Multidisciplinary View of Stigma* (New York: Plenum, 1986), 59-76.

²³ Eskew, *But for Birmingham*; W. David Lewis, *Sloss Furnaces and the Rise of The Birmingham District: An Industrial Epic* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994).

²⁴ Carl V. Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977).

- ²⁵ Eugene P. Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt: Las Vegas 1930 to 2000* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000).
- ²⁶ Hal Rothman, *Neon Metropolis: How Las Vegas Started the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
- ²⁷ Gray Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Kevin Starr and Richard J. Orsi, *Rooted in Barbarous Soil: People, Culture, and Community in Gold Rush California* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Herbert Asbury, *The Barbary Coast: An Informal History of the San Francisco Underworld* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933).
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- ³⁵ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1990); Mike Davis, *Dead Cities and Other Tales* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002).
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⁴¹ Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963); Irwin Katz, *Stigma: A Social Psychological Analysis* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: LEA, 1981).

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⁴³ Goffman, *Stigma*, 3, 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁶ Ibid.; Katz, *Stigma*, 2; Page, *Stigma*, 4.

⁴⁷ Sarah Kershaw and Patricia Leigh Brown, "Women's Work: The Take it Off But They Also Put on Suits, Uniforms, and Blue Collars," *New York Times*, June 2, 2004. In this article, Jones relates how, as Mayor, she was often confronted with the mistaken belief that she had previously worked as a showgirl or dancer.

⁴⁸ In numerous examples, the press tends to place the cities in the context of regional stereotypes. A few examples of this from mid century include: "Birmingham Story," *Time*, 16 May 1960; Howe, "Las Vegas Vacation Center," *New York Times*, 24 March 1946; Jack Goodman, "Desert Attractions: Tourism Is Las Vegas" Major Industry and

Spring Business is Booming,” *New York Times*, 16 March 1947; Grady Johnson, “Lively Las Vegas: New Vacationland is Growing Up Rapidly Around the Great Lake at Hoover Dam,” *New York Times*, 14 November 1948.

⁴⁹ Daniel J. Czitrom, *Media and the American Mind: From Morse to McLuhan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), xii.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 30-31, 35, 190-92.

⁵¹ Steve Gillon, *Boomer Nation: The Largest and Richest Generation Ever and How It Changed America* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 8-9; Lynn Spigel. *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 2.

⁵² Gillon, *Boomer Nation*, 8-9, 232, 283, 317-18; Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, 36-38; Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 5.

⁵³ Katz, *Stigma*, 1-11.

⁵⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 190.

⁵⁵ Marlon Manuel, “Birmingham Clinic Bombing: A City’s Past Comes Roaring Back,” *Atlanta Constitution-Journal*, 1 February 1998; Benjamin Spillman, “Obama Draws Ire over Vegas Junket Criticism,” *Las Vegas Review Journal* 11 February 2009; Patrick Buchanan, “Why Do They Hate Anita Bryant?” *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* 3 October 1978; “Protect America’s Children,” Mailer, Gary Shilts Papers, Box 7, folder 1, JCH-GLC..

⁵⁶ Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion*, NuVision Books Edition (New York: NuVision Books, 2007), 49-58.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 79-94.

⁵⁸ JBHE Foundation, “Stripping Away Myths: Improving the Lot of African Americans by Changing the American Racial Stereotype,” *Journal of Black Higher Education* 11 (Spring, 1996): 110.

⁵⁹ “The Coolies and the Negro,” *New York Times*, 17 February 1878; “The Negro Point of View,” *New York Times*, 17 November 1903; Robert G. Jones, “The Negro Point of View,” *New York Times*, 29 June 1932; “Negroes Also Have Feelings,” *New York Times*, 20 October 1942.

⁶⁰ Thomas E. Ford and George R. Tonander, "The Role of Differentiation Between Groups and Social Identity in Stereotype Formation," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 61 (December, 1998): 372.

⁶¹ JBHE Foundation, "Stripping Away Myths: Improving the Lot of African Americans by Changing the American Racial Stereotype," *Journal of Black Higher Education*, 110; This projection of place stigmatizations on residents is a form of tribal stigmatization as discussed in Goffman, *Stigma*, 4-6.

⁶² Lippman, *Public Opinion*, 49-58.

⁶³ Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "The Contribution of Spiral of Silence Theory to an Understanding of Mass Media," in Stanley Rothman, *The Mass Media in Liberal Democratic Societies*, 5-6, 75-84.

⁶⁴ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 2-3.

⁶⁵ Media Research Center, "Special Report: An In-Depth Study, Analysis or Review Exploring the Media," (Alexandria: Media Research Center, 2007); David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, "Journalists—Who Are They, Really?" *Media Studies Journal* 6 (Fall, 1992): 73-76; The word "acceptable" in regard to Chomsky and Herman implies control by an outside force. The existence of that force is not necessarily a conscious entity that directs from above what stories will be covered and how they will be slanted to promote social and, more importantly, financial well being for the media corporation. In some cases this may very well be the case, but it is only necessary that market forces and professional self-interest play on journalists and the networks or publications they work for. With this in mind, one can excise both the filter of ownership and the notion of propaganda from Chomsky's theory and arrive at a model that can describe the conservative direction of news coverage.

⁶⁶ Lippman, *Public Opinion*, 323-24.

⁶⁷ Thomas Kuhn, *the Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Third Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 23-34; Although Kuhn wrote that his ideas should not be projected beyond the scientific field to the social sciences, modern scholarship in the social sciences has seen fit to do just that. The most exciting use of the "social paradigm" as an explanatory device concerning modern society can be found in the field of environmental sociology. In explaining humanity's perceptions of nature, leading environmental sociologists have concluded that all theoretical perspectives within sociology, including functionalism, Marxism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, etc, are all based on the same anthropocentric paradigm. This has also been labeled the "human exceptionalism paradigm" and contrasted with the "new environmental paradigm" or "new ecological paradigm." The environmental sociologists have developed an additional paradigm known as the "dominant western worldview."

This, itself seemingly a product of the larger anthropocentric paradigm, includes the “ensemble of values and ideologies that have predominated during the 500 year plus boom of western expansion underwritten by finite supplies of fossil fuels and nonrenewable resources.” Frederick H. Buttel, “New Directions in Environmental Sociology,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 13 (1987): 465-88; See also William R. Caton, Jr. and Riley E. Dunlap, “A New Ecological Paradigm for Post-Exuberant Sociology,” *The Behavioral Scientist* 24 (September-October, 1980): 15-47.

⁶⁸ For the best histories of gambling in America and its changing levels of acceptance, see John M. Findlay, *People of Chance: Gambling in American Society from Jamestown to Las Vegas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); David G. Schwartz, *Roll the Bones: The History of Gambling* (New York: Gotham Books, 2006). For excellent coverage of America’s changing sexual mores and views of homosexuals see John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); and Bryne Fone, *Homophobia: A History* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000).

CHAPTER 2

NOT ALWAYS A PARIAH: BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA'S JOURNEY FROM THE “MAGIC CITY” TO “BOMBINGHAM”

Birmingham, Alabama claimed its share of popularity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Founded in 1871 at the rare confluence of iron ore, limestone, and coal, the city had all the natural resources to develop into a giant of iron manufacture. It was the New South city par excellence—a technological wonder showcasing the industrial might of the United States of America. As such, Birmingham seemed a local antithesis to a southern region so often perceived as agricultural, lazy, and backward.¹

Early on, boosters liked to associate Birmingham with this ideal of the “New South.” The booming young town seemingly turned its back on the South’s troubled agrarian past and embraced modern industrialism whole heartedly. As blast furnaces and factories dotted the local landscape by 1885, the expectations of boosters who prophesied a southern rival to northern industrial centers seemed destined for fruition.² The town’s population growth, (from 3,086 in 1880 to 26,178 in 1890, or an astonishing 748 percent) further supported their optimistic outlook. In addition, approximately 20,000 people resided immediately beyond the city limits in 1890. By 1910, Birmingham had become the largest city in the state and a force to be reckoned with in the wider South, claiming a

population of 138,685 people.³ Yet in many regards this burgeoning “New South” city proved not so new after all.

Planter interests had actually conceptualized an industrial center at Birmingham’s location in 1859. Their plans called for an industrial slave center that would help move the South into the industrial future while preserving the status quo of established labor and race relations. While the Civil War intervened to render this plan impossible, the city that emerged soon afterward differed only in its dependence on wage labor rather than slavery. Historian W. David Lewis and social geographer Bobby Wilson have shown that most of the city’s founders and early industrialists shared a common planter or upper class background. These men represented the elite of the old South, with their business, labor, and racial philosophies formed along the lines of plantation society. In Birmingham, these owners and their progeny initiated a system that embraced black convict labor and actively sought to keep labor divided along racial lines for decades. The city’s “New South” industrialists further traveled the path of the old South by choosing a reliance upon labor-intensive methods of production over recent technological innovations simultaneously being utilized by northern industry. The divided labor force was, after all, cheap and readily available while the latest innovative technology required considerable capital outlays.⁴ In some regards, the booming town came to resemble “an overgrown iron plantation.”⁵

Birmingham’s system of racial division matured in the twentieth century’s first three decades. By 1910, blacks held 75 percent of steel mill and iron furnace jobs. Black employment in the industry fell to 54 percent by 1930, as unionized whites entered the city’s industrial workforce in large numbers. Jobs within the plants subsequently took on

an increased stratification of white and black work. Labor organization strengthened this process, as unionized white workers exercised their newfound influence on management to enforce job discrimination.⁶ That is not to say that Birmingham unions never organized black workers. Between 1901 and 1908, for example, the United Mine Workers (UMW) added 6,000 black workers to its rolls. The city's white workers, nevertheless, always organized at a higher rate than did its black workers.⁷

Blacks also faced additional segregation in the social sphere during this period. In 1901, the state rewrote its constitution with the express intention of disenfranchising black citizens and poor hill country whites. In the field of education, Birmingham, like many other cities in the South and across the nation, operated separate systems for its black and white residents. On the surface, however, Birmingham seemed to take a step ahead of other southern cities in regard to black education. With the opening of Industrial High School in 1901, the city became the first in the Southeast to offer publicly supported secondary education for its black residents.⁸

Historian Horace Bond theorizes that Birmingham's industrial base prompted city leaders to such a radical action during this otherwise racially oppressive period. As a new and rapidly growing industrial center, the city needed a stable labor force. In his work *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel*, Bond proposes that city leaders accepted the new school because local industrialists favored the education of the black workforce. This argument credits education as a tool of social stability. By giving local blacks the necessary qualifications to assume skilled positions, increased education would reduce the probability of walkouts by white labor. Adding to the logic of Bond's

conclusion is the obvious notion of increased education equaling increased worker productivity.⁹

In actuality the black community, not local industrialists, called for black secondary education in Birmingham. On June 9, 1900, black leaders petitioned the educational board for the establishment of a black high school. This desire for increased tutelage conformed with the high regard in which southern blacks held education in the post-Civil War South. Freedmen realized, after the long denial of education under slavery, that socio-economic advancement required the formation of schools. These men and women often and sometimes begrudgingly accepted segregated institutions, as conditions rendered any integration into the white system seemingly impossible. This aura of impossibility grew in part from the prevalent white opinion that blacks should receive no education, much less education with their own white children. As historian Howard Rabinowitz postulates, the establishment of certain segregated institutions following Reconstruction actually offered a relative improvement for the black population. Although the black schools certainly lacked equality with white institutions, they did offer educational inclusion in place of the black population's former educational exclusion.¹⁰

Birmingham's Board of Education did not approve the black citizens' request out of hand. A long and heated debate erupted among members as they considered the unorthodox proposal. Those in dissent conceded to the high school's formation only after board president Samuel Ullman forcefully interceded in favor of the idea. Even then, board members clashed over the school's funding. While a monthly tuition rate of \$1.50 for residents and \$2.50 for nonresidents--intended to help cover structural costs--

persuaded finance committee president Steiner to approve the venture, tension rose regarding the payment of instructors. Board member H. B. Gray proposed that the city not pay the new school's teachers at all. In place of a city salary he preferred leaving the educators to draw what remittance possible from the tuition plan. Opposed by Ullman, this motion failed and the city assumed the instructors' salaries. Ullman's open support for black education and vocational training--previously low key, yet present for several years--ultimately cost the progressive his esteemed position. The city's Board of Aldermen refused to re-elect the long-time board president later that same year. Regardless of whether the call for a black high school would have failed without Ullman's support, the fact remains that the black community--not white industrialists--made the request. Local blacks rightly looked upon the institution with a sense of accomplishment.¹¹

By the 1930s, national media coverage began to support this idea of accomplishment. Three decades of success in public secondary education for blacks convinced some in national outlets that Parker High—formerly known as Industrial High School—represented a prime example of racial cooperation. With a new, multi-story brick building completed in 1924 and the largest enrollment of any black high school nationwide, Parker High School was cited in national publications as evidence of Birmingham's foresight and leadership in providing the opportunity of secondary education, albeit industrial in scope, for its black citizens. From *School Day* to the *Christian Science Monitor*, these publications lavished praise upon this burgeoning educational experiment of the Deep South's Birmingham.¹² But by this time, praise as a trendsetter was something to which residents of Birmingham had grown accustomed.

National Press Coverage of Early Birmingham, 1871 to 1930

Early on, the national press seldom shied away from singing this new and seemingly different southern town's praises. By 1887, the *New York Times*, in a review of A.J. McClure's *The Great South*, joined with the author in championing the burgeoning industrial center. Relying heavily on Birmingham's centrality to the state's ten-fold increase in iron output from 60,000 to 600,000 tons annually over the city's brief 15 year existence, the *Times* agreed that this "new Pittsburgh of the South," gave Pennsylvania "good cause to be anxious."¹³ This piece followed similar accolades printed only months earlier in the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. In an article reprinted nationally, the *Courier* wrote that Birmingham was in the process of "converting Alabama from a poor and listless farming territory into a rich, active, and prosperous community, with diversified interests, a mixed and vigorous population, and an entirely new character."¹⁴ The *Times* had also taken approving note of locals' preference for calling Birmingham "the Magic City," by this time.¹⁵ The nickname, coined by local developer Colonel James R. Powell of the Elyton Land Company in 1872, would be repeated often by both locals and outsiders in the decades to come.¹⁶

From the mid 1880s to well into the 1930s, the national press continued to bestow praise on this "new character" that Birmingham provided the South. This "character" of industrial success was presented as the American dream in many ways. It was a formerly impoverished area turning from the past to grab hold of one of the most technologically advanced industries of the day and, in so doing, improving its situation markedly. Time after time, additional comparisons to Pittsburgh appeared alongside such descriptive language as "pride," "show," "boom," "busy," "prosperity," "riches," "public spirit,"

“leading,” “miracle,” “wonder,” “throbbing,” and even “patriotism” in describing this atypical southern city.¹⁷

As for patriotic castings, the *Times* wrote as early as 1887 that “no man...who care[s] for national development and national progress,” could look away from Birmingham leading the South back into the national fold.¹⁸ Another piece placed Birmingham among the few Southern cities that “promote a harmony of feeling and interests with the rest of the country.”¹⁹ As war with Spain broke out in 1898, the trend of placing Birmingham as an example of patriotism and progress continued. At this time the proposed war production of the city’s steel mills was said to be an “example of increasing national unity,” “higher patriotism,” and “true progress.”²⁰ At the same time, a universal principal of disassociating Birmingham from other “drunken,” “dry,” (alcohol free) and “sleepy” towns of the South also permeated national articles focused on the city.²¹

This trend continued through the first two decades of the twentieth century. In 1910, the *Times* called attention to the fact that the booming metropolis “quadrupled” in population from 38,417 in 1900 to 132,685 by 1910.²² The 1920s also kicked off with an article that highlighted Birmingham’s progress. Here, *Times* journalist Charles A. Selden found that Birmingham, while leading the South in industrial production, had also taken a central role in improving conditions for southern blacks. The piece praised *Birmingham News* Editor Frank Glass for lending support to black suffrage for “high class Negroes.”²³ Five years later, *Times* journalist Frank Bohn, praising the industrial might of Birmingham in climbing its way to third in national iron production, went on to call the city, as part of the “New South,” the most interesting part of America.²⁴

Yet, beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century and increasing steadily alongside this stream of positive press, coverage of a more distressing characteristic of the city's regional placement could be found. In 1900 and 1901, the *New York Times* ran two small pieces that alluded to the nature of race relations in Alabama. These pieces cast Birmingham as a setting for racially charged activity, but not as an irredeemably bigoted place outright. First, in December 1900, the newspaper reported that members of the Alabama Democratic Executive Committee had gathered in Birmingham to arrange for a ballot measure to be presented to the voting public the following April. This measure, if approved would allow for the state constitution to be rewritten, in the words of the *New York Times*, to exclude the "ignorant negro vote." It would also assure that no former Confederate soldier would find his vote in jeopardy.²⁵

The following September, a second piece addressing the proposed constitution appeared, revealing that certain leaders of the state's black population had met in Birmingham and agreed not to oppose the disenfranchisement due to a lack of political power. Instead, they would seek other avenues to test the legality of the new constitution's provisions following its approval.²⁶ In December of that year, a far more disturbing article appeared that mentioned, without condemnation, the forced deportation of black Birmingham residents experienced in mill work to iron plants opening in Nova Scotia. Former Sloss-Sheffield Furnace superintendent J.H. Means, who had been named General Manager of Nova Scotia's Dominion Coal and Iron Company, sought to acquire a stable and cheap labor supply for his new assignment. The article mentioned that Means overcame worker "opposition" to the forced migration and succeeded in departing with "three carloads of Alabama negroes" and their "wives and daughters" from

Birmingham. No mention was made of the fate of any sons they might have had, or of any working agreement or contract between the northward bound residents and Means.²⁷

The 1910s witnessed much of the same in regard to the coverage of race relations in Birmingham. There was mention of the city in one article on the wider southern rivalry between Jewish immigrants and black merchants, and an editorial on the decline of lynching in the South--with only cursory mention of Birmingham--by Booker T.

Washington. The story of a man arrested for inciting black laborers to strike in a mining community thirty miles north of the city also appeared in April 1917.²⁸ Of these, the latter piece on the inciter proved the most revealing, as it made no connection between the racial antagonisms at the mine and the treatment of black workers in its parent iron industry in Birmingham. Instead, the averted racial strike was presented as an isolated event.²⁹

Coverage of race in the Birmingham area during the 1920s left no doubt as to whether southern white men saw southern black men as their equals. The content of the news, during that decade, reflected a decidedly violent turn. The year 1927 seemed to mark the peak of increased violence toward Birmingham area blacks, as five separate articles in the *New York Times* focused on the rash of floggings and other physical acts of violence perpetrated by local bands of the Ku Klux Klan.³⁰ The circumstances behind the floggings varied from individual to individual. In the case of Arthur Hitt, he was removed from his house by a band of masked klansmen after having refused to sell a tract of his land. After a very severe beating, Hitt agreed to sell the land for a price far below its market value. In another instance, Eston Murchenson of the Birmingham suburb Bessemer was forcefully removed from a car in which “two strange girls” had offered

him a ride. Murchenson was then whipped by a gang of assailants. He claimed the white girls had set him up by giving him the ride which provided the motive for the beating. Even women were subject to the attacks, as was the case with Ms. Bertha E. Slay. A band of both males and females entered Ms Slay's home, tied her husband and sister to a bed, and forced her out into the home's front yard. Once in the yard, Slay was tied to a barrel and whipped viciously with an automobile fan belt. News reports failed to mention the "reason" behind this brutal attack. A similar lack of motive marked a series of attacks on local resident James Bolton. In January Bolton was lured outside of his home at which time he was bound, taken to a deserted road, and severely whipped. The following June, Bolton was once again tricked into opening his door for an individual who claimed to need help for a sick girl. Bolton was then "beaten unmercifully with a large strap," as his home was set ablaze.³¹

Despite this rash of race-related violence in the Birmingham area during 1927 and the national attention it garnered, the city itself was not labeled as violently bigoted by the national press. Instead, articles linked the attacks more broadly to the South or the state of Alabama. This is evident by merely glimpsing the titles of the stories devoted to the floggings. In each instance, either the word "South," or "Alabama" appears as the geographical setting.³² A closer reading reveals that Birmingham is treated as distinctly different and more tolerant than the outlying areas in regard to this violence and race relations. In one instance, readers learn that Birmingham newspapers have joined with several in Georgia to go "after the Klan with gloves off." Although perhaps slow to do this, the *Birmingham News's* stance against the Klan places the city, in the eyes of the

Times journalists, far ahead of comparable areas in Florida and Tennessee where floggings are carried out brazenly and almost without notice.³³

National Press Coverage in the Depression and War Years

After this upsurge in racial violence during the late 1920s, the Great Depression decimated local industry in Birmingham. Conditions in the city, already substandard for black workers and their families, grew exponentially worse as unemployment and hunger gripped the town. Whites fared little better. In some instances, out of work men could be seen daily hitching rides out of town on railway freight cars to the countryside. There, they would gather berries and other available food sources before hitching a ride back into town later in the day. Occasionally one might even be seen holding tight to a wayward goat he had been lucky enough to rustle.³⁴ The devastation of the local area prompted Franklin Roosevelt to ultimately proclaim Birmingham the “worst hit” city in the nation.³⁵

Despite the oncoming crush of the Great Depression, Birmingham kicked off the 1930s with a portrayal in the national media to which its residents had, over the years, grown accustomed. On July 30 of that year, the *New York Times*' Anne O'Hare McCormick published a lengthy feature article focusing on the “Industrial Capitals” of the South. From first glance, the success of Birmingham among the region's young industrial centers jumps out at the reader. The caption beneath a large portrait of the city's skyline on the article's first page reads announces the city as the “First Forge of Steel Civilization in the Cotton Country.” McCormick's piece then goes on to distinguish Birmingham from the rest of the state and the South. Quite simply, the author

is surprised by an amount of “vigor” in Birmingham that “one does not expect in Alabama.” It is, after all, a state that “suggests the languor of the lower South.” No mention is made of race relations or the growing economic crisis.³⁶

One suspects that the population of Birmingham drew pleasure from articles such as McCormick’s that placed the city on a pedestal. When this was not the case, or when a rare article seemingly or even indirectly lumped the city into the backwardness that characterized the perception of its surrounding region, residents were quick to voice their displeasure. For example, in 1933, Birmingham resident Eugene R. Lyde, Jr. informed the nation through a *Times* editorial that, his city was not “agrarian” or “backwoods.” Responding to a recent article that relied on several stereotypical generalizations of the South’s level of advancement—although never mentioning Birmingham specifically—Lyde took great offense at the conceptualizations that “Northerners” tended to hold of their southern neighbors. In particular, he sought to inform readers that Birmingham was a successful, substantial city complete with skyscraping hotels and electric streetcars.³⁷ Citizens such as Lyde knew full well what it meant to be placed in the same conceptual framework as the rest of the South. At this time, they felt that their city deserved much more.

This defensive attitude could also be found by 1934 on a statewide scale relative to portrayals of race relations. In the midst of the sensational Scottsboro trial and the mass of media attention that it cast on the nature of race and society in the state, many felt unfairly criticized by a northern region they saw as equally discriminatory. Popular Birmingham journalist John Temple Graves complained bitterly in a *New York Times* editorial that the labeling of the entire state as racist was unfair and that the

characterization of Alabama governor Bibb Graves as the “Klan Governor” was insulting. While racial intolerance obviously existed in the state, Graves argued that it also existed in the North and levels of intolerance within Alabama varied greatly. Even if some rural parts of Alabama were violently bigoted, his Birmingham certainly was not.³⁸

These defensive editorials by Birmingham natives in the early to mid 1930s suggest that the nation was taking a closer look at the racial situation in the Birmingham area and perhaps taking an increased general interest in the nature of race relations in America. Both assumptions are correct to an extent. In the mid 1930s, the coverage of racial violence in the Birmingham area increased markedly. To a large extent this coverage tended to center on mob violence toward blacks, agitation by outsiders, and local denials of racial problems. Yet in every case, the media continued to project the racial problem onto the entire state or region. A specific media focus on Birmingham’s racial problems, or outright condemnations of the city as a center of racial problems, was not evident during this period.

The chronology of this increased notice of racial discrimination and violence in the South by the national press makes sense if one looks at it in the context of national and international events. In the aftermath of World War I, Warren G. Harding attempted a cautious stirring of the race relations pot. Harding, speaking in Birmingham on October 26, 1921 publicly advocated limited civil rights for black people. In a speech to thousands of blacks and whites gathered at the downtown Woodrow Wilson Park, the president called for educational, political, and economic opportunity for both races. To be fair, he also made clear that the races differed markedly and that any sort of “racial amalgamation” was beyond consideration. Yet his calls for limited equality—made in

the deep South no less—were enough to elicit national notice and draw sound condemnations from southern senators. The southern Democratic senators' ire was all the greater, considering that, only months before, the Republican president had stood before congress and espoused his support for an anti-lynching bill and suggested the development of an interstate race commission.³⁹

Harding's anti-lynching bill passed the house, but eventually fell victim to a filibuster by southern Democrats in the senate. The interstate race commission never made it out of committee in the house.⁴⁰ His nation, or at least many in his government, simply did not seem ready to be led in this direction. That the president even attempted such racial reform is quite astonishing, considering his wildly popular campaign slogan promising a "return to normalcy." While he may have invented the term "normalcy" to describe the conservative and nostalgic longings of the public for a simpler time before the reformist crusading of the Progressive era and the slaughter fields of European war, Harding somehow misjudged their willingness to adjust their racial views.

Following Harding's untimely death in 1923, his successor Calvin Coolidge attempted to carry out a similar racial policy. A man widely considered one of the most conservative and least dynamic of all the presidents continued to push for the formation of an interstate race commission. In both 1923 and 1925 he called unsuccessfully for the creation of a "Negro Industrial Commission" that could foster better understanding and cooperation among the races. He also supported an anti-lynching law and named the nation's first black ambassador. Whether such actions on the part of Harding and Coolidge were mere lip service to the northern black voting block or examples of at least some racial sensitivity on their part remains contested.⁴¹

It is important to note the historical context in which Harding and Coolidge formulated their policies on race. In the teens and twenties, the nation witnessed both a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan and a dramatic upswing in the number of lynchings and cases of violence perpetrated against blacks. The Klan, by its mid-twenties heyday, could claim between 3 and 6 million members nationwide.⁴² Although more adaptive to such local “issues” as immigration, vice, and anti-Catholicism, which allowed for its phenomenal growth in membership, the Klan still held white supremacy as its central belief.⁴³ As a result, its massive size and seeming ability to be all places in the early 1920s helped to hyper-racialize the nation. In this racialized environment, lynchings, floggings, murders, and abductions skyrocketed across the South, as did press coverage of such occurrences.

Even President Franklin Roosevelt, that icon of liberalism whom conservatives have erroneously held up as the “socialist” American President, harbored no dreams or even desires for racial equality in the United States. If Roosevelt ever felt that black Americans were equal to white Americans, he certainly failed to reveal this through words or actions. Instead, throughout his political career, he tended to placate the white South on many racial issues. As assistant-secretary of the Navy in the Woodrow Wilson administration, Roosevelt went along with and actively participated in the segregation of the Naval Department. A few years later, in 1919, he wrote to a Little Rock friend following racial demonstrations in Washington that “with his experience in handling Africans in Arkansas,” he wished he would “take charge” of the Washington police force. He never voiced opposition to the Jim Crow laws of Georgia after buying his Warm Springs getaway and proclaimed himself an “adopted son” of the state. And, most

importantly, he seemingly believed that the federal government had no right to interfere in a state government's handling of race relations.⁴⁴

Nonetheless, that Civil Rights awareness began to make strides during Roosevelt's New Deal. Although most New Deal Programs carried on the discriminatory tradition of the past—blacks, if included, were the last hired or helped and the first fired or forgotten—any type of inclusion proved beneficial. Some programs, such as the National Youth Administration (NYA) revealed very little discrimination. This organization helped approximately 300,000 black teens and paid them the same wages as whites. The Farm Security Administration likewise provided loans to a number of black farmers that equaled the overall percentage of black farmers in the nation. And the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) allowed approximately 250,000 blacks to serve in its ranks; about one quarter of these resided in integrated camps.⁴⁵

Thus, despite continued discrimination, blacks made relative gains during the depression era. Historian Harvard Sitkoff has argued that, considering the abject condition of black life in America preceding the depression, these changes “meant relatively more to blacks than to whites.” Sitkoff offers much statistical evidence from the decade to support his claim. The area of public education shows, perhaps most dramatically, how New Deal era federal funding impacted the lives of African Americans. For example, black illiteracy dropped 10 percent while public expenditure for blacks in southern schools rose from 29 percent of the amount spent on white schools in 1931 to 41 percent by 1941. The salaries of black teachers also increased to about one half of white teachers' pay by the decade's end; this was up from one-third in 1930.⁴⁶

When considering this and other relative advancements for blacks in the 1930s, it is also important to note the influence of a few racially liberal southerners, Roosevelt's wife Eleanor, and his Chief of Staff Harold Ickes. FDR appointed southerners to head many New Deal programs, as he needed to keep the southern Democrats in his fold to ensure passage of bills and his re-election. In the process, he included a few with surprisingly liberal ideas on race. Indicative of this fortuitous trend was Aubrey Williams of the NYA and Will Alexander of the Farm Securities Administration (FSA). Eleanor, as a true racial liberal, occasionally pushed the president's hand by exposing racial injustice through her actions. One prime example of this occurred at Birmingham's 1938 Southern Conference for Human Welfare when she refused to abide by the legally proscribed segregated seating at the city's Municipal Auditorium. Much to the shock of her hosts and, one would imagine the president, Eleanor placed her chair in the center of the isle dividing Birmingham blacks from whites. Likewise, Harold Ickes fought hard for increased equality and inclusion in New Deal programs for African Americans. Yet, his actions often met defeat as economic and political concerns won out, with FDR's approval, over any competing attempt to improve conditions for blacks. For example, Ickes found himself forced to compromise anti-discrimination measures of Public Works Administration projects in many southern states.⁴⁷

Thus, one can see early seeds of racial consciousness developing in the federal government in the 1920s and particularly in the 1930s. In the 1920s the consciousness, at least as manifested by Republican presidents, tended to be in reaction to a wave of intolerance and violence linked to the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. In the 1930s, the racial mindedness of the New Deal administration often came from below the president

and, at times, conflicted with his own political concerns. That such pleas emanated from his subordinates and wife during this period is not surprising when one looks at one final aspect of the wider historical context of the 1930s and early 1940s. This was the era of the rise of “isms.”

The Acknowledgment of Racism

It was not until the aftermath of World War II and the revolutionary upheaval of the Civil Rights Movement that the historical wash of racial oppression in America was fully revealed, questioned, and adjusted. In many ways, as Richard King points out, this shift began in the immediate post-War years. During this time, as evidenced by the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), intellectuals seemed intent on stressing the universality of humans. In part as a reaction to the racist extremes of Nazism, this philosophy stressed that all people shared basic fundamental rights as human regardless of racial and other variations. Any observable differences among the races were, after all, a result of cultural exposure rather than biological design. Further, people’s shared characteristics as humans far outweighed such cultural differentiation. As such ideas gradually gained hold in the world, many oppressed groups began to struggle for their rightful place alongside formerly dominant groups in the human community.⁴⁸

In the United States, this struggle took the form of the Civil Rights Movement. The resultant shift against bigotry, while not entirely complete in practice, proved so powerful in the American cultural sphere as to ultimately render anyone clinging to the old thoughts irrelevant and dangerously abnormal. If these individuals seemed massed in one

place, that place too suffered the consequences of the racist stigma in post-racist America--post-racist in the sense that at least its leaders opposed the stereotyping of groups in word if not always in deed. Yet in order to accomplish this social paradigm shift, a neat little linguistic box in which to deposit all the manifestations of racial intolerance had first to be invented and popularized.

Although racial discrimination and intolerance had been deeply ingrained characteristics of American society since before the United States was a nation, it was not until the 1930s that a word gained popular usage to encompass all of these bigoted traits. Thanks in large part to the rise of fascism and, more specifically, Nazism with its inherent racialist and anti-Semitic themes, the word “racism” entered the American popular discourse.⁴⁹ The *New York Times*, for example, first printed the word racism on June 17, 1935. That day, the *Times* quoted League of Nations High Commissioner for Palestine James G. MacDonald saying that the “racism and statism” of Nazi Germany were “unacceptable to Jews....Catholics and Protestants.”⁵⁰

Throughout the remainder of the 1930s, as the actions of Hitler’s Germany weighed heavily on the minds of some Americans, emphasis on the nation’s racial politics increased in the press. With this increased emphasis came stronger ties of the word racism to the increasingly dangerous fellow “isms”—fascism and Nazism. By late 1935, such mainstream publishers as Houghton Mifflin were printing books that dealt explicitly with these topics. A *New York Times* Review of Hobart C. Chatfield-Taylor’s *Charmed Circles*, for example, led off with the following quotation:

Democracy, the individualist, is fighting today for her very life, not against the autocracy of kings but to preserve herself from strangulation by collectivism—an enemy variously disguised by bolshevism, fascism, or racism.⁵¹

Two days, later, James MacDonald, now the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, appeared in the *Times* once again. Again, the newspaper quoted him at length on the dangers of these new, systematic racial policies of the Nazi Germany. MacDonald claimed to be witness to the Nazi-doled “poison of unreasoning racism,” as it manifested “bitter intolerance even in remote parts of the world.”⁵²

Within three years, the use of the term “racism” in the American media had spread beyond the *New York Times*. In 1938, readers in both Los Angeles and Chicago could find articles in their respected newspapers relying on the relatively new term. Again, the pieces, without fail, tied the term to fascism. The *Chicago Tribune* chose to highlight Jewish author Henry Bernstein’s refusal of the Order of St. Maurice and Lazare awarded to him by Mussolini himself. The *Tribune* quoted Bernstein as basing his stance on the Italian fascists’ “racism of recent invention” and related persecutions of law-abiding Italian citizens.⁵³ The *Los Angeles Times* introduced the term to its West Coast audience about a month later. In an article addressing the eighth National Eucharist Congress’s meeting in New Orleans, the *Times* reporter focused on the Catholics’ distrust of the various “isms” floating around their contemporary society. The piece quoted Msgr. Francis J. Haas of Catholic University as affirming that “the spread of Communism, Fascism, and racism...proposes a weltanschauung, a philosophy of life totally at variance with fundamental Christian concepts.”⁵⁴

Throughout the last years of the 1930s and the war years that followed, a steady stream of articles relating this new “racism” with the enemies of America and democracy followed. Thus were the American people provided with a specific term under which to place systematic intolerance. More importantly, this term and the practices it

encompassed were linked to insidious, anti-American ideologies. While racism itself had existed on the North American continent for centuries by this time, it had not been characterized as such and in such an inflammatory and dangerously foreign way.

Bombingham in the National Media, 1945 to 2000

Against such a shifting and sensitized racial backdrop, the racial inequality built into Birmingham's labor force and social system began to manifest itself in active unrest immediately following World War II. As this occurred, the national media began to take note of the city's increasing racial violence and categorize it as problematic. Between 1945 and 1963, fifty racially motivated bombings occurred within the city limits, earning the city the derisive moniker of "Bombingham."⁵⁵ Race stood as the motivation for most if not all of these violent acts. Most regularly the home of an outspoken black resident or that of a black family that sought to move into an all-white neighborhood served as the setting for a bombing.

By the late 1940s and through the 1950s, foreboding signs about Birmingham's future presented themselves with increasingly regularity. Industrial relocation to the city had slowed dramatically by 1948 and 1949 and "civic and economic malaise" increasingly defined the city. The racial bombings and a more widespread knowledge of Birmingham's strictly segregated nature also led to comparisons between the city and Johannesburg, South Africa.⁵⁶ Still, with a population of 326,037 in 1950, Birmingham closely trailed its "great rival" Atlanta with its 331,314. Yet in the coming decades, the competition between the two cities proved a mismatch. The more cosmopolitan and economically diversified Atlanta left Birmingham far behind in growth and national

perception. By 1970, Atlanta claimed 496,973 people to Birmingham's 300, 910. The Georgia city had, by then, clearly surpassed Birmingham in the race to become the region's leading city. Many Birminghamians charged that Atlanta had used vague "unfair tactics" to gain this title.⁵⁷ Perhaps, in attributing at least a portion of the blame for Birmingham's demise as the region's "Magic City," they should have considered local racial tensions and the image of the city that such tensions, when they exploded, provided the world. Atlanta avoided this characterization and ultimately, stigmatization.

On April 12, 1960, the postwar shift toward characterizing Birmingham as city plagued by racism and violence took a decisive step forward. That day leaders in Birmingham reacted with shocked outrage at an exposé of their city appearing in the *New York Times*. The front page headline read "Fear and Hatred Grip Birmingham." *Times* reporter Harrison E. Salisbury had produced a full two-page indictment of the city's race relations. Salisbury wrote of a "brooding Birmingham," on the verge of outright racial conflict. It was a cowering city he observed, a place where "no one talks freely" out of fear of violence and retribution. His article revealed that every aspect of life within the city was strictly segregated. He named Commissioner "Bull" Connor as the brutal enforcer of the racial status quo. In the rare cases when individuals in Birmingham spoke or acted out against the norm, Salisbury detailed the wrath they encountered. He offered the example of one student who participated in a public "prayer for freedom." Later that evening, "seven hooded men" arrived at the youth's house armed with "iron pipes, clubs, and leather blackjacks into which razor blades had been sunk." When they left, the youth, his sister, and mother lay severely beaten, the mother with crushed hands, a broken leg, and severely lacerated scalp.⁵⁸

Salisbury followed up his “Fear and Hatred” article the next day with a second, equally damning front page exposé. This time, he set his sights on the entire state of Alabama, claiming that the “corrosive impact” of racism, anti-Semitism, and segregation were disintegrating the state’s social and political structure. Often using Birmingham as an example, and referring to Connor by name, he wrote of police themselves terrorizing citizens on a regular basis and turning a blind eye to acts of racial violence committed against blacks and white sympathizers. Salisbury emphasized his points by providing a campaign advertisement for John G. Crommelin, Birmingham-based candidate for the U.S. Senate. Commelin’s ad championed him as “The Whiteman’s Candidate,” who pledged to:

ATTACK and EXPOSE the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rth (ADL), the malarial-mosquito of integration and real hidden enemy of White Christian Alabamians, THIS MUST BE DONE.

The ADL (all Jew) is the mosquito; the NAACP (Jew controlled Negro) is the germ.⁵⁹

Neither Bull Connor nor his fellow commissioners should have expressed surprise at the media’s negative portrayal of their city by 1960. The *New York Times* had increasingly addressed racism and racial violence in Birmingham during the course of the 1950s. Local segregation alone had served as the basis for sixteen stories in the paper between 1950 and 1959.⁶⁰ Additional stories dealt with violence perpetrated by whites upon blacks, racially motivated bombings, and intolerance among white citizens.⁶¹ The articles’ increasing frequency, in a major newspaper with great agenda-setting power, mirrored the nation’s growing awareness of racial tension as the Civil Rights Movement moved into higher gear. Yet Salisbury’s piece was the first outright and prominent

indictment of the city as a whole relative to racism by a national newspaper. As such, it was an important step in constructing the city's racist stigma in the public's mind.

Local reaction to the Salisbury articles has been fittingly described by local attorney and one-time mayor David Vann as “violent.”⁶² The Birmingham press immediately and directly attacked Salisbury's criticisms in the days following his articles' appearance. The *Birmingham News* led off its April 14 issue with the scathing title “*N.Y. Times* Slanders our City—Can this be Birmingham?” before reprinting the “Fear and Hatred” article word for word as it had appeared in the *Times*. The editor's note immediately beneath the title informed Birmingham readers that the *News* was reprinting this article “as an example of what is being written and printed about us.”⁶³ The next day, *News* editors continued the same strategy, reprinting Salisbury's second article as an example of an unfair attack on the city. This time, however, the Birmingham paper got in a jab at the *Times*' famous slogan while questioning the accuracy of the piece. The local paper's title that day read “‘All the news That's Fit to Print'?—*N.Y. Times* Continues Attack....”⁶⁴ The *Post-Herald* likewise informed its readers of Salisbury's take on the city in articles also printed on April 14 and 15. Here, labeling the *Times* piece a “race hate story” that “shakes” all of Alabama, *Post-Herald* editors also reprinted the *Times* pieces in full so that Birmingham residents might know how they were being “presented to millions of our neighbors.”⁶⁵

The editorial pages also joined in the reaction against Salisbury's pieces. In the *Post-Herald*, longtime editorialist John Temple Graves characterized the articles as “an almost total lie” while blaming Salisbury's mindset on his “birth, upbringing, and education in Minnesota.” As the acerbic Graves concluded, Minnesota had always been the “most

South-hating of the states.” Through the *New York Times*, the *Minnesotan*, in Graves’ opinion, had dealt Birmingham “bitter hurt.” While “God might forgive him” for this “cruel...body blow,” Graves concluded, “we never shall.”⁶⁶

The *Birmingham News* editors, only the day before, had outdone even Graves with the publication of what was perhaps one of the most outraged editorials ever to grace their paper’s pages. Labeling the piece a “Grave Disservice,” the editorial described both Salisbury’s reporting as “shoddy,” “vicious,” “malicious,” “bigoted,” “noxiously false,” and “distorted.” The editorial went on to accuse the *Times* of “libeling” and “slandering” the city through “journalistic demagoguery.” This slander—portrayed as the latest in a long line of “South-baiting” journalism by northern reporters—deserved response because it called out Birmingham specifically and was printed in a paper whose “readership is one of the most influential segments of America.” As such, the *News* editors felt it threatened to inflict “economic damage” on the city.⁶⁷

The Jefferson County Grand Jury obviously agreed with the *News*’s accusation of malicious damage to the city’s reputation. Meeting at the Bessemer courthouse at the time of the articles’ publication, the grand jury indicted Salisbury for criminal libel.⁶⁸ “Bull” Connor and his fellow commissioners also shared in the grand jury’s and newspapers’ opinion that the Salisbury articles had inflicted great damage on both their reputation and the image of their city.

On May 1, 1960, Connor, his fellow commissioners, and the city’s business oriented Committee of 100 and Chamber of Commerce wrote the *Times* demanding a public retraction of Salisbury’s stories.⁶⁹ Five days later, having received no reply, Connor’s attorneys filed suit in the United States District Court of the Northern District of

Alabama, against the newspaper. The complaint alleged that, through Salisbury's article, the *Times* sought to "defame" Connor "falsely and maliciously." His attorneys went on to claim that Connor had been subjected to "public contempt, ridicule, shame, and disgrace." For this, Connor sought damages of \$500,000.⁷⁰ In the months that followed, Connor's case would be combined with the identical complaints of fellow commissioners James W. Morgan, James "Jabo" Waggoner, Jess Lanier, Herman Thompson, Raymond Parsons, and Joe Lindsey.⁷¹

Theophilus Eugene Connor, et al. v. The New Times, et al. would drag on for approximately six years. In 1964, Connor and his co-plaintiffs would find themselves victorious in the district court. Here, the jury found that Salisbury's statements in the articles were "made with actual malice." They were not, however, "motivated by personal ill will" or "the intent to do the plaintiff harm." The jury subsequently awarded Connor \$40,000 in compensatory damages and nothing in punitive damages. In late 1966, the United States Court of Appeals for the 5th District reversed the jury's verdict. In the end, the appellate court ruled that Connor was obliged to pay \$2,617.50 in court costs.⁷²

Throughout the months preceding the court action and the testimony during the trial itself, the plaintiffs' displeasure at the *Times*' portrayal of their city was as evident as their anger over its portrayals of themselves. In fact, of the nine original plaintiffs, only Connor had been mentioned directed in the Salisbury articles. At times throughout the legal proceedings, Connor seemed more intent on showing that Birmingham was not the incredibly racist place Salisbury made it out to be than in defending his own reputation. In answer to pretrial depositions by defense attorneys Connor frequently protested such

statements as “Birmingham being like Johannesburg,” and claimed that the article caused a “great wave of feeling....throughout the state and the nation” against his city. The city further, according to Connor, “had very little disorder, agitation, or demonstration” before the appearance of Salisbury’s piece.⁷³

From attorney T. Eric Embry’s opening remarks onward, the defense’s strategy was to clearly show that the article was not about Connor at all, but rather about Birmingham itself. As he pointed out, in both of Salisbury’s articles, there were only three mentions of Connor and none of the other plaintiffs. Instead, Salisbury had merely carried out an ordinary news assignment to go down to several southern cities, investigate, and report on the impact of the sit-in movement relative to local race relations. If his reports were libelous simply because they provided an unfortunate image of the city, then the right of all to criticize conditions in “your town and in your community” would be compromised.”⁷⁴

By contrast, the plaintiffs’ team attempted to impress the Birmingham jury by making the case about regional identity, antagonisms, and meddling. Attorney Jim Simpson repeatedly cast Salisbury as a “New Yorker.” Over Embry’s objections, he told the jury that “no New Yorker can readily measure the climate of Birmingham.” Throughout his cross examination of Salisbury, Simpson questioned the writer’s knowledge and opinion of the South. In doing so, he revealed to the jury a man who had never lived in the South, visited Birmingham only for the few days it took to research the articles, and knew little about southern ways. In his closing statement, Simpson related Salisbury’s journey into the South to that of Civil War forays intended to disrupt southern life. Although armed only with a pen, Simpson argued, Salisbury came with just as definite a purpose as the

soldiers of the past. Salisbury and the *New York Times*, the jury was told, came to spread “propaganda” and end segregation.⁷⁵

While the trial lingered on and the plaintiffs and defense debated southern identity, slander, and the invasion of Birmingham by pen-wielding Yankees, additional media coverage solidified Birmingham’s image as a racist, violent, and intolerant city. Representation of key events in 1961 and 1963 proved central to this identity’s formation. In response to the Salisbury article and the city’s subsequent libel suit against the *New York Times*, CBS decided to film a segment of *CBS Reports* in Birmingham early in 1961.⁷⁶ Titled “Who Speaks for Birmingham” and eventually airing nationally on the night of May 18, 1961, the program further exposed the city’s racial intolerance and violence, while also deeming it representative of regional southern racism. The narrator, respected television journalist Howard K. Smith, announced Birmingham as “the largest segregated city in the South.” Further, he characterized the local *Birmingham Post-Herald* as being the “voice of the segregated South.” As for the question raised in the program’s title, Smith contended that the violent and uncooperative “Bull” Connor had “emerged as the voice of Birmingham.”⁷⁷

If such media representations had not established Birmingham’s social deviance from the rest of the United States to an adequate degree, coverage of local events in 1963 ensured the city’s future stigmatization. In May, Salisbury’s prophesied racial conflict came to pass, as civil rights demonstrations overwhelmed the city. With the city’s jail space overfilled and hundreds of teenage prisoners confined at the state fairgrounds’ livestock pavilion, the demonstrations soon turned violent. Bull Connor’s police force ruthlessly employed his much vaunted armored tanks, dogs, and water cannon.⁷⁸ The

national media captured it all, both in print and image. As violent reactions on the city's part increased, articles concerning the demonstrations gained more prominent placement in the *New York Times*. In the one month period between April 15 and May 15 alone, the paper's editors deemed some twenty-three articles dealing with the protests as worthy of front page placement.⁷⁹ The most powerful among these appeared on May 4, with an accompanying image of a police dog violently grasping the abdomen of a young protester as a uniformed Birmingham police officer held him in place.⁸⁰ This image, along with others like it, undoubtedly strengthened the national perception of Birmingham as a violent center of racism. When this coverage combined with the *New York Times* twenty-eight articles focusing on the tragic 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in the week following its September 16, 1963 occurrence, the stigma stood solidly entrenched and available for future media use as events warranted.⁸¹ There could be no doubt, at that point, either to the citizens of the United States or of countries around the world, that Birmingham most definitely had a racial problem. The question, on a macro scale, seemed then to become whether or not racial conditions in this city represented those of the nation as a whole.

In regard to this question, one can see the influence of contextual world events in the post-World War II era shaping the nation's acceptance of Birmingham's stigmatization. Aware of the contradiction between racism and American democracy's supposed egalitarianism, the public and government sought to rationalize the identity they held of themselves and projected to the Cold War-era world. This led parts of the nation to form their identity in opposition to parts seen as deviantly racist. Actions of the United States government contributed to this process. As historian Mary L. Dudziak has argued, Cold

War-influenced concern over the United States' international image prompted the government to purposefully label the South, and such violently racist areas within it as Birmingham, as deviant from the national norm.⁸²

At a time when the United States actively sought to export its influence, governmental system, and economic theory abroad, internationally publicized instances of racial violence proved embarrassing and threatened its success. The Soviet Union made great propagandistic use of racist events and images “such as those flowing out of Birmingham” in extolling capitalism's inherent inequality. This particularly threatened the United States' democratic image in the newly independent nations of Africa. To quell the success of the Soviet propaganda campaign, the United States government initiated one of its own. In addition to characterizing southern areas as abnormal within the American system, the campaign championed instances of federal intervention in such wayward areas. This intervention stood as proof of the emphasis the nation placed on equality even in seemingly backwards areas. The media's portrayal of Birmingham thus took on a degree of official sanction. The South, with its brutal and uncompromising “Bull” Connors, assumed the role of repository for the nation's sin. As an isolated and deviant exception to the national norm, the city provided rationalization for the anomaly of racial oppression in a democratic system. Against this image, the rest of the nation could form its own racially progressive identity.⁸³

Interestingly, this image of Birmingham came from a very limited section of the city's geographic area. The famed protests of May 1963 and the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing all occurred within a three to four block area in the city's central business district. Each day, during the protests, the demonstrators often assembled at the

16th Street Baptist Church at 16th Street and 6th Avenue North. They would then set out for the city hall located between 6th and 7th Avenue on 20th Street North. Often they would advance no farther than the Kelly Ingram Park which borders both 16th and 17th Street on 6th Avenue. Here, less than a block from their embarkation, is where Connor met the marchers daily with officers, water cannon, dogs, and handcuffs. He never allowed protestors to reach city hall. Thus, in a physical sense, less than a full city block defined the city to the world.⁸⁴

The changing media portrayal of Birmingham and the national and international stigma it resulted in were not solely a consequences of the sensational and racially charged events that occurred in the city during the Civil Rights movement. In order for this coverage to occur and for the nation to condemn the actions portrayed in such a fashion, there first had to be a shift in the very way that America viewed racial oppression and inequality. This shift began in the 1930s and climaxed with the bomb blast on Birmingham's 16th Street in 1963. In the post-war decades, the term racism took on connotations so un-American as to stigmatize people and places associated with it to a virtually unrecoverable degree. When Birmingham had been at the forefront of industrial production, in an era before the widespread development of this racial sensitivity, it was easy to overlook its oppressed workforce and citizens in favor of celebrating the technological advance that was America. In this regard, early Birmingham was the city of the American dream, it was the "Magic City" where anything was possible. However, as more and more white Americans gained a racial conscience, beginning with the linkage of fascism to racism in the 1930s, the defense of Birmingham's apartheid-like system grew more difficult to maintain. Ultimately, the violent anti-Civil Rights

outbursts of the 1960s proved a slap in the face to a more highly developed sensitivity. With the sting of this slap, Birmingham, Alabama made the mental journey from “Magic City” to “Bombingham.” This shift from pacesetter to pariah thus occurred in tandem with a social paradigm shift in regard to racial consciousness. As the next chapter will show, it subsequently proved devastating and incredibly difficult to surmount as the racist stigma emerged as one of the most crushing in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Endnotes

- ¹ The most extensive coverage of Birmingham's founding can be found in Carl V. Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 12-14; Two excellent studies of southern identity that examine the commonly held ideas of the lazy, laid back, or agricultural southerner can be found in James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Todd L. Savitt and James Harvey Young, *Disease and Distinctiveness in the American South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).
- ² Justin Fuller, "Boom Towns and Blast Furnaces: Town Promotion in Alabama, 1885-1893," *The Alabama Review* 29 (January, 1976): 38; Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham*, 14-16. Harris reveals Birmingham's iron and industrial boom to be one of fits and starts. After the city's 1871 founding, a nationwide economic depression and a localized cholera outbreak in 1873 slowed the city's growth. Yet by 1880, with the formation of the Pratt Coal and Coke Company and the initiation of successful coal mining four miles northwest of the city, industrial output and population began a marked expansion.
- ³ Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham*, 22; Martha Mitchell Bigelow, "Birmingham's Carnival of Crime, 1871-1910," *The Alabama Review* 3 (April, 1950): 124.
- ⁴ W. David Lewis, *Sloss Furnaces and the Rise of the Birmingham District: An Industrial Epic* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1994), 82-91; Bobby M. Wilson, *America's Johannesburg: Industrialization and Racial Transformation in Birmingham* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 4-5, 50-51, 60-62, 65-79, 86-87, 92, 109-112.
- ⁵ Lewis, *Sloss Furnaces*, 475.
- ⁶ Robert J. Norrell, "Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama," *Journal of American History* 73 (December, 1986): 671.
- ⁷ Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham*, 45.
- ⁸ Birmingham Board of Education Minutes, June 9, 1900, Linn Henley Research Library and Archives, Birmingham, Alabama (Hereafter listed as LHRLA); "Advanced Grade in Colored Schools Allowed Conditionally," *Birmingham News*, 11 June 1900; Margaret E. Ambrester, *Samuel Ullman and "Youth": The Life, the Legacy* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1993), 40.
- ⁹ Horace Mann Bond, *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1994), 145-7.
- ¹⁰ Birmingham Board of Education Minutes, June 9, 1900. LHRLA; Howard N. Rabinowitz, *The First New South: 1865-1920* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1992), 134-7.

¹¹ Birmingham Board of Education Minutes, June 9, 1900 and September 3, 1900. LHRLA ; “High School For Negro Children,” *Birmingham News*, 4 September 1900; Lynne B. Feldman, *A Sense of Place: Birmingham’s Black Middle-Class Community, 1890-1930* (Tuscaloosa, The University of Alabama Press, 1999), 120-21; Armbruster, *Samuel Ullman*, 42. The fact that the call for publicly supported secondary education for black children originated from the black community supports the findings of Harris’s *Political Power in Birmingham*. Harris argues that multiple interest groups competed for and exercised political power in Birmingham between 1871 and 1921. While the economic upper and middle class wielded the greatest political power and lower class black residents the least, Birmingham was far from a complete dictatorship of the economic elite. Lower groups could, and often did exert political power.

¹² Arthur Harold Parker, *A Dream That Came True: Industrial High School* (Birmingham: Printing Department of Industrial high School, 1932), 86; Juliet Bradford, *The Industrial High School: A Brief History* (Industrial High Printing Department, 1925), 11-7; “Industrial High Head Is Honored,” *Birmingham Post Herald*, 5 May 1939; Jerome Christopher Averette, “Documentation And History Of Arthur Harold Parker High School,” *Alabama Black In The Mirror*, May, 1977, 5-8; Ambrose Caliver, “The Largest Negro High School,” *School Life*, December, 1931, 73-4; “Negro High School With Booker T. Washington Purpose,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 11 October 1932; “Industrial School for Negroes Is ‘A Dream That Came True,’” *Christian Science Monitor*, date unknown, 1930.

¹³ “The Great South,” *New York Times*, 28 August 1886.

¹⁴ “The New Alabama: Recent Great Changes in the Character of Its Population,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 23 December 1886, reprinted in *The New York Times*, 26 December 1886.

¹⁵ “Mad Speculation in Land,” *New York Times*, 25 February 1887.

¹⁶ Charles E. Connerly, *The Most Segregated City in America: City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920-1980* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 13; Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham*, 13-14. Harris provides biographical information on the colorful Powell, also known as the “Duke of Birmingham.”

¹⁷ “Alabama’s Show City,” *New York Times*, 24 December 1899; “Alabama’s Leading City,” *New York Times*, 31 December 1899; “Iron and Coal Galore,” *New York Times*, 7 February 1887; “New Riches Piled High,” *New York Times*, 10 February 1887; “A Change of Spirit,” *New York Times*, 6 September 1884.

¹⁸ “Iron and Coal Galore,” *New York Times*, 7 February 1887.

¹⁹ “A Change of Spirit,” *New York Times*, 6 September 1884.

²⁰ “A Southern Incident,” Editorial, *New York Times*, 24 June 1898.

- ²¹ “Alabama’s Show City, *New York Times*, 24 December 1899; “Alabama’s Leading City,” *New York Times*, 31 December 1899; “Iron and Coal Galore,” *New York Times*, February 7, 1887; “New Riches Piled High,” *New York Times*, 10 February 1887.
- ²² “Birmingham’s Big Jump,” *New York Times*, 30 September 1910.
- ²³ Charles A. Selden, “South’s Giant Stride From Pawnshop to Prosperity,” *New York Times*, 15 February 1920.
- ²⁴ Frank Bohn, “New South Throbs,” *New York Times*, 25 October 1925.
- ²⁵ “To Disenfranchise Alabama Negroes,” *New York Times*, 16 December 1900.
- ²⁶ “Alabama Negroes Act,” *New York Times*, 25 September 1901.
- ²⁷ “Deporting Alabama Negroes,” *New York Times*, 17 December 1901.
- ²⁸ J. A. MacKnight, “Levantines Driving the Negro Out of Business in the Gulf States,” *New York Times*, 8 April 1906; Booker T. Washington, “Southern Lynchings,” *New York Times*, 11 January 1913; “Inciter of Negroes Held,” *New York Times*, 9 April 1917.
- ²⁹ “Inciter of Negroes Held,” *New York Times*, 9 April 1917.
- ³⁰ “New Flogging Case Bared in Alabama,” *New York Times*, 14 July 1927; “South is Aroused Against Flogging,” *New York Times*, 17 July 1927; “Flogging Inquiries Increase in Alabama,” *New York Times*, 18 July 1927; “Alabama Band Flogs Man, Burns His Home,” *New York Times*, 11 September 1927; “Alabama Floggings Charged to 18 Men,” *New York Times*, 17 September 1927.
- ³¹ “New Flogging Case Bared in Alabama,” *New York Times*, 14 July 1927; “Alabama Band Flogs Man, Burns His Home,” *New York Times*, 11 September 1927.
- ³² “New Flogging Case Bared in Alabama,” *New York Times*, 14 July 1927; “South is Aroused Against Flogging,” *New York Times*, 17 July 1927; “Flogging Inquiries Increase in Alabama,” *New York Times*, 18 July 1927; “Alabama Band Flogs Man, Burns His Home,” *New York Times*, 11 September 1927; “Alabama Floggings Charged to 18 Men,” *New York Times*, 17 September 1927.
- ³³ “South is Aroused Against Flogging,” *New York Times*, 17 July 1927.
- ³⁴ Lawrence D. McAvoy, conversation with author, 28 January 2009.
- ³⁵ Blaine A. Brownell, “Birmingham, Alabama: New South City in the 1920s,” *The Journal of Southern History* 38 (February, 1972): 24, 28-30; Carl V. Harris, “Reforms in

Governmental Control of Negroes in Birmingham, Alabama, 1890-1920,” *The Journal of Southern History* 38 (November, 1972): 569.

³⁶ Anne O’Hare McCormick, “The South: Its New Industrial Capitals,” *New York Times*, 6 July 1930.

³⁷ Eugene R. Lyde, Jr., “Ideas About the South,” *New York Times*, 12 June 1933.

³⁸ John Temple Graves, “Alabama Wearies of Our Criticism,” *New York Times*, 8 July 1934.

³⁹ Richard B. Sherman, “The Harding Administration and the Negro: An Opportunity Lost,” *Journal of Negro History* 49 (July, 1964): 157-58. Sherman argues that Harding possessed a limited knowledge of race relations in the United States, and did not go far enough in pushing for equality. However, the president’s public stances in favor of the anti-lynching law, interstate race commission, and equality in all realms but the social indicate at least a significant acknowledgment of the nation’s racial problem. Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham*, 34. Harris characterizes local reactions to Harding’s comments on limited racial equality as “cold” and “appalled.”

⁴⁰ Sherman, “The Harding Administration and the Negro,” *Journal of Negro History* 49 (July, 1964): 160-61.

⁴¹ Presidential scholar Alvin Felzenberg has argued that Coolidge was not nearly as silent on race as has been popularly believed. Instead, he showed disdain for the Ku Klux Klan and acknowledged the needs of black Americans: *Boston Globe*, 2 August 1998; Others, such as the editors of the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, have taken issue with this interpretation, arguing instead that Coolidge did only the bare minimum on racial issues to keep northern blacks in the Republican corner: JBHE Foundation, “The Racial Views of American Presidents: A Look at the Record of Calvin Coolidge,” *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 21 (Autumn, 1998): 71.

⁴² Estimates vary widely for Klan membership during this period. Charles C. Alexander estimates Klan rolls to have included five million individuals nationwide in *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), vi. Kenneth T. Jackson offers a more conservative estimate of just over two million in *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 237. Others, such as Robert Goldberg, place the number somewhere near 6 million: “Beneath the Hood and Robe: A Socioeconomic Analysis of the Ku Klux Klan Membership in Denver, Colorado, 1921-1925,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 11 (April, 1980): 181.

⁴³ Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest*, 55-56; Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 20-21, 33, 39, 48-52, 75-76, 128-29, 164, 189, 192, 194, 200-201, 209, 213, 231, 261, 267, 272, 277. These page numbers relate to Anti-Catholicism as a Klan recruitment tool.

⁴⁴ Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal For Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 40-42.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 73-74.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 47, 60-65, 72-74.

⁴⁸ Richard H. King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 1-10. King stresses that the post war shift toward human universality quickly gave way to particularism during the mid to latter 1960s. During this period, belief in group identification, pride, and power overtook the emphasis on universal humanity.

⁴⁹ George M. Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton University Press, 2002), 5; Obviously, the degree of racist ideology and its implementation differed between the various Fascist states and hyper-racism of Hitler's Nazism. Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Hitler and Nazi Germany: A History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 190-92; 265-68. Spielvogel provides a concise explanation of the central placement of anti-Semitism and racism in Hitler's ideology. For an overview of the variations between Fascist states see F.L. Carsten, *The Rise of Fascism*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 160-229. For a concise overview of the historiography concerning the degree of anti-Semitism in Fascist Italy as compared to Nazi Germany see R.J.B. Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London: Arnold, 1998), 101-105.

⁵⁰ "State Church Assailed," *New York Times*, 17 June 1935.

⁵¹ Hobart C. Chatfield-Taylor, *Charmed Circles* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1935), quoted in Betty Drury, "A Pageant of Changing Civilizations," *New York Times*, 20 October 1935.

⁵² "Christians Urged to Aid Reich Exiles," *New York Times*, 22 October 1935.

⁵³ "Jewish Author Sends Back Decorations Given Him by Italy," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 September 1938.

⁵⁴ "Catholics Attack Isms," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1938.

⁵⁵ Glenn T. Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 53-54.

⁵⁶ W. David Lewis, *Sloss Furnaces and the Rise of the Birmingham District* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 432-33.

⁵⁷ Lewis, *Sloss Furnaces*, 432-35, 483.

⁵⁸ Harrison E. Salisbury, "Fear and Hatred Grip Birmingham: Racial Tension Smoldering After Belated Sitdowns," *New York Times*, 12 April 1960.

⁵⁹ Harrison E. Salisbury, "Race Issue Shakes Alabama Structure," *New York Times*, 13 April 1960.

⁶⁰ The following *New York Times* articles directly addressed Birmingham's racially segregated structure in the decade prior to the "shocking" Salisbury exposes: "Birmingham Loses Negro Zoning Plea: Federal Appeals Court Rules City's All-White Regulation is Unconstitutional," *New York Times*, 21 December 1950; "Birmingham Firm on Law: Robinson All-Star Cannot Use White Players There," *New York Times*, 9 October 1953; "Birmingham Eases Bias in Athletics," *New York Times*, 27 January 1954; "Segregation Law Eased: Birmingham Permits Mixed Pro Baseball and Football," *New York Times*, 24 March 1954; "Justice in Birmingham: Negro Entertainers Have Long Performed before White Southern Audiences Without Challenge," *New York Times*, 22 April 1956; "Segregation Foes Trail in Alabama: Vote Shows Support for Plans Aimed at High Court Rule for Schools and Parks," *New York Times*, 29 August 1956; "Birmingham Defiance Ends," *New York Times*, 28 December 1956; "White Foe of Bias Attacked by Mob: Sat With Negro in Alabama Station," *New York Times*, 7 March 1957; "28 Negroes Fined in Bus Bias Case: Birmingham Judge Attacks Court's Integration Ruling and 14th Amendment Cites Montgomery Decision," *New York Times*, 22 March 1957; "Alabama Negro Clergyman Beaten While Trying to Enroll Students," *New York Times*, 10 September 1957; "Birmingham Ends Negro Job Curbs," *New York Times*, 25 July 1958; "Bus Law Repealed: Birmingham Gives Companies Power on Seating," *New York Times*, 15 October 1958; "Negroes Arrested in Test of Bus Law," *New York Times*, 21 October 1958; "Minister Arrested in Bus Law Protest," *New York Times*, 22 October 1958; "14 Negroes Jailed in Dispute on Buses," *New York Times*, 25 October 1958; "2 Alabama Negroes Jailed in Bus Case," *New York Times*, 28 October 1958.

⁶¹ Additional *New York Times* stories featuring Birmingham's intolerant and violent race relations include: "Birmingham Seeks Home Dynamiters: Police Start Hunt Following second Blasting of a Negro's Residence Within 10 Days," *New York Times*, 24 April 1950; "Birmingham Bans Reds: Communists given 48 Hours to Get Out of Town," *New York Times*, 19 July 1950; "Alabamians Attack King Cole on Stage," *New York Times*, 11 April 1956; "Bombing in Alabama Injures 5, Wrecks Negro Minister's Home," *New York Times*, 26 December 1956; "Boys in Birmingham Held as Bus Snipers," *New York Times*, 31 December 1956; "Negro in Alabama to Die for Burglary," *New York Times*, 24 April 1957; "3 Klansmen Held in Negro Torture," *New York Times*, 8 September 1957; "Two Bomb Scares Stir Birmingham," *New York Times*, September 11, 1957; "4th Klansman Guilty: Alabamian Gets 20 Years for Mutilation of Negro," *New York Times*, 21 February 1958; "3 Whites Held in Blast," *New York Times*, August 3, 1958.

⁶² David Vann, "Events Leading to the 1963 Change From Commission to the Mayor-Council Form of Government in Birmingham, Alabama," paper presented before the

University of Alabama at Birmingham Center for Urban Affairs, 1981. Birmingham City Council Papers, Pamphlets/Reports, Box 9 Folder 6. Linn Henley Research Library, Birmingham, Alabama.

⁶³ “N.Y. Times Slanders Our City—Can this be Birmingham?....,” *Birmingham News*, 14 April 1960. When turning to the story’s page eleven continuation, local residents were treated to the indignant headline “New York Reporter Slanders Birmingham Over Race Issue.”

⁶⁴ “All the News That’s Fit to Print?—N.Y. Times Continues Attack....,” *Birmingham News*, 15 April 1960.

⁶⁵ “Text of the New York Times Race Hate Story,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 14 April 1960; “N.Y. Times Report Declares Race Issue Shakes Alabama,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 15 April 1960.

⁶⁶ John Temple Graves, “Almost Total Lie From the Times,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 16 April 1960.

⁶⁷ “A Grave Disservice,” *The Birmingham News*, 15 April 1960.

⁶⁸ Vann, “Events Leading to the 1963 Change,” paper presented before the University of Alabama at Birmingham Center for Urban Affairs, 1981. Birmingham City Council Papers, Pamphlets/Reports, Box 9 Folder 6. LHRLA.

⁶⁹ “The Birmingham Story,” *Time*, 16 May 1960, 74.

⁷⁰ “Complaint,” Civil Action #9634, Dated May 6, 1960. *Theophilus Eugene Connor et al v. New York Times et al* Trial Transcript and Papers, Box 1 Folder 1. LHRLA.

⁷¹ “Order” dated October 24, 1960. *Theophilus Eugene Connor et al v. New York Times et al* Trial Transcript and Papers, Box 1 Folder 1. LHRLA.

⁷² “Judgement on Jury Verdict,” US District Court for Northern District of Alabama, Southern Division, Civil Action no. 9634, September 15, 1964, *Theophilus Eugene Connor et al v. New York Times et al* Trial Transcript and Papers, Box 1 Folder 4. LHRLA; “Notice of Appeal,” US Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit, Civil Action 9634, September 24, 1964, *Theophilus Eugene Connor et al v. New York Times et al* Trial Transcript and Papers, Box 1 Folder 1. LHRLA; “Judgement,” US Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit, Civil Action 9634, August 4, 1966. *Theophilus Eugene Connor et al v. New York Times et al* Trial Transcript and Papers, Box 1 Folder 1. LHRLA; In regard to the intellectual background of Salisbury’s passage concerning “Birmingham being like Johannesburg” and Connor’s reaction to it, see also Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 4. Here, Borstelmann examines the South’s perceptual

relationship to other regions of the country relative to different groups' reactions to its stance on race.

⁷³ "Answers to Defendant's Interrogatories by Eugene Connor," US District Court for Northern District of Alabama, Southern Division," Civil Action no. 9634, September 8, 1964, *Theophilus Eugene Connor et al v. New York Times et al* Trial Transcript and Papers, Box 1 Folder 4. LHRLA.

⁷⁴ "Transcript," District Court for Northern District of Alabama, Southern Division," Civil Action no. 9634, September 8, 1964, *Theophilus Eugene Connor et al v. New York Times et al* Trial Transcript and Papers, 11-12, 905, Box 5 Folder 1, Folder 9. LHRLA.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-9, 804-806, 893-898.

⁷⁶ "3 in Birmingham to Sue the *Times*: City Commissioners Base Libel Action on an Article Reporting Racial Hatred," *New York Times*, 16 April 1960; "Police Head Charges Smear," *New York Times*, 16 April 1960.

⁷⁷ "*Who Speaks for Birmingham*," CBS Reports, May 18, 1961, program transcript, LHRLA.

⁷⁸ "Police Considers K9s One of Top '60 Achievements," *Birmingham News*, 16 April 1961. Connor bragged in this article of his numerous instruments of social control. These included police dogs, water cannon, and a specially equipped armored vehicle.

⁷⁹ Foster Hailey, "Fighting Erupts At Birmingham," *New York Times*, 15 April 1963; Foster Hailey, "New Birmingham Regime Sworn, Raising Hopes for Racial Peace," *New York Times*, 16 April 1963; Foster Hailey, "500 Are Arrested In Negro Protest At Birmingham," *New York Times*, 3 May 1963; Foster Hailey, "Dogs And Fire Hoses Repulse Negroes At Birmingham," *New York Times*, 4 May 1963; Claude Sitton, "Violence Explodes at Racial Protests in Alabama," *New York Times*, 4 May 1963; Foster Hailey, "U.S. Seeking a Truce in Birmingham: Hoses Again Drive Off Protestors," *New York Times*, 5 May 1963; Foster Hailey, "Birmingham Talks Pushed," *New York Times*, 6 May 1963; Claude Sitton, "Birmingham Jails 1,000 More Negroes," *New York Times*, 7 May 1963; "Hoses and Armored Cars Used Against Demonstrators," *New York Times*, 8 May 1963; John D. Pomfret, "President Voices Birmingham Hope," *New York Times*, 8 May 1963; Claude Sitton, "Rioting Negroes Routed by Police at Birmingham," *New York Times*, 8 May 1963; Claude Sitton, "Hurdles Remain: Negroes Warn of New Protests Today if Parleys Fail," *New York Times*, 9 May 1963; John D. Pomfret, "Kennedy Reacts," *New York Times*, 9 May 1963; "Peace Talks Gain at Birmingham: A Day of Truce," *New York Times*, 9 May 1963; Claude Sitton, "Birmingham Talks Reach an Accord on Ending Crisis," *New York Times*, 10 May 1963; Claude Sitton, "Birmingham Pact Sets Timetable for Integration," *New York Times*, 11 May 1963; Hedrick Smith, "Bombs Touch Off Widespread Riot at Birmingham," *New York Times*, 12 May 1963; Claude Sitton, "50 Hurt in Negro Rioting After Birmingham Blasts," *New York Times*, 13 May 1963; Anthony Lewis, "U.S. Sends Troops Into Alabama After Riots Sweep

Birmingham,” *New York Times*, 13 May 1963; “Wallace Decries Kennedy Action: Says Birmingham And State Can Cope With Crisis,” *New York Times*, 13 May 1963; Claude Sitton, “Birmingham Still Quiet,” *New York Times*, 14 May 1963; Tom Wicker, “Troops Won’t Go Into Birmingham If Peace Prevails,” *New York Times*, 14 May 1963; Claude Sitton, “Whites Cautious on Alabama Pact: Birmingham Leaders Balk at Giving Public Support to Accord With Negroes,” *New York Times*, 15 May 1963.

⁸⁰ Claude Sitton, “Violence Explodes at Racial Protests in Alabama,” *New York Times*, 4 May 1963.

⁸¹ Fred Powledge, “Alabama Bombing Protested Here,” *New York Times*, 17 September 1963; “Lawyer in Alabama Blames Whites, Saying ‘We All Did It,’” *New York Times*, 17 September 1963; John Herbers, “Parents Are Sad But Not Bitter,” *New York Times*, 17 September 1963; “Vatican Paper Decries Killings in Birmingham,” *New York Times*, 17 September 1963; “The Blame and Beyond,” *New York Times*, 17 September 1963; “Day of Mourning Urged,” *New York Times*, 18 September 1963; “Hughes Asks for Prayer for Bombing Victims,” *New York Times*, 18 September 1963; “Ugandans Protest Alabama Bombing,” *New York Times*, 18 September 1963; John Herbers, “White Birmingham 4th Graders Back Negroes in Class Themes: All Voice Sympathy ‘Sorry for Children,’” *New York Times*, 18 September 1963; “Connor Holds Court To Blame In Bombing,” *New York Times*, 19 September 1963; “Funeral is Held for Bomb Victims: Dr. King Delivers Tribute of Rites in Birmingham,” *New York Times*, 19 September 1963; “Bombing in Birmingham: Atrocities Declared No Deterrent to Negro’s Fight for Equality,” *New York Times*, 19 September 1963; Lawrence Davies, “Negroes Protest in San Francisco: Decry Alabama Bombing,” *New York Times*, 19 September 1963; “Rally to Mourn 6 Slain Negroes,” *New York Times*, 19 September 1963; James Preston, “Birmingham: ‘Look Away...Look Away, Look Away, Dixie Land,’” *New York Times*, 20 September 1963; “1,000 in Elizabeth Attend Bomb Rites,” *New York Times*, 20 September 1963; “Presbyterians Ask Silence Sunday for Bomb Victims,” *New York Times*, 20 September 1963; George Dugan, “Birmingham Stirs Faith to Action,” *New York Times*, 21 September 1963; “Birmingham Bomb Planted,” *New York Times*, 21 September 1963; “Mayor Proclaims Day for Birmingham,” *New York Times*, 21 September 1963; Claude Sitton, “Birmingham: Despite Shock Caused by Bombing, Opposition to Integration Remains Firm,” *New York Times*, 22 September 1963; “Bombs and Rights,” *New York Times*, 22 September 1963; “Norwalk to Pay Tribute to Birmingham Children,” *New York Times*, 22 September 1963; “Prayer Being Held For Bomb Victims,” *New York Times*, 22 September 1963; “Churches Mourn Racial Tragedy,” *New York Times*, 23 September 1963; “Drive Seeks Funds to Rebuild Church Wrecked by Bomb,” *New York Times*, 23 September 1963; Peter Kihss, “Rallies in Nation Protest Killing of 6 in Alabama,” *New York Times*, 23 September 1963.

⁸² Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 46, 229; Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, 1, 4-5.

⁸³ Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 46, 94, 107, 124, 130-26, 170, 186-87, 215, 229, 236-38, 240-41; Lewis, *Sloss Furnaces*, 435.

⁸⁴ Former Birmingham Mayor Richard Arrington mentions the small geographic area of the protests in his memoir *There's Hope for the World: The Memoir of Birmingham, Alabama's First African American Mayor* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 173.

CHAPTER 3

REMEMBERING BOMBINGHAM:

BIRMINGHAM CONSIDERS ITS

PAST, 1970 TO 2008

Birmingham Mayor Larry Langford received quite a shock in June 2008, when he publicly suggested renaming the Birmingham International Airport in honor of Civil Rights activist Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth. To Langford, the renaming represented a way to honor the life of the man perhaps most responsible for bringing change to Birmingham in the 1960s. But, as Langford soon became aware, many others did not share his desire to celebrate the city's place in modern American history. For many locals, the idea of renaming the airport threatened to invoke painful memories, and, in the process, rekindle the fires of racism.

Langford "never dreamed" that his well-intentioned proposal could "conjure up demons of the past."¹ But stir up passions it did. Almost immediately following his announcement, a storm of local controversy erupted as groups took sides on how best, if at all, to remember Birmingham's past. This controversy, as will be shown, represented only the latest incident of a city struggling to deal with its history and the identity formed by that history. Because of Birmingham's racist image, any attempt to deal with the racially charged past has met with tension forged in a racially charged present. In Birmingham, an inferiority complex of sort has developed as a direct result of the city's

racist image, while, at the same time, the racist image has contributed to the development of a hyper-racialized local climate. Thus, from the 1960s onward, a vicious circle has developed in attempts to honor or deal with the city's past both feeds off and falls victim to an often dangerously racialized atmosphere.

One can easily understand the rationale behind Mayor Langford's suggestion to rename Birmingham's airport in honor of Reverend Shuttlesworth. After all, his dedication and influence on the local Civil Rights Movement stood unquestioned. He is the man whom a white mob beat down with chains in the middle of 7th Avenue North in 1957 for attempting, in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, to desegregate the all white Phillips High School.² A year before he was left bleeding and unconscious that day in Birmingham, he had also formed the local Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR). This organization had taken shape after the Alabama lawmakers outlawed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) within state boundaries and served as Shuttlesworth's rights podium and the vanguard of activism in Birmingham for seven years before Martin Luther King and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) arrived in 1963. During this time, Shuttlesworth endured injury, threats, the bombing of the church over which he presided, and even the bombing of his own house on Christmas Day, 1956.³ Nevertheless, he never relented in his push for equality for Birmingham's black citizens. Through his actions, Shuttlesworth revealed a belief in forcing Birmingham segregationists to constantly defend racial separation and inequality.⁴ Thus, by the early 1960s, Birmingham leaders such as "Bull" Connor were extremely defensive over segregation and poised to put down any threat to the institution's continued existence.

With such a history in mind, Langford saw the renaming of the airport as an appropriate honor for a man who “led Birmingham to...become the conscience of the world.”⁵ The very fact that Birmingham had served as this conscience, however, stoked the opposition to the renaming of the airport and other attempts at public remembrance of what many viewed as troubled times. The individuals opposed to the renaming of the Birmingham airport voiced their opinions frequently.

Where in the past, the editorial page of a newspaper or the television reporter’s camera and microphone might have served as the means of airing this public discourse, much of this discussion played out in a more technologically advanced medium. In keeping with the times, reactions to online *Birmingham News* articles provided a platform for those uncomfortable with or opposed to the renaming to air their views. While many might see this as a democratization of the press in that it allows for far more voices to be heard than the traditional letter to the editor, it also has drawbacks. Langford, for example, felt this new medium of discourse gave the unprogressive elements of society “the shade to hide their faces behind once again.”⁶

By providing anonymity for the commenter, online posting allows a more accurate glimpse into the beliefs of the people—or at least into the ideas of those often silenced by the supposed cultural dissonance of their views. Thus, online commenting allows people to overcome the self censorship central to Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann’s “Spiral of Silence.” According to Noelle-Neumann’s theory, individuals are more likely to remain silent or otherwise conceal their true beliefs when they are in opposition to the presumed beliefs of the majority. Underlying this reticence is the idea that voicing an idea or opinion counter to what is believed to be the established majority view can lead to

problems for the dissenting individual ranging from discomfort to alienation. The resultant silencing of opposing viewpoints subsequently solidifies the appearance of majority agreement.⁷ With the online comment, there is no concern over discomfort or repercussions for voicing one's true beliefs.

Online readers of the *Birmingham News* certainly showed no reticence in voicing their opinions immediately following a June 28 online article in which *News* reporter Charles R. McCauley reported that five of the seven Birmingham Airport Authority board members favored renaming the airport in honor of Shuttlesworth. One-hundred-and- twenty-four readers felt inspired enough to leave comments about their position on the proposal. Of these comments, only fifteen could be classified as positive or neutral relative to the name change. When printed out, the responses amounted to thirty typewritten pages of highly emotional commentary. Much of what they had to say revealed both a deep-seated tension over Birmingham's image and the hyper-racialized nature of the community in 2008.⁸

Several of the readers felt certain that renaming the airport after Shuttlesworth would reopen the racial wounds of the city's past in the eyes of the nation and world. An individual by the screenname of Chandalar9 proposed that the city should "move past this civil rights mess....to shed that image of Birmingham." The poster then added that this image only remained because "racists blacks" would not let it die.⁹ Poster dangriffen obviously agreed, writing that "there is no reasonable meaning in turning all of Birmingham into one big civil rights institute. That will only keep us in the past and hold on to the image that so many are ready to leave behind."¹⁰ Tired of having civil rights related issues being "pushed down everyone's throats," sjlchristian felt that renaming the

airport after a civil rights leader would be “embarrassing” for the city.¹¹ Another poster, hiding behind the pseudonym bteb, saw the proposed name change as only an “attempt to make whitey pay and be reminded of a very negative past.” Further arguing that the city and state are viewed “around the world” as racist and ignorant, this poster felt it more desirable to let the “things” that “happened forty years ago” remain buried in the past.¹² Because, as kwn posted, “There will never be peace until we quit living in the past and CONSTANTLY rehashing it.”¹³

Beyond the theme of reviving a difficult past, other posters saw the issue purely in racialized terms. Their posts, Mayor Langford later confided, reminded him of things he heard in the sixties and thought long since buried. Yet the anonymity of the online comment allowed such “true feelings” to surface once again.¹⁴ Those “true feelings” included outright bigotry, ideas of persecution on racial grounds, and an inability to view anything proposed by a black politician as lacking some sort of racial motivation.

A hint of this has already been presented in the select comments examined above. Bteb’s reference to a black politician honing in on “whitey” and Chandalar09’s rant against racist blacks reveal mindsets tainted by something far darker than anxiety over re-energizing the city’s historical image.¹⁵ The before-mentioned kwn made sure to point out in a second post that the Birmingham Airport Authority board was comprised completely of African Americans who, borrowing a phrase from New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, want to transform the poster’s beloved Birmingham into a “chocolate city.”¹⁶ Others, such as Bamaborn1111 argued that if black city leaders failed to get their way with the renaming, then they would really play the race card and “call in the brothers and sisters” to protest and force the change on area whites.¹⁷ A majority of posters made

some reference to race in their comments. This held true for those few in favor of the change as well as the vast number of readers in opposition. Mzcm70 wrote that the mayor and airport authority would be receiving only “high praises” if they had suggested renaming the airport after a white man.¹⁸ Nitalynn further felt inclined to point out the racial foundation of the discussion by rhetorically asking the anti-Shuttlesworth posters how many places in Birmingham are named for white people.¹⁹

All in all, the local uproar over the seemingly innocent attempt to rename the Birmingham International Airport in honor of a historically significant person revealed the difficulty of dealing with identities and images grounded in a less than complimentary past. In one sense, it proved that many residents of Birmingham still shirk at the idea of revisiting that painful period and the worldwide image associated with it. Yet it shows something far more important, in revealing how the long association with the violently racist image of “Bull” Connor’s Bombingham has shaped modern day attitudes. These attitudes have further influenced the direction of the city, as many locals remain hypersensitive to race and in many cases have grown resentful of anything that seems race related.

Mayor Larry Langford sees this preoccupation with race as manifesting itself in local politics and subsequently affecting the living environments and quality of life of certain Birmingham residents. In making this point, he points to the stark contrast between such wealthy areas of town as the Highway 280 corridor and poorer and blacker areas such as West End and Five Points West. The major differences in appearance in these areas are not so much a product of economic differences but of a sensitivity to race. The black city council representatives often refuse to seek city funds for improvements in their areas

because they know that when they do so, the wealthier and whiter areas will say the money only goes there because the majority black city council and mayor want to send all tax money to black neighborhoods. Instead, as Langford puts it, sidewalks are repaired in rich areas, while “some areas have no sidewalks to repair.”²⁰

Well before the 2008 airport renaming, another example of Birmingham’s acute racialization and reluctance to deal with its past can be found in the city’s development of a museum to honor his city’s place in the Civil Rights Movement. In this instance, local politicians and other urban leaders ventured onto dangerously contested ground by attempting to deal directly with the issue that had stained Birmingham’s image in the 1960s. As an indication of the resistance faced, one can look at the time span from the idea’s approval by the mayor and city council in the 1970s to its actual fruition in the 1990s.

For the briefest of instances in 1979 all seemed right in the world of Birmingham politics. On a late Spring night that year, Mayor David Vann asked the City Council to approve the establishment of a Civil Rights museum in the city. Vann, having been greatly moved by a recent visit to Jerusalem’s Holocaust Museum, and having long-harbored the idea of a museum acknowledging Birmingham’s role in the Civil Rights Movement, realized the power that such institutions can wield in helping a people come to terms with an uncomfortable history. In what was undoubtedly one of the rarer moments of municipal governance in the city’s history, each council member agreed with their mayor’s proposal.²¹ In light of such a harmonious proceeding, one can forgive Vann and the council members a bit of celebration. Their city, already the site of the largest municipal art museum in the Southeast, seemed poised to claim a leadership role

in the public presentation of the region's history as well, exorcise a few demons, and maybe make a few tourist dollars along the way.²² Emboldened, Vann drafted organizational documents and program proposals for the institution.²³ Yet thirteen years would pass before the first patron would enter the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

Not everyone in Birmingham shared the mayor's and city council's elation following the resolution's passage. The unanimous vote, in reality, marked only the beginning of a long struggle within the community over the appropriateness of a museum devoted to what many residents viewed as a chapter of local history best forgotten. Beyond the mayor's office and council's hall, business leaders and many in the wider population proved reluctant to support the funding needed to make the museum a reality.²⁴ These individuals feared reinforcing the stigmatized identity that, drawing off 1963's widespread images of water canons, attack dogs, and bombed-out churches, had taken deep and widespread root in the years that followed. As David Vann later recollected, he quickly learned that people preferred to "put it behind us....[and]....forget about those racial demonstrations."²⁵

In 1979, Vann had misinterpreted the centrality that the race issue maintained some sixteen years after demonstrations and bombs rocked Birmingham. But racial divisions and sensitivities had not disappeared with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, or with the passage of time. To Vann, any lingering doubts that Birmingham had journeyed beyond its racially violent past could be put to rest through the museum's construction. He argued that by placing the struggles of its past within a museum, his present day city could improve its image by highlighting its progress beyond old racial tensions. The city could clearly tell the world "Look that's history. That's not

today.”²⁶ Soon enough, local events proved Vann’s optimistic interpretation of race relations within the city severely misplaced, put his museum push on hold, and ultimately cost him his seat as mayor.

On the night of June 22, 1979, Birmingham police officer George Sands arrived on the scene of a Kingston area convenience store robbery in which a clerk had just been shot in the shoulder. Standing over his wounded co-worker, another clerk pointed out a green Buick in the store’s parking lot as belonging to the assailant. Sands and his partner then approached the car from the rear, ordering its occupant to remain still. In the confusion that followed, the car’s occupant dove downward into the seat and Sands unleashed a barrage of gunfire. When calm returned, twenty-one year old Bonita Carter lay mortally wounded in the car’s seat, shot three times in the back. Carter, who was black and unarmed, had been an acquaintance of the robber, who had ordered her into the car as he ran from the scene in the robbery’s immediate aftermath. Officer Sands, who was white and had a documented history of brutality toward suspects, had ignored the shouts of a group of bystanders who yelled that the suspect had fled on foot.²⁷

The shooting of Bonita Carter reignited smoldering racial tensions in Birmingham just as David Vann was attempting to build a monument to the city’s progress concerning race relations. Waves of protests, cries of a racism, and lack of action by the police department divided the city violently along racial lines. By July 24, demonstrators flooded the streets of the Kingston area demanding justice. When attempting to restore order through a “power sweep” the Birmingham Police Force found its advances met with rocks, bottles, and, at times, gunfire. Ultimately, the police were forced to shoot out

overhead streetlights in order to advance into the community under the cover of darkness.²⁸

Over the next two weeks, the situation turned even uglier, as white groups faced off with black groups nightly in the Kingston area. Late on July 5, riot police were called to the scene as bullets and blows flew between white and black demonstrators. Ten black protestors were arrested, one injured, and claims of police brutality against black residents issued. The next day, Reverend E.W. Jarrett stood on the steps of 16th Street Baptist Church, alongside SCLC president Abraham Woods, both hands filled with spent shotgun shells from the previous night's altercation. The police, Woods pointed out to the inflamed crowd, had arrested only one white protestor during the melee. That night, police arrested eight Ku Klux Klan members for demonstrating in the area in violation of a court order. The next day, two white men suspected of being "snipers" were arrested for pointing shotguns at black pedestrians.²⁹

Local print media provided saturation level coverage of the Bonita Carter shooting and the events that followed. For over a month, one could hardly pick up a Birmingham newspaper without being confronted with some aspect of the tragedy and strained race relations. At the height of the tensions, in the month following the June 23 shooting, forty-nine feature articles, twelve editorials, and nineteen letters to the editor appeared in the *Birmingham News* and *Birmingham Post-Herald*.³⁰ Interestingly, the black press seemed greatly divided on the issue. The more conservative *Birmingham World* virtually ignored the shooting and controversy, printing mention of it only once in a letter to the editor lambasting a *Post-Herald* article that attempted to humanize Officer Sands.³¹ The *Birmingham Times*, by contrast, devoted most of its front page (along with significant

portions of pages two and three) to the shooting and the racial tensions it spawned over the course of the Summer. Here, one could find such dramatic headlines as “Klan Launches Weekend Kingston Invasion” and “Bonita Is Dead...Mayor Does Nothing.”³²

The uproar and racial division spurred by the shooting quickly moved Mayor Vann to authorize a citizens’ committee to investigate the shooting. The racial sensitivity of the situation revealed itself early and obviously in the board’s equal distribution of black and white members. Chosen by Operation New Birmingham (ONB) the eight members ranged from historian of Birmingham Blaine Brownell to ACMHR president Reverend Edward Garner. While the committee had no power to convict or exonerate those involved, it could, if it so chose, make recommendations to Mayor Vann concerning what action he might take. In such a case, Vann agreed to listen to such recommendations, although asserting that the responsibility for dealing with the case ultimately resided with the mayor and police chief.³³ In addressing the committee on its opening day, Vann stressed that “the greatest and primary purpose” for its existence was to supply the public with the facts concerning the case. This, Vann asserted was a duty of “rather unique importance in this city,” as the racially divisive “rumors” as to what occurred could overturn “all the good work” of the previous fifteen years.³⁴ The committee ultimately found the shootings to be unjustified and Mayor Vann refused to dismiss either the police chief or Officer Sands. Instead, Sands was reassigned to a desk job until a mental breakdown on July 31 removed him from active duty.³⁵

Beyond the revelation of festering racial tension within Birmingham in the late 1970s, the Bonita Carter incident also revealed a population’s concern with its city’s image. Newspaper editorials, articles, and letters to the editor by citizens of the city display

evidence of this concern. The name “Bull” Connor, for example, made appearances as citizens and reporters saw the events of 1979 raising the ghosts of 1963.³⁶ Other residents hoped that the naming of the bi-racial citizens council and earnest attempts to deal with this “difficult moment” in the city’s history would show the quality of Birmingham’s citizens and the “greatness” of a city that has “learned to cope with such tensions.”³⁷ An editorial in the *Birmingham Post-Herald* warned of the danger of the Bonita Carter shooting, given the “legacy of our city’s racial history” if authorities did not act quickly and wisely in resolving the situation.³⁸ Likewise, the *Birmingham News* editorialized that the racially violent acts erupting in Kingston were “remnants of an era of police dogs and fire hoses of 15 years ago.” The *News* editor continued that “Birmingham had come too far” to allow this episode to ruin its racial progress.³⁹ A week and a half later, as violence increased in the Kingston community, the *Birmingham News* editors directly related the racial upheaval to the city’s image and past:

Birmingham has been through this kind of messy business before. We know first hand what the costs are in both social and economic terms and in terms of the individual and the community. The city, despite good and positive changes, still suffers from the reputation garnered by violence and confrontation in the ‘60s. We have too much that is positive and good going for us to turn back the clocks....So let’s cool it. Now—before it’s too late.⁴⁰

The next week, the *News* once again warned of dangerous ground Birmingham was traversing in regard to its national image. This time, editors spoke directly of the “stigma” of racial violence that devastated the city in the aftermath of 1963:

Many have probably forgotten or are too young to know the trauma that followed in the wake of violence in the ‘60s. The city’s progress came to an abrupt halt and the economy literally shriveled. All efforts to bring new enterprises to the city were for naught. Some Birmingham based firms actually pulled up stakes and departed. They wanted no part of the

stigma that resulted from violence in the streets, and even numbers of our sons and daughters fled the city for better opportunities elsewhere.⁴¹

It is also revealing that Operation New Birmingham took the lead in putting together the citizens' committee hearings into the shootings. ONB, characterizing itself as "Birmingham's unique, privately sponsored civic action organization," began as the Birmingham Downtown Improvement Association (BDIA) in 1957. That year, twenty-seven downtown business owners formed the BDIA in response to the local construction of suburban malls and the threat this posed downtown businesses. In 1963 the BDIA changed its name to ONB and expanded its objectives to include taking an active role in the city's public relations. Specifically, ONB sought to "reshape the city's image, both in the eyes of its own citizens and in the view of the rest of the country."⁴² Just as the organization's name infers, it has attempted to build a "New Birmingham" from the ashes of the old.

By 1979, ONB had attempted to rehabilitate Birmingham's image among its own citizens and on the national scale through a variety of means. On the local scale, it frequently sponsored pro-Birmingham exhibits at local libraries and museums, speeches at various local venues by political leaders and such famous local products as Jim Nabors, of the *Andy Griffith Show* and *Gomer Pyle* fame, and invented the city's own civic pride holiday in Mayor's Day. The organization also launched "positive thinking campaigns" such as 1967's "A Number One-derful City" essay competition. In an effort to "rebuild self-confidence in their city" local businesspeople procured advertising time on television, radio, and in newspapers for the contest. Ultimately the contest drew over 2,500 entries from around the city.⁴³

On a national scale, ONB attempted to improve Birmingham's image by publicizing positive aspects of the city. In 1968 and 1969, for example, ONB issued numerous press releases through the city's national PR company John Moynahan and Company of New York. These press releases highlighted such positive developments as the construction of new high rise buildings, arrival of major companies, and praise of the city by national political figures⁴⁴ In one attempt to distance Birmingham from the violent demonstrations of its past, ONB made sure to publicize a "paint in" demonstration in which 200 "rich, poor, black, and white" individuals came together to paint murals across the city. Including an image of a psychedelic mural featuring the words "Love, Peace, God, Country, Mankind," the press release stated that "in this age of 'ins'—sit-ins, stand-ins, kneel-ins, love-ins—a new kind of 'in' happened in this week in Birmingham."⁴⁵

ONB's greatest, or at least most vaunted, success in reshaping Birmingham's national image came in early 1971. Since 1968, the organization had been attempting without success to get Birmingham named to *Look* magazine's annual list of "All-America Cities." Finally, in 1970, ONB's Community Affairs Committee submitted a joint application with the Birmingham Area Chamber of Commerce. After reviewing the applications, the declining magazine—this would be its last year of publication—placed Birmingham in its rightful place alongside such other distinctly American towns as Gainesville and Lakeland, Florida, Lumberton and Shelby, North Carolina, Ardmore, Oklahoma, Dallas, Texas, Indianapolis, Indiana, Enfield and Bloomfield, Connecticut, and Fitchburg, Massachusetts.⁴⁶

Following receipt of this "national honor and coveted award," city business leaders partook in a virtual orgy of self-congratulation. The Chamber of Commerce's monthly

magazine *Birmingham* devoted five of eight feature articles to the award in its March issue and eight of fourteen total articles in April. Calling the award a “promoter’s dream come true,” editor Donald A. Brown wrote of the Chamber’s national campaign that would publicize Birmingham’s All-America designation through television, print, radio, and press kits. He further urged “every company in the city” to use the March and April issues of *Birmingham* as “national mailing pieces.”⁴⁷ The Chamber also deemed fit to place a seal bearing the words “Birmingham All-America City” on the upper left corner of each magazine’s cover for the remainder of the year.

In the April issue, editor Brown took a firm stance on the reason why this award meant so much to Birmingham as to justify a second issue devoted to its receipt. As he wrote:

becoming an All-America city is stumbling back into the sunshine after being lost in some abandoned mine shaft....Back in 1963 we were abruptly awakened to learn that our hoop-skirted dreamworld was the fantasy and our secret nightmare was upon us....There are those who still may think of Birmingham as the Tragic City....set them straight with an extra copy of this All-America issue. Spread the word. The Magic is back.⁴⁸

Throughout the pages that followed, magazine writers echoed Brown’s theme, extolling the great progress Birmingham had made since its darkest point seven years earlier. This was, after all a city that even prominent locals had declared “dead” in 1963.⁴⁹ Now the editor of a respected national magazine had asked to come to Birmingham and present it with a national honor. In their eyes, Birmingham was no longer the “doormat” of the “world.”⁵⁰

Thus, through the public relations activities of ONB and the Chamber of Commerce, Birmingham locals had reason to believe their city had made great strides regarding its

image by the mid to late 1970s. Unfortunately, the Bonita Carter shooting and its violent aftermath threatened to overturn that progress.⁵¹ This is what motivated the editors of local newspapers and the mayor to warn in 1979 against the dangers that the controversy potentially held for the city's reputation.

While Mayor Vann quickly moved to contain the damage to his city's image by approving the formation of the bi-racial citizens' committee and implementing procedural changes in police force tactics, he failed miserably at heading off damage to his own reputation. To make matters worse, 1979 was an election year. The outrage caused by the shooting and violent confrontations thereafter, sealed Vann's fate. Ironically, Vann, who had been instrumental in 1963's shift from commission to council form of government that removed "Bull" Connor from office, and had long been a proponent of racial equality, lost support of the black community as well as a significant portion of white liberals. This significant loss of support among his base resulted from the fact that he appeared less than forthcoming with documents requested by the citizens committee and then declined to fire the officer--whom the district attorney had also failed to indict.⁵²

If Vann's handling of the Bonita Carter shooting closed the door on his political career in Birmingham, it swung that same door wide open to his longtime friend and supporter, city council member Richard Arrington. The former zoology professor and head of the recently formed Jefferson Country Citizens' Coalition, rode the crescendo of anti-Vann sentiment to win the election and take his place as the city's first African American mayor in early 1980.⁵³ This mayoral election subsequently made numerous headlines in the national press.

Regardless of what ONB, Chamber of Commerce, and local news editors might think to the contrary, coverage of Arrington's election proved that Birmingham still had a major image problem to kick off the decade of the 1980s. The *New York Times* provided extensive coverage of the late October election, with representative titles in its A section reading "Birmingham, Once a Citadel of Segregation, Elects its First Black Mayor," and "Birmingham Runoff Today Is Focus of Racial Tensions."⁵⁴ The articles, despite having attempted to portray Birmingham as a pacesetter of racial progress, emphasized the city's persistent racial divisions and revealed its inability to separate itself from the image gained in the early 1960s. Reporter Howell Raines wrote that the election "split" Birmingham's "electorate along racial lines" bringing "racial animosities here to their highest pitch since the civil rights demonstrations of 1963."⁵⁵ His series of articles frequently reiterated that 90 percent of the white electorate refused to vote for Arrington.⁵⁶

The local media did not seem to catch on to the significant chance that Birmingham might elect its first black mayor until election night results made it readily apparent that the incumbent was not going to be re-elected. Articles on the October 9 election day in leading newspapers merely listed the candidates along with brief biographical information and voting instructions. The race pitted incumbent Vann against city council members Richard Arrington, Larry Langford, John Katapodis, local attorney Frank Parsons, Grand Dragon of the Alabama Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Don Black, and Socialist Worker's representative Mohammed Oliver. In its election day editorial, the *Birmingham News* made no reference to Arrington and Langford--the two serious black

contenders--in its endorsement of Vann.⁵⁷ The *Post-Herald* printed no editorial endorsement.

On October 10, as the extent of the heavy turnout became apparent and the initial results rolled in, everything changed. Suddenly the significance of what was occurring dawned on the local press, and race became the central topic of discussion in regard to the mayor's race. The *Birmingham Post-Herald*, now touting Arrington as the man "often predicted to become Birmingham's first black mayor," revealed to the public that the councilman had finished a whopping 20,000 votes ahead of his next closest opponent Frank Parsons. Sitting mayor Vann had finished an embarrassing fourth, behind councilman Katapodis, with 15 percent of the vote as compared to Arrington's 45 percent. As no one received over 50 percent of the vote, a runoff between the top two vote recipients would follow on October 30.⁵⁸

The extent of the racial focus taken by the *Post-Herald* and *News* on the day after the election was striking. Every article, with the exception of two small pieces on fringe candidates in the *Post-Herald*, dealing with the mayoral race either centered on or prominently mentioned race.⁵⁹ Articles appeared in both papers dissecting the racial breakdown of the vote. Each ultimately concluded that Arrington pulled the majority of the black and well as a small yet significant portion of the white vote that had supported Vann four years earlier. In some black neighborhoods, the newspapers revealed, turnout approached 70 percent. As one Vann supporter put it, over half of Vann's supporters in 1975 had deserted the mayor in favor of Arrington. This supporter reasoned that this turnabout was solely the result of the Bonita Carter shooting: "It just makes you sick to think that just because of Bonita Carter, all of those blacks could turn against him."

Arrington supporter State Representative Earl Hilliard agreed, stating that “Vann had to have the black vote and he blew it with Bonita Carter.”⁶⁰

Editorials followed suit, emphasizing the magnitude of race in the election and the significance of Birmingham possibly electing a black mayor. The *Birmingham News*, itself having let race dominate the post election coverage, warned its readers against letting race become “the primary focus of the campaign.”⁶¹ Both the *News* and *Post-Herald* cautioned against the “easy temptation” of saying the voting played out on strictly racial lines. Their editorials—in striking opposition to what would come in Raines’s *New York Times* pieces after the runoff election—stressed Arrington’s impressive strength in some predominately white precincts and his failure to dominate some black precincts.⁶² In an interesting aside, one Birmingham resident expressed concern over the election’s influence on the city’s historically battered racial image. Karen Robinson, in a *Birmingham News* letter to the editor, looked with great regret on the mayoral campaign of KKK leader Don Black. In summary, she concluded that his candidacy had damaged the “fine reputation” that the people of Birmingham and Alabama had worked so hard to rebuild after the publicity of the 1960s labeled it as “racist.”⁶³

On a day threatening rain, the turnout for the October 30 runoff election surpassed all expectations. Seventy-one percent of the city’s black voters and sixty-six percent of its white voters cast their ballots. After campaigning on improving the city’s economy and fighting crime in black areas, Arrington defeated Parsons by a margin of 52 percent to 48 percent. That evening, in his acceptance speech, Arrington spoke of the significance of his election to the city’s image. He claimed that the majority’s election of a black man in Birmingham “says more about our city....than all the PR we can do and all the things we

can say.” President Carter echoed Arrington’s words, as he called to congratulate the new mayor shortly thereafter. The president concluded that this was a “great day” for a city whose history was so stained by the racial turmoil of the 1960s.⁶⁴

Local editorials also took on a celebratory tone, feeling that Arrington’s election must reveal to the world once and for all the progress that Birmingham had made since 1963. The *Post-Herald* called his election “symbolic confirmation” of racial progress that was more important than any policy. Under the title “City Wins Election,” the *Birmingham News* wheeled out the old title “Magic City” in lauding the election as confirmation of a “truly new Birmingham.”⁶⁵ Residents such as Jacqueline McCarroll agreed, writing that, for the first time in her life, she was “really proud of this city.” The election, she felt, projected a “new and beautiful image to the rest of this nation and the world.” After this, certainly Birmingham could no longer be “looked upon” as a “non-progressive city” defined by “racial prejudice and unrest.”⁶⁶

Not all within the community shared the local press’s and McCarroll’s opinion that Arrington’s election represented progress or a boon for Birmingham’s image. The negative responses in the press by citizens revealed that at least some of Birmingham’s population could not care less if the city was viewed as racist. One has to doubt that James Thompson, for instance, ever lost sleep over Birmingham being stigmatized as a racist city. After all, on the day that the city elected its first black mayor, Thompson openly argued for a return to racial segregation in a letter to the editor published in the *Birmingham News*. Claiming that both racial majorities and minorities would forever reject the culture of the other, Thompson concluded that the *News* had been terribly wrong in calling for an end to racial polarization during the campaign. The only solution

that made sense in his mind, was a return to “separate but equal.”⁶⁷ Others such as Vera Jones and an unnamed “white insurance agent” found much to fear in the election of a black mayor. The insurance salesman felt Arrington would turn out to be a “racist” who would only push issues important to the black community. Jones, echoing these racially based fears, felt sure that whites would “be left out in the cold.”⁶⁸

As a five term mayor, Arrington often tried to reassure the community against ideas such as those expressed by the insurance agent and Ms. Jones. On occasion, the Mayor felt it necessary to address the topic directly in his yearly “State of the City” addresses. On January 5, 1982 he reminded residents that, as mayor, he “works equally for both blacks and whites.” In the same speech, Arrington further revealed the racialized nature of his city by stating that, in Birmingham, people have an “obligation” to work for a successful multi-racial society. This was required more in Birmingham than other cities, because “no other city in the U.S.” had come farther in regard to race relations over the past twenty years.⁶⁹

Arrington often returned to race relations and Birmingham’s special historical identity in regard to this in subsequent speeches. In 1983, he spoke of how the “burden of past racial antagonisms rests heavily” upon Birmingham. His hope was, in the forthcoming election, to prove to “those who watch us so closely,” that Birmingham had been successful in “surmounting the burdens of her past.”⁷⁰ The next year, Arrington was still hoping that the city could overcome race “once and for all as a matter of controversy and concern.”⁷¹ Unfortunately, as the new decade broke six years later, Arrington conceded that the city was still undergoing “continuing efforts to heal the wounds of the past.”⁷²

One way that Arrington felt he could address these “wounds” of Birmingham’s history was by adopting Vann’s idea of a civil rights museum in the city. As early as 1982, he lent his support to a plan drawn up by a citizens’ committee and presented to the city council. This plan called, once again, for the construction of Vann’s proposed civil rights center. Although all were in agreement as to the soundness of the idea, finances put the project on hold. Quite simply, there were no funds available to build the multi-million dollar project and the idea of a bond issue or tax increase to fund an institute that many in community viewed with suspicion was not a viable option. Thus, the project languished for four years until, in 1986, Arrington formed a museum task force to study the feasibility of the museum and hopefully get it on track to fruition. Led by Odessa Woolfolk, the Director of Urban Affairs at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and Chamber of Commerce President Frank Young, III, the task force included a diverse cross section of Birmingham’s political and social leadership that included African Americans and whites, members of the civil rights movement, radio personalities, and even former mayor David Vann. Many more, however, turned down an offer to serve on the task force. Often, even liberal white business people claimed they wanted no association with what they saw as a very controversial issue with potentially negative connotations for the city. The task force named the proposed center the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, had architectural plans created, and issued a mission statement.⁷³ In addition, Arrington proposed paying for the museum by way of a special bond issue. Over the next four years, the bond issue for the institute was placed on the county wide ballot twice. In both 1986 and 1988 the referendum went down in defeat.⁷⁴

Mayor Arrington had announced his support of the project in his 1988 “State of the City” address. He informed the city that the Civil Rights Institute Task Force would soon be reporting “to the community” on the planned site and building to be placed on land directly south of 16th Street Baptist Church, and west of Kelly Ingram Park. At this time, Arrington portrayed the institute completely in terms of downtown revitalization and made no mention of history or race relations.⁷⁵ This approach changed markedly by the time of his next mention of the institute two years later. In his 1990 address, Arrington threw the full weight of the city’s history and damaged public image behind the creation of the institute. He spoke of how Birmingham had yet to become the “harmonious, inclusive community” that it must if the city is ever to “prosper” and successfully overcome the “perception” of a place that is “not a city of promise, particularly for [the] young minority.” Claiming that “no site in the nation” was more important to the Civil Rights Movement than Birmingham, Arrington chided his fellow citizens to take pride in the June 1990 groundbreaking and support the institute. He closed by emphasizing that no “bond funds” would be used in the institute’s construction.⁷⁶

Later that same year, the mayor created the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Board of Directors from many of those individuals that had served on the Task Force. He chose Mrs. Woolfolk as the Institute’s first president and, along with the city council, accepted a financing plan that drew money from the city and county government and the private sector. The Jefferson County Commission provided the institute with a direct construction grant, while the city shifted funds from its sale of the Social Security Building. Despite Arrington’s claims to the contrary, additional funding was drawn from bond sources. This bond money came from general revenue bonds issued by

Birmingham's Historical Preservation Authority. Additional funding to cover the museum's construction came from corporate donations. When the structure was completed, the city would lease it to the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Inc.⁷⁷

When the Civil Rights Institute finally opened in 1992, it neither swamped the city with negative press nor increased division along racial lines. National press coverage, for the most part, tended to be very favorable. The *New York Times*, for example, lauded the Institute early in 1993. Holding it up as an example of how to positively embrace the city's history, the *Times* pieces revealed the institute as an unmitigated success. Praising the institute as both a museum and an educational enterprise, the *Times* piece conveyed a sense of \$12 million well spent. In the end the city had paid entirely for the construction, with much of the money ultimately raised by the controversial bond issues. As a result, by the end of 1993, the center had drawn some 37,470 visitors from forty-four states and thirteen countries. Further, it had expanded its mission to include hosting human rights conferences, sponsoring historical tours of the Civil Rights district, and conducting educational outreach programs for local and distant school children as well as art exhibits and performances.⁷⁸ All in all, the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute proved to be a model example of a city embracing its past, albeit a troubled and best forgotten past in the eyes of many residents. Instead of looking to history with regret, the Civil Rights Institute celebrated progress and the role the city and its brave residents played in changing the world.

Locally, Birmingham basked in the favorable publicity and potential surrounding the institute's opening. The Chamber of Commerce devoted an article in its *Birmingham* magazine that argued, as institute vice president Abraham Woods put it, that the institute

was a “symbol” to the “nation and world” of how far Birmingham had come since the days of Bull Connor.⁷⁹ The black *Birmingham World* likewise wrote of the city being “praised for its vision,” and the institute’s “boost” to the “city’s image.”⁸⁰ Arrington credited the institute’s opening with bringing “more favorable national and international recognition” to the city than ever before in its history. To him, the press coverage had been “extraordinary.”⁸¹ As the local press reported, he felt that the institute was helping the world “look at Birmingham in a new light” as a “forward looking city” that “has confronted and accepted its past.”⁸²

Unfortunately for the city of Birmingham, Arrington was a bit too optimistic when he spoke of the Civil Rights Institute being such a significant force in altering the city’s established image. Instead, the institute joined such heralded events as Birmingham’s being named an “All-American City” in 1971, and electing a black mayor in 1979 in failing to permanently alter the national portrayal of Birmingham as a city torn by violent racial divisiveness. Part of the rationale for the perseverance of Birmingham’s stigma during and after these events, can be traced to continued media coverage of the city relative to its role in the 1963 movement. This coverage distinguished itself in three distinct forms throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Through the acknowledgement of anniversaries of Civil Rights-related incidents in the city, long-delayed trials stemming from criminal activity during the demonstrations, and simple tying of the city’s past to unrelated events in its present, Birmingham’s violent history has remained firmly attached to its contemporary identity regardless of whatever progress the city might have made with regard to race relations.

Anniversaries

A key way in which the violent racism of Civil Rights era Birmingham is regularly thrust into the national spotlight is through anniversary recollections of the events. The highlighting of tenth, twentieth, and so on anniversaries of spectacular events makes for dramatic television. At times this seems almost as inviting as live coverage of the event itself. Birmingham residents should have been more concerned with the nature of such temporal milestone remembrances than any images the Civil Rights Institute might invoke. Their city did not fare nearly as well when remembered in such light.

September 15, 1983 marked one such anniversary for the city. On that day, twenty years had passed since a bomb ripped through the lower levels of the 16th Street Baptist Church, forever linking the city with the senseless killing of four young girls. This anniversary was not to be missed by the national press, as both television and print media recalled the two-decade-old tragedy and commented on the city's violently divisive history. On *ABC Evening News*, Peter Jennings and Charles Murphy treated viewers to a four minute long segment that highlighted the city's violence and segregation while prominently invoking the words of segregationist Governor George C. Wallace.⁸³

The anniversary-driven recollections did not stop with the church bombing. Approximately two months later, a new round of Birmingham evocations occurred as the media acknowledged the twentieth anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. Dan Rather's guests on the *CBS Evening News*, for example, offered commentary on the violent racism of Birmingham alongside the Bay of Pigs episode, Cuban Missile Crisis, and desire to explore space as among the greatest challenges of the president's tragically short administration.⁸⁴

Such recollections continued each time a ten year milestone offered a new opportunity for news editors to fill time and evoke a sensational event of the nation's past. In 1993 the church bombing once again appeared on the nation's news broadcasts, reminding Americans that thirty years had passed since Birmingham flew into a racial rage. As Tom Brokaw put it, this "was one the most infamous events of the bloody Civil Rights Movement." It was a "story out of America's violent past," it was the story of "the Birmingham bombing." This was a story that occurred in a place where, despite progress having been made, "so much remains to be done." Reporter Bob Dotson made sure to point out that, while Birmingham had elected a black mayor, black city council members, and its police force numbers consisted of over 50 percent blacks headed by a black chief in the years since the bombing, the economic power remained in the hands of whites. With less than 6 black-owned businesses per 100,000 blacks in its population, the city ranked at the bottom of the nation in terms of black-owned businesses. In fact, he claimed it ranked even lower in this category than on that deadly day in 1963.⁸⁵

Yet another anniversary presented itself on May 12, 2001 as the nation recalled the freedom rides of forty years earlier. Once again, Birmingham served as the backdrop for news reports. The *ABC Evening News* briefly recalled the event, focusing a story on the commemoration that had taken place in Birmingham the previous day. With help from violent images of that 1961 day when the Freedom Riders rode into the Birmingham bus station, the news managed to once again link Birmingham of the twenty first century both visually and audibly to its racist past of forty years earlier.⁸⁶

Delayed Justice

Beyond anniversaries, newsworthy events continued to grow from the violence of 1963 in the decades that followed. One means by which this has occurred has been through the ongoing attempts to bring the perpetrators of the 16th Street bombing to justice. The process of doing so turned into a decades-long endeavor that has proven itself ripe with negative publicity for Birmingham.

On February 18, 1976, for example, the nation was reminded of Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church bombing thirteen years earlier. That day, the national news reported on Alabama Attorney General Bill Baxley's reopening of the criminal investigation into the tragic bombing. Walter Cronkite revisited the events of September 15, 1963 on the *CBS Evening News* and informed the American public that an FBI agent had named nine people potentially involved in the as yet unsolved bombing that left 4 dead and 23 wounded.⁸⁷ When indictments and court proceedings followed the next year, the national news embraced the story with a vengeance. From the day of the indictment of Robert Chambliss on September 27, 1977 through his conviction on November 18, ABC, NBC and CBS broadcast sixteen segments on their evening news dealing with the trial.⁸⁸ Each one evoked the events and images of Birmingham in 1963 for the nation to recall. For example, on November 14, NBC's David Brinkley spoke of the opening of the 73 year old hardware clerk's trial while standing in front of an image of the damaged church and recalling the city's deadly violence some 14 years earlier.⁸⁹ Four days later, in a segment relaying the conviction and life sentence of Chambliss, both prosecuting and defending attorneys stressed how the attitudes of city residents had changed since 1963. Prosecutor Bill Baxley claimed that changed attitudes toward race

in the city allowed this conviction and would enable him to bring forth more indictments against Chambliss's co-conspirators in the days to come. Defense attorney Art Haynes Jr. also claimed that Birminghamian's attitudes had changed. Yet he saw this change as damaging to his client's chances. As Haynes put it, "the people of this community...wanted and hoped for [the case] to be solved," putting his client in a "difficult position." They wanted the past put behind them once and for all. The mother of Carol Robertson—one of the young girls slain by the bombing—put it best as she left the courtroom: "Things are better. Things are looking up."⁹⁰

Although things might have been looking up that day in 1977, it took another 22 years for additional indictments to be brought against the co-conspirators Baxley talked so enthusiastically about prosecuting in the afterglow of Chambliss's conviction. The indictments and eventual trials of Bobby Frank Cherry and Thomas Blanton Jr. would, once again, prove too enticing for the national media to pass up. After a litany of delays, competency hearings, and even a made-for-television movie, a Birmingham jury ultimately convicted the two, now elderly, men. Ultimately, for their barbaric actions in 1963, they found themselves sentenced to life imprisonment.⁹¹ While justice was finally served, the coverage of these events once again thrust Birmingham's past into the present of the national and international spotlight.⁹²

The *New York Times* broke the story of the new indictments with a front page story on May 15, 2000. *Times* reporter Robert Slack wrote that the Birmingham bombing held special significance in the history of the Civil Rights Movement "because of the randomness of its violence, the sacredness of its target and the innocence of its victims." He went on to write that Birmingham experienced the "most violent resistance" of the

movement and the bombing had both turned the nation against southern segregation while having “emboldened” leaders of the movement to increase their efforts.⁹³

On the same day that Slack’s front page piece announced the indictments, the *Times* also ran an editorial dealing with the recent developments in the 1963 bombing. In “Alabama’s Long Search for Justice,” *Times*’ editors lauded the “new breed of southern prosecutors” who were willing to reopen civil rights era cases. These prosecutors were atoning for the actions of the past and bringing about the “promise of a new southern justice.” Yet this new justice would not have been required if it had not been for the old leaders—the George Wallaces and J. Edgar Hoover--who condoned racial violence by standing in the way of the legal system. The *Times* condemned these people as having allowed the perpetrators of such crimes as the 16th Street Church Bombing to go unpunished for far too long. This was, after all, “the most heinous crime of the civil rights era.”⁹⁴ Additional front page articles in the *Times* during the trial referred in their titles to “Birmingham’s ’63 Nightmare,” and “the Shame of 1963.”⁹⁵

The *New York Times* was far from the only national media outlet whose attention perked up at the new developments in the old court case. Coverage of the indictments and trials that followed ran the gamut from print to radio to television. On the morning of May 2, 2001, Blanton’s conviction led off as the top story on CBS’s *The Early Show*. The segment featured an overview of the bombing, the prosecution, and interviews with U.S. Attorney Doug Jones, Blanton’s defense attorney John Rollins, and local civil rights activist Reverend Abraham Woods. In a telling exchange, interviewer Mark Strassberg asserted that Rollins felt the conviction only occurred because the “community....felt guilty and wanted to blame someone.” Rollins, far from disagreeing with that synopsis,

admitted that he expected a conviction “because of where we were.” Woods added that the decision was proof that the people of Birmingham were “beginning to come to accord with [their] conscience.”⁹⁶

Likewise, coverage of Cherry’s trial and ultimate conviction kept the image of Birmingham as bastion of violence and delayed justice very much alive into the twenty-first century. Following Blanton’s conviction, National Public Radio reported on the Cherry’s defense strategy of having their client declared mentally incapacitated. On July 16, 2001 this seemingly worked as a Birmingham-based Circuit Judge James Garrett declared the one time Klansman unfit to stand trial as a result of vascular dementia. In response, Abraham Woods commented that the “system seems to have set up a kind of situation where white people can escape when they murder negroes. I feel very sad about that.” NPR correspondent Debbie Elliott then interjected that Woods believes that “Birmingham can’t move beyond its racist past until it deals with all the suspects in the notorious 16th Street Baptist Church bombing case.”⁹⁷

Eventually Birmingham dealt with Frank Cherry. After Judge Garrett’s unfit ruling was overturned, Cherry faced his trial. After deliberating for a total of six and one half hours, a jury of six white women, three black men, and three black women returned a guilty verdict on four counts of murder. The 71 year old Cherry, now claiming that “the whole bunch lied all the way through this,” was led off in shackles to serve a mandatory life sentence.⁹⁸

Unfortunately, Birmingham was not able to “move beyond its racist past” merely by exorcising the demons of Blanton and Cherry. Instead, in a very real sense, the prosecution of the two bombers and the media coverage it received revived

Birmingham's past on a national scale. That is not to criticize the media for covering the trials. By contrast, with the possible exception of Debbie Elliot putting words into the mouth of Abraham Woods relative to Birmingham's inability to "move beyond its racist past," the reporting of the prosecutions proved evenhanded and warranted reference to Birmingham's past.⁹⁹ That that past may be damaging to the public's present perception of the city is unavoidable and must be accepted, as the events in the present are direct carryovers from those historical actions. This represents a way in which the media perpetuate a stigmatized identity in a perfectly legitimate way.

If such negative representations of place always occurred in such a manner--only when events in the present day related directly to the stigmatizing events of the past--then stigmatized identities would likely prove less enduring over time. Yet all too often, current events with no tie to the stigmatizing event of the past are placed in the context of the stigma. That is not to say that there is some conspiracy among journalists to slander and keep the reputations of places such as Birmingham in tatters. To the contrary, this is often done without conscious effort or mal-intent. Over time, the stigmas assume such a central part in the city's identities that the mere suggestion of the city triggers the stereotype created by its historical circumstances. With only a few words related to this stereotype, the journalist can evoke a historical context for the reader in which to place the current activities. The use of such shortcuts is required in modern society, as it is impossible to adequately research and provide comprehensive historical back ground material on each place mentioned in news coverage today.¹⁰⁰ In the case of Birmingham, for example, coverage of a bombing in the city would, most likely, include reference to the proliferation of racially motivated bombings in the city during the Civil Rights era.

This is true, even if the bombing has nothing to do with race or civil rights. Simply put, the combination of the words bombing and Birmingham bring forth images of racism in both the journalist's mind and that of the public. The mention of Birmingham's violent past thus places the modern day bombing in a comfortable historical context. In a very real way, the habitus of the journalist and the reader acts as a limit on the way such a bombing would be reported.¹⁰¹

This was exactly the case with certain elements of press coverage following North Carolinian Eric Rudolph's decision to detonate a bomb at the All Women, New Woman health care center on January 29, 1998. In so doing, the radical "pro-life" activist secured his place in history as having carried out the first abortion clinic bombing in United States history that resulted in a fatality.¹⁰² He also managed to re-associate Birmingham with its violently explosive past.

In its coverage of this terrible incident, the *New York Times* proved commendable. In a series of articles over the following days, journalist Rick Bragg stuck to the issue at hand, impartially relating the circumstance and tragedy of the bombing. He made no speculative connections between the city's history of bombings and this latest blast.¹⁰³ If any fault can be found in the *Times*' coverage, it resides in reporter Kevin Slack's later articles that emphasized the bombing's and bomber's "southern" identity.¹⁰⁴

Print coverage in other large markets lacked the *Times*' tact in dealing with the tragedy. A storyline in the *Atlanta Constitution-Journal* read "Birmingham Clinic Bombing: A City's Past Comes Roaring Back." Reporter Marlon Manuel went on to equate directly the clinic bombing with the city's epidemic of racially motivated blasts from 1945 to 1963. More specifically, he drew comparisons to the 16th Street Baptist

Church bombing of September 15, 1963.¹⁰⁵ On the same day, an equally unfair commentary by Clarence Page appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*. Having recently viewed Spike Jones's documentary *4 Little Girls*, Page directly evoked both the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing and the derisive label "Bombingham." He somehow saw the event as evidence that racial progress in "Birmingham and the rest of the South" still had far to go.¹⁰⁶

Birmingham of Yesterday and Today

With Birmingham's past and that history's representation in mind, one cannot be too shocked at the reaction to Mayor Langford's request to rename the Birmingham International Airport in honor of Fred Shuttlesworth. Birmingham residents, since the 1960s, had grown accustomed to their city being identified as one of the most violently racist places in America. Many among the local population saw no need in their own community calling forth the stigma of their racist past, even if only through a well-intentioned attempt to honor a local hero. Some truly felt that the stigma would never die if the city refused to let the past die. By invoking the painful past, the leaders "only keep us in the past and hold on to the image that so many are ready to leave behind."¹⁰⁷ While this is a valid concern, it reveals a mistrust of history based in a feeling of inferiority about one's own history. The residents who share this view have been told often and loudly that their history is irredeemably stained by the post-war period's worst social sin—racism. Many, in the face of failed attempts to rehabilitate that image, have seemingly come to believe it.

At the same time, bigotry continues in Birmingham as it does in some form or another in every gathering of individuals around the world. One cannot argue that racism did not play a role in the Bonita Carter upheaval, was not an underlying motivation for resistance to the construction of the Civil Rights Institute, and has played no role in the controversy over the renaming of the airport. There is, nonetheless, much evidence to suggest that Birmingham is not the same racist place that it was in 1963. While economic equality in terms of business ownership and income may have lagged behind for many African Americans, one will not find an openly avowed racist such as “Bull” Connor guiding city policy or lingering and blatant examples of racial oppression that so dominated the city Harrison Salisbury visited in 1960. In the place of such things, in the twenty-first century’s first decade finds Birmingham with a black police chief, its third consecutive black mayor, and a black majority city council. Yet, one will also find a Birmingham that remains obsessed with race, ultra-sensitive about its past, and paranoid about national exposure. These characteristics revealed themselves most recently in late 2008, once again due to the actions of Mayor Langford.

On December 1, 2008 Birmingham Mayor Larry Langford was arrested after a lengthy federal investigation into his financial dealings prior to being elected mayor and while serving on the Jefferson County Commission. The FBI claimed to have uncovered overwhelming evidence through a multi-year investigation that Langford had, at the very least, taken \$156,000 in unreported, illegal donations. In the 101 count federal indictment that followed, Langford faced felony charges of bribery, fraud, and conspiracy.¹⁰⁸ While tragic, such news of political corruption fails to reach the level of

surprising in the modern, cynical age. What is revealing about the whole affair is the manner in which Birmingham residents reacted to the news.

Almost instantly after the news broke, local discussion turned toward concerns over image and race. Within twenty minutes of the *Birmingham News* breaking the story on its online site, the first reader comment appeared from a city resident lamenting the fact that the story would likely receive national media coverage. Going under the screenname TGIF0000, the concerned resident wrote “Wow.. just wow... Birmingham will be in the national news probably again... just great...” Others echoed this theme, voicing great trepidation over the idea of Birmingham in the national headlines. Such sentiment could be found in the posting of reader Cutegrma, who asserted that “we don't need more negative news about B'ham or the South on national news anymore!” Another resident of 31 years pondered how long before “this becomes the feature story on Regional the National news? Here we go again!”¹⁰⁹

That resident's worries materialized the next morning, as news of Langford's arrest made for feature news stories across the nation. Such leading newspapers as the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Wall Street Journal*, among others, featured the story prominently in their A sections.¹¹⁰ Yet, in the communications age, the news was an old story by the time the printed papers came out on the morning of December 2. It had hit the Reuters wire by 11:00 am Birmingham time and the Associated Press wire by 9:00 am on December 1.¹¹¹ From that point it traveled around the national and world news sites with alarming rapidity. By 10:00 am central time, an article forward dated December 2, 2008 and detailing the arrest had already appeared on the *New York Times* website. It would appear on the pages of the

newspaper the next morning. By early afternoon, CNN had issued its own story on the Langford situation, although a link to Birmingham's NBC affiliate had been placed on CNN's website for several hours by that time¹¹²

The lightning fast spread of the news did not stop at the national borders, appearing on some international news sites before those in the United States. In the UK, the *Guardian* picked up piece off of the AP feed within hours.¹¹³ Likewise, the French could read of the mayor's troubles by visiting the *International Tribune Herald's* website as early as 9 am local Birmingham time.¹¹⁴ That was about thirty minutes after the poster on the Birmingham News Website had pondered how long the story would take to make regional or national news.

Most of the initial coverage of the Langford story portrayed the city of Birmingham in an objective, straightforward way. References to the city tended to follow the AP wire story in characterizing Birmingham as "Alabama's largest city." Only the *Los Angeles Times* managed to get race into the story on the first day. In that paper's piece, reporter Richard Fausset made clear that Langford was an African American and that, on an earlier occasion, his attorney had claimed the investigation was merely an attempt to "scapegoat" a prominent black mayor.¹¹⁵ In all, as online comments to the Birmingham News reports reveal, local residents proved far more likely to bring up race and the racism of Birmingham's past than did the national media in the aftermath of Langford's indictment. This provides further evidence that the stigmatization of Birmingham has been internalized by many Birminghamians.

As this latest episode reveals, the people of Birmingham have been just as reluctant, if not more so, than the national press to alter their post-1963 perception of the city. This is

in no small part because they have been reminded so often by the national media of their difference or stigmatizing characteristic of racism. It is ironic that Birmingham's lasting image as a racist city emerged from the painful birthing process of a new, post-segregation Birmingham. In a real sense, Bull Connor's water hoses and snarling dogs were a holdover of the old Birmingham in 1963. By the time they were unleashed on protestors, the citizens and civic leaders of Birmingham were already well into the process of rejecting Connor via their approved shift from commission to council form of government.¹¹⁶ While racism carried over, Connor's officially oppressive city ceased to exist with the tragic ignition of Blanton, Chambliss, and Cherry's dynamite on September 15, 1963. Yet the flash of that dynamite also seared into the consciousness of a generation and beyond an image of a place too violent to succeed and too backward to change. It forever colored the events of the present with "the demons of the past," demons that will forever float loudly in the silence of the dead, making "Bombingham" their home.¹¹⁷

Endnotes

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⁴ Robert Gaines Corley, "The Quest for Racial Harmony: Race Relations in Birmingham, Alabama, 1947-1963," Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1979, 132.

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⁷ Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "The Contribution of Spiral of Silence Theory to an Understanding of Mass Media," in Stanley Rothman, *The Mass Media in Liberal Democratic Societies* (New York: Paragon House, 1992), 5-6, 75-84.

⁸ Charles R. McCauley, "Most Airport Board Members Back Move to Add Shuttlesworth's Name," posted on *The Birmingham News: Breaking News*, June 25, 2008. http://blog.al.com/spotnews/2008/06/most_airport_board_members_bac.html. (accessed July 22, 2008).

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¹² Comment by bteb, June 26, 2008 at 11:43 am in response to Charles R. McCauley, “Most Airport Board Members Back Move to Add Shuttlesworth’s Name,” posted on *The Birmingham News: Breaking News*, June 25, 2008. http://blog.al.com/spotnews/2008/06/most_airport_board_members_bac.html (accessed July 22, 2008).

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¹⁶ Comment by kwn, June 26, 2008 at 8:45 am in response to Charles R. McCauley, “Most Airport Board Members Back Move to Add Shuttlesworth’s Name,” posted on *The Birmingham News: Breaking News*, June 25, 2008. http://blog.al.com/spotnews/2008/06/most_airport_board_members_bac.html (accessed July 22, 2008).

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²⁰ Langford, interview by author, 18 August 2008.

²¹ Verna Gates, “The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute,” *Alabama Heritage* 66 (Fall, 2002): 17; Richard Arrington Jr., *There’s Hope for the World: The Memoir of Birmingham, Alabama’s First African American Mayor*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 169. Although Arrington makes no mention of the council’s vote on the formation of a Civil Rights Movement museum in the city, he does reveal that Vann had “began to share” his ideas about the need for such an institution as early as the mid-1970s.

²² Vicki Leigh Ingham, “The Birmingham Museum of Art: A Civilizing Spirit,” *Alabama Heritage* 60 (Spring, 2001): 6.

²³ Arrington, *There’s Hope for the World*, 171.

²⁴ Odessa Woolfolk, interview by author, 12 March 2009; Edward LaMonte, interview by author, 13 March 2009.

²⁵ Vann quoted in Gates, “The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute,” *Alabama Heritage*, 17.

²⁶ Gates, “The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute,” *Alabama Heritage*, 17-18.

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CHAPTER 4

NEVER QUITE AMERICAN: THE DEVIANTLY EXOTIC REPUTATION OF SAN FRANCISCO,

1776 TO 1967

“San Francisco is a mad city—inhabited for the most part by perfectly insane people...”
--Rudyard Kipling, 1891¹

Unlike Birmingham, the pages of *Look* magazine never lauded San Francisco as an “All-America City.” Since initiating the widely publicized award in 1949, the National Civic League never saw fit to bestow the honor upon the bayside city.² Likewise, a search of *Time* magazine over the years reveals that even Las Vegas had one-upped San Francisco in carrying the “All-American” mantle by the mid-1990s.³ As this chapter will argue, it is not surprising that these national publications and “All-America” granting organization have ignored the city in their proclamations of the quintessentially American. Instead, “Baghdad by the Bay,” has, since its induction into the nation, often carried the identity of something exotic and not quite American.⁴

Geographically, modern San Francisco occupies a peninsula defined by the Pacific Ocean, Golden Gate Strait, and San Francisco Bay. It shares this sliver of land with 40 hills reaching heights of up to 1,000 feet. At only 47 square miles total area, the modern city is spatially cramped. In comparison to Birmingham’s 152 square miles and Las

Vegas's 113 square miles, it occupies the smallest physical space of any city in this study.⁵ Yet, as with Birmingham, even smaller geographical segments of the city have contributed disproportionately to its modern identity. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, for example, the Barbary Coast vice district projected a national reputation of an anything-goes type town. Later, in the last decades of the twentieth century, the centrally located Castro District helped project the image of San Francisco as a gay Mecca. This was in no small part due to the former working class, Irish neighborhood's vibrant gay culture and role as seat of the San Francisco gay rights political movement in the late 1970s.⁶

Early San Francisco

In the same year that Thomas Jefferson's quill declared the United States its own sovereign and independent nation, Franciscan monks traveled northward into California from established settlements in Spanish Mexico. Upon reaching one of the greatest natural harbors in the western hemisphere, they stopped to construct a small mission on the shore of Yerba Buena Cove. Compatriots of these early travelers also erected a presidio or fort at the mouth or "Golden Gate" of the harbor. Along with approximately 800 head of cattle, horses, and mules, these missionaries of the faith and a few Spanish cowboys that accompanied them began what would be a largely unprofitable outpost. Over the immediately following decades the Spanish eked out a minimal existence at the far-flung settlement, while members of the native population found their numbers depleted by some three-quarters due to the introduction of disease and forced labor at the

mission.⁷ Nonetheless, these sites were the first European settlements in what would one day become known as the San Francisco Bay area.

It was not until 1835 that an American working as harbor master for the now independent Mexican government that controlled the area threw up a canvas tent supported by four redwood poles. Captain W.A. Richardson christened his new “town” Yerba Buena, or “good herb.” While it was impossible for Captain Richardson to know it at the time, his hastily erected tent would be remembered as the first structure on the present day site of San Francisco, California. Likewise, he could have never imagined how prescient his choice of town names might have been 130 years in the future. Had the Mayor of Yerba Buena not changed the town’s name to San Francisco on January 30, 1847, the hippie movement centered here some hundred and twenty years later could have had yet another tie to “good herb.”⁸

It is such associations that have colored San Francisco’s identity since its earliest days as part of the United States. Although the pre-US settlement of the area shares a tenuous chronological association with the most revered date in the nation’s founding, the identity of San Francisco, has always been tinged with a bit of the exotic. In the modern day, for example, writers of such wildly popular travel guides as Lonely Planet’s *San Francisco City Guide*, characterize the city as a place of “outcasts among outcasts.” Would-be travelers who read such travel guides learn very quickly that, from the city’s entrance into the United States, it has been a preferred place for everyone from “crackpots” to “visionaries” to “Chinese, Irish, African Americans, Australians and Mexicans.”⁹ Such characterizations of the city throughout its history are not abnormal. On the contrary, one can trace this labeling of San Francisco as something different from the time of its

foundation as a Mexican outpost, through its rough and tumble emergence as an American port city, and finally into its twentieth century history of social dissent. As this chapter will show, many perceived San Francisco as deviantly radical long before it earned a mental placement as the nation's and world's preeminent Gay Mecca.¹⁰ This long history of otherness subsequently prepared the perceptual ground in which the Gay Mecca label and reality took root so firmly.

The Mexican-American War of 1846 to 1848 obviously played a central role in the relationship between the city and the United States. This is, after all, how San Francisco became part of the United States. Manifest Destiny, or the belief that the United States was destined by God to stretch across the North American continent to the Pacific Ocean, was in full swing by 1846.¹¹ While the much delayed annexation of Texas into the nation and the resultant border dispute with Mexico marked the immediate events resulting in the outbreak of hostilities, one should not discount the strength of US designs on California. A US diplomatic mission headed by John Slidell had, for example, gone so far as to attempt to purchase California from the Mexicans for the sum of \$25 million in the months leading up to the war. This unsuccessful bid carried the full support and blessing of US President James K. Polk. The president's willingness to fight when Slidell could not reach agreement with the Mexicans on either the Texas border dispute or the California question should also come as no surprise. He had, after all, campaigned on the slogan "54, 40 or fight!" Although this referred to his willingness to go to war with Britain over Oregon's northern boundary, he also revealed the acquisition of California as one of his administration's main goals.¹² Yet beyond Polk's and the public's strong

belief in manifest destiny, one of the oldest motivations in human history also likely contributed to American designs on California.

A mere nine days before the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo brought hostilities with Mexico to an end and provided the US with a bargain basement price on what was to become the southwestern quarter of the nation, James Marshall picked a bit of gold from the American River near present day Sacramento. Soon, news of this discovery blanketed the United States, spread internationally and set off what has been called the greatest gold rush in history. Over 80,000 gold hungry settlers ventured to the state in 1849 along, followed by an estimated 300,000 by 1854. The great gold run of 1849 subsequently placed San Francisco on the map, rapidly brought statehood to California, and helped fill the nation's treasury.¹³

History seldom follows such a neat linear trajectory. The previous chain of events, for example, ignores many key elements of the story. While news of Marshall's discovery in 1848 set off the gold rush, the existence of gold in California actually predated the Mexican-American War; two thousand ounces of the precious metal were shipped to Washington, D.C. from the San Fernando Valley in 1843. The dispatches of US Consul to Monterrey Thomas O. Larkin to his Washington superiors that same year detailing the mineral wealth of California also hint at an earlier knowledge.¹⁴ And there are always the various press reports and rumors linking the name California, the far West, and gold that predated even the Franciscan monks' founding of their little mission by the bay. The *Pennsylvania Packet* and the *New York Journal*, for instance, wrote in 1772 of the reported "immense" riches and gold mines of the California coast. Here, they claimed that "with very little labor, vast quantities of grains of gold have been found."¹⁵

In 1804, newspapers across the nation ran an editorial of British origin warning of the dangers of Napoleon gaining control of “the gold mines of Mexico and California.”¹⁶ By 1819, leading papers were reporting on the vast quantities of gold and silver that “abound in Old and New Mexico.” They went on to write of “immense” gold shipments originating in Santa Fe, while the land of Sonora and California also held great prospective value to Americans.¹⁷ Fifteen years later, while claiming the United States’ mines had the greatest quality gold in all the world, a piece in South Carolina’s *Southern Patriot* and Massachusetts’s *New Bedford Review* referenced the reception of “specimens” of California gold by the Geological Society of Pennsylvania.¹⁸ While many of these claims were directed at what is today Mexico’s Baja California and southern California, they set a precedent of associating the name California and the Pacific Coast area with gold. Then, of course there are the numerous reports of gold in the San Francisco area in 1842. Many of these refer to a “prolific vein of gold extending nearly twenty miles” discovered near the bay of “St. Francisco, in Upper California.”¹⁹ Others tend to be a little more vague, but still equate Mexican California with gold.²⁰

Simply put, the idea of gold and California did not magically come together in 1848 as the Mexican-American War came to an end. The notion and proof of the notion had been floating around for quite some time before Mr. Sutter’s hired laborer pulled a few glittering grains from the river bed. Adherence to this story provides a simple, clean cut narrative for the Americanization of California and, by association, San Francisco. As a sole foundation, the story, although encompassing factual events, becomes mythical in scope. Then myth then provides a romantic element to mining and prospecting. Anyone, even an eccentric carpenter like Marshall, could go out and strike it rich on his own, as an

individual without the burden of indebtedness to others or servitude to the corporate overseer. Such romantic founding myths are key to the development of national and local identities. They provide a place with a sense of destiny, accomplishment, and independence.²¹ In a way, they give the person a quick reference point upon which to base and build their subsequently arising perceptions of a place as needed by intervening historical events.

Perceived as such an independent activity, mining assumed the role of a gamble for many who would decide to head west after 1848. By association, San Francisco itself became something of a gamble. It was the center of golden-hued hopes, serving as an entre-point and service center for those hoping to hit the jackpot in nature's casino. An article on the European press's coverage of the gold mania emanating from California in 1849 directly linked the search for gold to gambling no less than five times.²² And European nations had cause to worry. The goldfields lured Americans, Latinos, Asians, Europeans, and every other shape, form, and culture of human that was ever tempted by riches. The influx of foreign born prospectors brought about by the gold rush was so significant that at least one historian has of the era has labeled it as the instance of "internationalism" that "most boldly" conveyed the "increasingly global nature" of the United States' society in the nineteenth century.²³ Unlike many American cities and regions, San Francisco and northern California thus exhibited a very cosmopolitan character from early on. As Glenna Matthews has pointed out, this cosmopolitanism ultimately became valued for its own sake, prompting a regional consciousness less hateful and suspicious of the "other" in American society. While suspicion and hate were never completely removed from the equation, she presents a strong explanation for a

significant portion of San Franciscans—often at odds with other national groups—displaying a live and let live philosophy. This idea of born cosmopolitanism can also be applied to San Franciscan’s relative acceptance of the “Gay Mecca” label in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.²⁴

Beyond the cosmopolitan seeds it planted, the California gold rush certainly qualifies historically, as Albert Hurtado has argued, as a “great event.” He is on target in arguing that the gold rush “set a pattern of mineral rushes, industrial mining, and environmental despoliation that has marked the West from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day.” Further, his assertion that the gold rush earthquake set off political, social, and demographic tremors that continue to shake the West and wider world” rings true.²⁵

What he could have added was that the gold rush also sowed the seeds of San Francisco’s radical image that took firm root with astonishing speed during this period, and continued to flower throughout the twentieth century.

It is not difficult to imagine what it was like in this boom town and the surrounding environs in the era of the gold rush. By 1850, the young city existed as the United States’ foremost port on the Pacific and boasted a population that was overwhelmingly male and under forty years of age.²⁶ As that year drew to an end, one could count 12.2 males to every female in California. In 1852 this ratio had improved to 5.2 to 1. Yet by the dawn of the Civil War, males still outnumbered females at a rate of over 2 to 1.²⁷

This sexual imbalance highlights the fact that, as a gamble and harsh physical enterprise, prospecting, mining, and seafaring tended to draw from the young, unattached male demographic. This demographic is also the most unstable, in its almost constant search for excitement and various forms of entertainment. The search took on added

impetus if one had been out to sea or out in the wilderness panning for gold for extended periods. Gambling held particular attraction for men who had journeyed to the area with the intention of striking it rich. As one historian has observed, “gambling remained the principal diversion of the great mass of restless, turbulent, gold-hungry men who almost over night had transformed the once peaceful hamlet of San Francisco into a bawdy, bustling bedlam of mud holes and shanties.”²⁸

Gambling was everywhere, with no real efforts at enforcing state control until the 1870s. In the interim, a person could open a gambling establishment anywhere he or she wanted to set up a table.²⁹ As early as 1849, the American press began reporting on “The Revolting State of Things” in San Francisco, where would-be miners had “given themselves up to gambling and drinking.”³⁰ Less than a year later, a dispatcher to Washington, D.C.’s *Daily Globe* had decided that the whole town had been “converted into one large gambling hall.”³¹ Yet, despite a propensity by letter writers and journalists to refer to “drinking and gambling” as the “only amusements” and the “prevailing vice,” at least one more form of entertainment availed itself readily.³²

As one might suspect, prostitution also flourished in the early city. Working women arrived literally by the boat load in the early 1850s. Two thousand disembarked in the foggy western port in the first six months of 1850 alone, principally hailing from France, parts of New York City, and New Orleans. The local *Pacific News* ran a feature in October of the same year, highlighting the expected arrival of another 900 French ladies of “beauty, amiability, and skill.” Unfortunately for many of the miners’ expectations, only 50 of the French ladies actually made the trip. Nevertheless, rumor held that San Francisco had at least one prostitute of every national origin plying her wares in its ever

growing vice district by 1852. This district in only a few years had grown larger than many of the towns that miners and sailors had left in search of adventure and fortune.³³

Considering this state of things, New York's *Evening Post*, as early as 1849, referred to the people of San Francisco as "mad, stark mad."³⁴ They did, after all, choose to live among gambling houses and dens of ill repute that rivaled even "the hells of Paris."³⁵ This allusion to the "hells of Paris" is a prime and early example of giving the eastern reader a metaphorical foundation upon which to build a stereotypical vision of the distant, western city. As journalists and others began to talk about this new and exciting place, they had to come up with proper metaphors or reference points so that the people they wrote to or for might understand its nature more readily. One way to do this was to compare the young city with established urban areas, as the *Post* writer did by evoking the sinful, foreign stereotype of Paris. Another early example of this presents itself in a song written by Caleb Lyon as he prepared to embark from New York on the long journey around the South American continent to San Francisco. In an attempt to place San Francisco mentally, Lyon refers to the California city as "the Naples of the West." Meanwhile the article in which the song is printed, treats destinations such as Nevada as "a home for freedom." This is quite a contrast from San Francisco's link to a foreign city. All the while, the piece always returns to the quite catchy refrain of "to build another empire, to found another state."³⁶

Obviously, San Francisco was not the only American destination cast in terms relative to European sites during the nineteenth century. Promotional literature of the time often talked of western places relative to European ones. For example, one could read of the Rocky Mountains as America's Alps, or the southern California coast as the

American Mediterranean. Yet, as Marguerite Shaffer points out in *See America First*, the drawing of such parallels dwindled considerably in the twentieth century as a means of legitimating American places as tourist destinations.³⁷ Yet San Francisco's Barbary Coast and wider image retained exotic connotations.

The notorious "Barbary Coast" vice district emerged early on to meet the needs of a rapidly growing, increasingly cosmopolitan city already labeled consistently as something other than purely American. Even the name "Barbary Coast" suggests the foreign shores of the distant Mediterranean. One can find mention of the Barbary Coast as early as 1867 in the local *San Francisco Bulletin*. Here the writer sarcastically expounds on the "honest" miner who eventually drifts to the dens of either Pacific Avenue or the Barbary Coast to take part in the type of illicit "amusement" that "he prefers."³⁸ While these types of "amusements" were increasingly coming under attack in the older parts of the United States, in San Francisco of the gold rush heyday, they were widely viewed as the normal accompaniments of a gold dust frontier.³⁹ Such tacit acceptance quickly came under challenge by both city and nation alike, as San Francisco grew and the nation became increasingly self-conscious of its bawdier side.

Within two years, knowledge of San Francisco's exotic district had spread eastward. The reading public in New Jersey, for example, learned of how the city's Barbary Coast was a "haunt" of "Chinamen" and "Mongolians."⁴⁰ Later that week, Macon, Georgia residents also learned of the Barbary Coast's international characteristics. In a more extensive condemnation of foreign immigrants and illicit activities, they were treated to a piece about the smuggling of opium into the area by Chinese immigrants.⁴¹

Throughout the 1870s, the Barbary Coast name appears often in the San Francisco press and occasionally across the nation. During this period it is increasingly tied to the hardships and dangers brought about by vice. Myriad stories tell of the tragic ruin of young people who have ventured to the city from rural America only to have their dreams torn asunder by the vices of the Barbary Coast.⁴² Likewise, in reporting on the assault of a local citizen while visiting San Francisco, the *Arizona Weekly Journal* observed that “it was more dangerous to travel on the Barbary Coast than among the bloodthirsty Apaches.”⁴³ Other pieces, such as one printed in Silver City, Idaho, tie together the danger, vice, and foreign nature of the district. Here the writers inquire as the whereabouts of local citizen Jim Crutcher who has failed to return from a visit to San Francisco. They observe that friends reported him “nearly being Shang-haied by Chinese immigrants and then driven to desperation by the dire predictions of a Barbary Coast fortune teller.”⁴⁴ It is interesting that, by this time, the articles no longer face the necessity of explaining that the Barbary Coast is a center of gambling and illicit sexual activities in San Francisco. Increasingly, as the populace becomes aware of this, simple referrals to the Barbary Coast suffice to elicit the mental dawning of a generalization regarding the area’s stained reputation.

This pattern of highlighting the Barbary Coast’s vice and danger continued in the press throughout the closing decades of the nineteenth century. During the early years of the twentieth century, however, a marked change in the subject matter of the articles takes place. As those elusive currents of reform known collectively as the Progressive Era gripped the nation, San Francisco’s vice district came under increased attack. Thanks to municipal officials who chose to look the other way rather than enforcing laws against

prostitution or other lewd and obscene behavior, the Barbary Coast survived the reformist impulse unscathed until 1913. The lax attitude toward the vice district changed markedly that year, as state business leaders voiced their concern to San Francisco Mayor James Rolph over the possibility of the Barbary Coast's notoriety casting a shadow over the city's Panama-Pacific Exposition planned for 1915. Having donated millions of dollars to the exposition, local business leaders pressured the Mayor to avoid embarrassing the city by cleaning up or shutting down the district. Publisher William Randolph Hearst then got in on the action in September of 1913 by running a series of front page exposés on the Barbary Coast. Less than a week passed after the last of Hearst's exposés before the mayor announced that, under new policies, the San Francisco Police would forbid all forms of prostitution, dancing by females in saloons, and the serving of drinks by females within the district. While the cleanup that ensued proved effective both in public relations and substance, many of the saloons and brothels survived for a least a few more years. Weakened further by the enforcement of California's Red-Light Abatement Law, the remaining clubs ultimately succumbed to police raids in early 1917.⁴⁵

Although the Barbary Coast was one of the most famous of vice districts, virtually every major American city had its vice or red light district by the turn of the twentieth century. In New Orleans, one could gain quite a few stories from a visit to Storeyville. A trip to Chicago's Levee or New York's Tenderloin districts would also provide whatever discreet excitement the otherwise upstanding citizen might be seeking. While the most explicit details of what took place in these districts seldom made it into the public sphere, knowledge of their existence was widespread among adults.⁴⁶ Historian Neil Shumsky argues that Americans, while viewing red light vices such as prostitution

as “evil, animal, and unhealthy,” accepted the practice as inevitable until the earliest decades of the twentieth century. As long as it could be segregated and contained within a physical location and the working class segment of the population, these mid to upper class leaders of American society saw no need to destroy it. In fact, as distasteful as it might be, Shumsky points out that many saw the red light district as a welcome means of controlling those below them on the social scale. The physical boundaries of the district helped distinguish where one belonged in society. If a person crossed the boundary and entered the district, then that person obviously flaunted the established sexual norms and had no place in proper society.⁴⁷

While it is debatable that red light districts served as a marker of social belonging—and absurd to think that none but the working class ever entered them—one cannot deny that they housed the unacceptable, segregated other in American society. While these districts often bordered the central business districts, and conducted business enterprise on a scale that might even have surpassed their city neighbor, they could never be legitimate. Where banking, commerce, and government were respectable American occupations, the equally profitable practice of catering to drinkers, fornicators, and gamblers could never be. These weaknesses had to be separate, spoken of in whispered tones, and labeled as the province of the supercharged sexuality of immigrants, the unwashed, and ultimately the mentally ill. Thus, Shumsky is correct in assuming that the American treated the red-light district as a sort of ghetto. They accepted or ignored its existence until it threatened to “spill over” into their own hallowed space.⁴⁸

Something akin to this fear of “spilling over” underwrote the reform-mindedness that ultimately achieved the closing down of the nation’s red-light districts. Between the late

nineteenth century and the late 1910s, reform movements for public health and morality coalesced in their fight against prostitution and red light districts. A white slavery panic in the early 1910s, in which media outlets cast foreign pimps as kidnapping and forcing young white women of rural origin into prostitution in the nation's cities, added fuel to the drive. It is, however, important to note that urban business interests often resisted attempts to close vice districts. Such districts brought in visitors and profit to many local, non-vice industry establishments. Yet, at times morality outweighed business concerns, and between 1910 and 1917, nearly every US metropolis commissioned panels to study the effects of immorality within their city limits.⁴⁹

Ultimately, Americans embraced a policy aimed at more stringent policing of prostitution, mandatory reporting of the infected, and, in some cases, sterilization. Much of this came about as the result of the new American Social Hygiene Association's (ASHA) leadership recruitment efforts among the medical, scientific, and often eugenicist fields.⁵⁰ The United States military also contributed to the demise of vice districts. With the leadership of its newly created Committee on Training Camp Activities (CTCA) heavily filled with purity and social health reformers, the military launched an all out drive against venereal disease and the solicitation of prostitutes. In the end, the CTCA implemented 5 mile "pure zones" around military camps in which prostitution was strictly prohibited. Beginning in 1917 it also placed heavy pressure on municipal leaders to close their city's red light districts under threat of losing lucrative military bases.⁵¹

That San Francisco had housed one of the best known of all red-light districts served the city no favor in regard to its reputation during such a period of reform. Throughout

the teens and twenties, reformers across the nation often traced their own problems with vice back to Barbary Coast origins. In the process they further stained the name of San Francisco by association. This was exactly the pattern when New York City established a commission to investigate the morality of the city's dance halls in 1912. Mrs. Charles Henry Isreal's Committee on Amusement and Vacation Resources for Working Girls found much to be alarmed at concerning the risqué styles of dancing that had seemingly swept the city. On January 27, 1912 Mrs. Israel presented her findings to the city's Welfare Committee with the recommendation of banning such dances as "The Shiver," "The Bunny Hop," and certain forms of the "Turkey Trot." These "gasp" and "shudder" soliciting dances were said to have originated in San Francisco's notorious Barbary Coast District.⁵² Likewise, a New York settlement house operator listed only by the name Miss de G. Trenholm, proclaimed this "indecent dancing" to stand alongside inefficiency and immodesty in dress as the primary contributing factors to the distressing state of the city's working women in 1912. As Miss de G. Trenholm stated:

we could not tolerate the bunny hop and turkey trot. What a wildly foolish craze for the young people of the Nation to take up! The women could have stopped it. Why didn't they? I hesitate to think. The turkey trot, I am informed, originated in the vicious dives of the Barbary Coast in San Francisco. I find it quite impossible to comment adequately on the state of things which made it possible for such a dance, with such an origin, to be transplanted into the great drawing rooms of our best people.⁵³

While Israel and Trenholm failed to wipe all vestiges of the "indecent" dancing form New York City in 1912, their failure did not stop the emergence of a new anti-dance hall movement in the city in 1924. This time, the reform impetus was aimed at "closed dance halls." These closed dance halls were said to be frequented by "socially undesirable Orientals," and consisted of men paying 4 cents a dance to young ladies. A study by Mrs.

Henry Moskowitz's Commercial Recreation Committee found that 20 percent of the halls permitted "immoral" behavior. Once again the journalist claimed this form of dancing to have been "imported from the Barbary Coast."⁵⁴ Additional articles held up the reform and ultimate closing of all Barbary Coast dance halls as an example of how best to deal with this outbreak of immorality in New York City. At the Barbary Coast, they had found that prohibiting women from sitting in dance halls and from smoking in 1917 helped reduce the amount of dancing until the city ultimately decided to ban women from being paid for public dancing altogether in 1920. While Miss Maria Lambin, who was in charge of the local survey of New York dance halls, conceded that "you can't stop Italians, Poles, Bohemians, and Scandinavians from dancing," they did feel you could regulate the way they danced along the example of the Barbary Coast.⁵⁵

Thus, during the Progressive Era and the 1920s, reform not only came to the Barbary Coast, the Barbary Coast came to reform. The district had gained such a national reputation for vice that, years later, its example as progenitor of questionable activities often underwrote moral reform thousands of miles away. In this regard, the coast served as an easy repository for the sin of one's home. If the home town could somehow be shown as the victim and not the creator or instigator then its central goodness could remain. It was far simpler to throw the blame on an established center of obscenity than to accept that relative standards of morality might exist in one's own city and even among one's own social class. This is exactly what Mrs. Israel meant when she stood aghast at things of "such origin....entering the great drawing rooms of our best people."⁵⁶

Exotic San Francisco

Although lacking the moralizing of the Progressive era and such episodes of the 1920s as the anti-dance craze, the 1930s also witnessed San Francisco's portrayal as deviantly exotic and not quite 100 percent American. One interesting source for this can be found in the earliest in-flight airline magazines. With articles often written with hopes of attracting travelers to destinations in cities serviced by the airlines, these articles tended to be overwhelmingly positive in the descriptions. Yet one does not have to be blatantly negative to portray difference.

Western Airlines began operation in 1925 as Western Air Express when the US Postmaster General awarded the upstart company an air mail route between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles with a refueling stopover in Las Vegas. A year later, the airline would branch out and carry its first load of human cargo along the same route, becoming the first regularly scheduled passenger service in US history. Over the course of the next few years, Western's routes expanded over more of the West and Midwest, and ridership increased correspondingly. By the time the airline celebrated fifty years of passenger service in 1976, it had expanded its routes to include Anchorage, Honolulu, and Mexico City.⁵⁷

Once it had gotten people in the air in the 1920s, Western proved innovative in the field of in-flight entertainment. By 1930, the airline had launched the first ever in-flight magazine. Aptly titled *Speed*, each monthly issue highlighted destination cities along Western's ever expanding routes. These articles are valuable for illuminating contemporary perceptions of various American cities. Most of the early pieces tended to

be written by local boosters with a stake in portraying their city in a positive light. Such bias makes certain references and omissions all the more telling.

One such revelation presents itself in the tendency of many writers to describe their city as quintessentially American. Herbert O. Fischer, for example, the Director of Aeronautics for the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, has no qualms about pronouncing his city as “The Typical American City.” In a virtual laundry list of what he considered to be American characteristics, Fischer related how Indianapolis was the largest inland city in the world, was located nearest the US center of population, had diversified industrial, agricultural, and commercial economic activity, the largest number of automobiles in the US, high homeowner rates, and of course a famous speedway. All of this, he concluded, enabled the Midwest metropolis to take its rightful and destined place in the leadership of American air transport.⁵⁸ Along these lines, in future years he would take to quoting his American-centered city’s former slogan: “there is less wobble at the hub.”⁵⁹

At least two disagreed with Fischer’s proclamation of Indianapolis as the typical American city and eventual leader of the airline industry. An anonymous article in the July, 1931 edition of *Speed* proclaimed Columbus, Ohio as “The American City.”⁶⁰ A similar piece in the March 1933 edition by local resident Oscar Kahan, credited St. Louis, Missouri as the “Thoroughly American City.”⁶¹ Both of these pieces followed the pattern of the earlier Indianapolis feature by extolling what traits made them qualified to be so American. For St. Louis this revolved heavily around being the geographic center of the country. A place where “Eastern thrift, Northern energy, Western enterprise, and Southern hospitality” can come easily together. Likewise, it was if the town had “caught in stone

and steel some quality of purposefulness which is typically American.”⁶² In Columbus, one could look around with nativist pride at the 94 percent of local residents who were born in America. Also, who can argue with it being the largest of the nineteen places named in honor of that exploring Italian sailing under the Spanish flag so long ago.⁶³ Certainly, with such intrinsic characteristics, the city must be exceptionally American.

One would assume that, as San Francisco was added to Western’s destinations early on and eventually became the airline’s corporate headquarters, that some local promoter would have staked a claim in *Speed*’s ongoing contest over the most American of American cities. Not only is this assumption false in that no one ever wrote of San Francisco as typically American, it is doubly false since that even local boosters tended to portray the city as distinctly un-American. San Franciscan Richard O. Jones literally began his July 1931 feature by exclaiming: “The Paris of America....San Francisco!” He went on to write not of any distinctly American attributes but rather the “exotic” nature of a place where “Asia meets the Old West.” This place of cultural melding (or collision, as he is never quite clear concerning that issue) is romantic and wild, harboring “bits of old China,” and “bazaars that rival Gay Paree and Tokio.”⁶⁴

Herbert O. Warren took a similar tack in his description of places to see and things to do while in San Francisco. Just as Jones began by comparing San Francisco to Paris, Warren saw in her hills a likeness to ancient Rome. Here, he told of a fascinating city “born of the sea,” and containing the largest Chinese ethnic settlement outside of the Chinese mainland. He then almost begrudgingly admitted that San Francisco is “essentially an American city.” That is not to imply, however, that the city does not own

its own unique and “old tradition that she’s not likely to forget; a tradition of come what may, let’s live each day to the fullest.”⁶⁵

It is important but hardly surprising that San Francisco never quite made the grade of the “typical” American city in these earliest air travel magazines. That writers from the Midwest showed no hesitation in casting their cities in the all-American glow while San Francisco boosters took an opposite approach can be viewed as evidence that bay area boosters recognized what their city could legitimately be seen as having to offer. They were after tourists and directed their articles whole-heartedly toward this end. Where boosters of Indianapolis, Columbus, and St. Louis also sought short-term visitors, their pieces revealed a greater interest in positioning their cities to make the most of the burgeoning airline industry. While San Francisco boasted of its exotic and unique qualities, the others sought to present themselves as the most convenient and sensible choice through which to move the most Americans in the most efficient manner.

These cities had a distinct profit to be gained from the acceptance of their “normal” nature. San Francisco, on the other hand, had yet to be considered normal and had developed in such a way that any such casting of normality in this regard and at that specific time might not be entirely beneficial.

The Post-War City

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor ushered in quite a few significant changes to San Francisco. Population, industrial development, and technological fields certainly blossomed as the government and private sectors entered into an unprecedented union aimed at defeating their common enemy. The war, in many ways, transformed the West

and its cities. As the late Gerald Nash has pointed out, it brought about a diversification of economic life that both helped dispel attitudes of colonial inferiority and instill a “new self confidence” that all challenges could be met.⁶⁶

One such challenge that San Franciscans would find themselves meeting in the decades following the war was the growing size and increasingly vocal nature of its homosexual community. The origin of this vocal community can also be found in the war years alongside Nash’s proposed can-do attitude. During the war, San Francisco served as a major mustering point for the military. Subsequently, thousands of gay servicemen were processed out of the military into the city over the length of the conflict. Many, from the vast reaches of America, found others like themselves for the first time in their lives. A sense of community subsequently developed, as many of the men chose to remain in San Francisco after leaving the military. These individuals ultimately served as an important boost to the development of San Francisco’s distinctive post-war gay community.⁶⁷

It can also be argued that the shared experiences and struggles of the war created a stronger sense of community on the national and local levels.⁶⁸ Along with this shared sense of Americanness, one can see the increased interest in a common historical background and the growth of a consensus mindset that would dominate 1940s and 1950s academia. In the immediate post-war decade, the idea that Americans’ commonalities greatly outweighed any conflict over differences they might harbor became accepted mantra in such fields as history. This proved a marked contrast to early schools of thought, such as the Progressive historians of the twentieth century’s first few decades,

who based the greatest part of their interpretations on the inherent conflict between classes and ideologies within American society.⁶⁹

This brief historiographical discussion is important because it hints at the wider moods of the nation. San Francisco, a city that had been portrayed throughout its entire existence as exotic and, in many regards, un-American, found itself, in the aftermath of World War II, in a nation swept along by an ideological tide promoting consensus. As a result, two possibilities existed. The nation could shift away from years of accumulated thought about the city and stress its Americanness or it could step up its portrayals of San Francisco as an aberration on the otherwise consensus canvas of America.

Overall, the latter tack proved to be the direction of the nation in regard to San Francisco. In the post war years, beginning with the Beat culture of the 1950s, building with the Hippie and student movements of the 1960s, and culminating with the gay rights advances of the 1970s and 1980s, the more conservative and consensus-loving elements of American society cast San Francisco as radically liberal or just plain strange. Thus, in the post war years, San Francisco would remain a stigmatized outcast, often being pushed even further away from mainstream America than at any point during its pre-war existence.

The first major postwar episode that both drew from and built upon San Francisco's stigmatization presented itself in the mid 1950s. The date was October 7, 1955, to be exact. That night, somewhere between 150 and 200 people gathered in a former automotive body shop on Fillmore Street recently reborn as the Six Gallery. The main entertainment consisted of San Francisco poets Philip Lamantia, Michael McClure, Kenneth Rexroth, and a young unknown New Yorker named Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg's

sidekick and one time Columbia classmate Jack Kerouac refused to read before the crowd, preferring instead to help the crowd and poets gain insight via the multiple jugs of burgundy he brought along for the occasion. So with the mood set and the crowd loose, a bearded Ginsberg shuffled upon the former orange crate that now served as the poet's podium.⁷⁰ And with a howl into that San Francisco night, the poet said that something was terribly wrong with America.

This "Howl" of Ginsberg's can be traced back to an interesting peyote trip about a year before his debut at the Six Gallery. On October 7, 1954, after consuming an unknown amount of peyote in his apartment, Ginsberg proceeded to watch San Francisco's Sir Francis Drake Hotel and the Medical Arts buildings morph into giant incarnations of Moloch, an ancient Phoenician god.⁷¹ Either scared, inspired, or both, he started writing soon thereafter.

With style eerily reminiscent of Walt Whitman's best, Ginsberg's finished prose addressed more than the long-forgotten god of the middle-eastern seafarers that had haunted his peyote vision. Instead, it lashed out a nation wasting away under stifling conformity. Here was one of "the best minds of America wasted" who had been "starving, hysterical naked....looking for an angry fix." He was mad and he wanted his generation to be mad that their ideas and lives were being drowned and silenced by strangleholds of a false consensus society and academia. This America was not the "starry dynamo" that it could be. No, it was an America in which his generation met face to face the "scholars of war....waking nightmares....horrors through the walls....dreams, with drugs....and the sirens of Los Alamos."⁷² Allen Ginsberg was angry with America,

and his anger would be heard far beyond the dusty walls of that old, transformed San Francisco body shop.

In expressing his anger, Ginsberg shocked not only a few people in the crowd, but the nation as well. When Lawrence Ferlinghetti published “Howl” in 1956 as installment number four of his City Lights Bookstore’s Pocket Poet Series the poem’s provocative content gained notice beyond that of poetry enthusiasts. By 1957, the US Government declared the book obscene, charged its publisher with the distribution of obscene material, and had its customs agents confiscate and destroy some 520 copies. With such major news outlets as *Life* and *Time* magazines providing coverage, Ferlinghetti stood trial that summer. Ultimately, the poet/publisher was acquitted with the judge’s ruling that Ginsberg’s poem had some redeeming social value and, as a work of art, was thus not to be considered obscene. In the process, however, San Francisco became forever linked with the birth of the Beat movement and the angry dissidence of youth.⁷³

By 1958, the popular press had firmly established a link between these Beats and the city of San Francisco. Time and again, articles and interviews tied the writers to the city while highlighting their abnormality. *Time* magazine, for example, crowned Jack Kerouac as “patriarch and prophet” of this movement of “mystics” originating in San Francisco’s “smoke filled cellar cafes and cold water flats.”⁷⁴ The magazine then went on to publish segments of a transcript from a recent television interview of Kerouac by Mike Wallace. The highlighted parts include the author of the recently released *On the Road* proclaiming Beatness a religious movement, and at one point, flippantly interchanging the word god and tangerine:

Wallace: What do beat mystics believe in?

Kerouac: Oh, they believe in love. They love children . . . they love women, they love animals, they love everything . . . What I believe is that nothing is happening . . . We're an empty vision—in one mind.

Wallace: In what mind—the mind of God?

Kerouac: That's the name we give it. We can give it any name. We can call it tangerine . . . god . . . tangerine . . . But I do know we are empty phantoms . . . And yet, all is well.⁷⁵

This was dangerous ground for Kerouac to tread in Cold War era America.

Throughout the 1950s, a religious revival of sorts had been ongoing that was absolutely anchored in the post-war world conflict between communism and capitalism. Beginning in the late 1940s and continuing throughout the 1950s, such evangelists as Billy Graham built huge followings by traversing the nation with revivals as heavy on anti-Communist rhetoric as on the supposed word of God. Even President Eisenhower got in on the game, frequently meeting with Graham, becoming the first president to be baptized in the White House, and pronouncing at one point that “our government makes no sense unless it is founded on a deeply felt religious faith.” Only two years before Kerouac equated God with a tangerine, 96 percent of the American people cited a specific denominational affiliation in response to the Census Bureau’s questioning of religious preference.⁷⁶ That same year, a now familiar motto appeared via federal law on all US paper currency. “In God We Trust,” although having been around on coinage—with a few interruptions since the Civil War—now proudly equated America with God on that all important American icon, the dollar bill. Only a few months previously, the Congress had voted to declare the phrase the nation’s official motto and thus place it on all money.⁷⁷ Also in 1954, congress inserted the phrase “under God” into the wording of the pledge of allegiance.⁷⁸

All of this was so successful that one historian of the era writes that religion became “virtually synonymous with American nationalism.”⁷⁹ On the other side of the now God-fearing coin, Communism then became the domain of the atheist. Thus, in this hyper-religious-charged environment, Kerouac’s unconventional take on God could be viewed as un-American. Subsequently, the linking of Kerouac as king of the Beats and the Beats to San Francisco, built upon and added to the already long held perception of San Francisco as a different sort of place than the rest of the nation.

By the time the Beats were firmly tied to San Francisco, both the dissidents and the city were increasingly linked to foreign nations. News article after news article carried on the tradition of equating San Francisco and its odd residents with the foreign and exotic. Readers learned that the San Francisco Beats are like “Francoise Sagan’s generation in France....the angry young men of England, and Existentialists on the Continent.”⁸⁰ Others read that these San Francisco artists possessed the “chi chi of Paris,” whatever that might be.⁸¹ One journalist pointed out that the Beatniks’ style of beard “flourishes not only in San Francisco....but in London, Paris, Rome, and other European cities.”⁸² But then these, “bearded beatnik poets from San Francisco,” were very similar to the twenties “Lost Generation” expatriate who “moodily or talkatively spent his time over his coffee, beer, or absinthe at the Dome or Rotunde in Paris.”⁸³

In San Francisco, the Beat epicenter of North Beach soon housed an establishment even more controversial than risqué than Ginsberg’s poetry and Kerouac’s stream of consciousness writings. In 1964, waitress Carol Doda danced topless atop a piano in the neighborhood’s Condor Club located at the corner of Broadway and Columbus. With her dance, San Francisco laid claim to the nation’s first topless bar. Soon, a large neon

likeness of Doda graced the establishments front, and a number of strip joints lined Broadway. Within five years, Doda had gone bottomless as well and achieved nationwide fame. One could also find Broadway Street characterized as a “Disneyland for Adults,” in the pages of the *New York Times*.⁸⁴ Attempts to shut down the topless bars in the late 1960s and early to mid 1970s drew further national attention. Such well publicized campaigns added to San Francisco’s deviantly exotic reputation by drawing attention to the city as the originator of topless and totally nude dancing.⁸⁵

As heirs to the Beatnicks, the student protestors and hippies of the 1960s cemented San Francisco’s place in the American habitus as an abnormal city. Print coverage of the counterculture tended to portray the city as the center of the movement. Because of such a placement, San Francisco took on such descriptions as “bizarre,” dangerous to “American youth,” and drug infested.⁸⁶ In one loosely veiled drug reference, a young Hunter S. Thompson equated the city to both the drug culture and counterculture while taking time out from writing his first novel to prepare a special piece on the hippie movement for the *New York Times*. To the future author of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury became “Hashbury....the Capital of the Hippies.” He went on to highlight the violence of the Hell’s Angels, and pronounce “most of the people....involved in some way or another in the drug traffic.” In his view, the only people who refused to use LSD and marijuana were police informants and the few others who did not mind being ostracized by the community.⁸⁷ Likewise, *The Atlantic*’s Mark Harris ran a eleven page feature on the hippies of San Francisco. Going into great detail on the history of Haight-Ashbury, Harris concluded that, while there may

be hippies in other places, the Haight “is certainly the biggest, floweriest, and most psychedelic.”⁸⁸

With images and words of the Hippies roaming high and naked through San Francisco, the American public received just the latest indication that something just was not quite normal about the City by the Bay. Since the time of city’s entrance into the United States, this had been the pattern. From boisterous and vice-ridden boom town of the gold rush, to hippie capital, San Francisco never really fit comfortably in the box that American culture proscribed for its urban areas. Perched on the west coast, shrouded in fog, and with its port-induced cosmopolitanism, it could never be Indianapolis with its claim to the center of American population, or Columbus with its boast of a 97 percent American born population. No, San Francisco was different from these “typical American” cities in many ways and, by the 1960s the people of America were well aware of it. In the coming three decades, this awareness of the exotic west coast port would culminate in the physical and mental creation of the nation’s Gay Mecca.

Endnotes

- ¹Rudyard Kipling, *American Notes* (Boston: Brown and Company, 1899), 12.
- ² Gerald Astor, "All-America Cities, 1970," *Look*, 23 March 1971, 72-74; National Civic League, "Past Winners of the All-America City Award," http://www.ncl.org/aac/past_winners/past_winners.html (accessed November, 22, 2008).
- ³Kurt Anderson, "Las Vegas: The New All-American City," *Time*, 10 January 1994, 42-51.
- ⁴ An early and prominent use of the nickname "Baghdad by the Bay," in connection to San Francisco can be found in Herb Caen, *Baghdad by the Bay: The San Francisco Story* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1949). In the modern era, it continues to appear in popular culture. A quick search on Amazon.com, for example, reveals numerous products carrying the nickname. These products include key chains, shirts, coffee mugs, and even songs.
- ⁵ "San Francisco: Climate and Geography," <http://www.city-data.com/us-cities/The-West/San-Francisco-Geography-and-Climate.html> (accessed June 9, 2009); Birmingham: Geography and Climate, <http://www.city-data.com/us-cities/The-South/Birmingham-Geography-and-Climate.html> (accessed June 9, 2009); Las Vegas: Geography and Climate, <http://www.city-data.com/us-cities/The-West/Las-Vegas-Geography-and-Climate.html> (accessed June 9, 2009).
- ⁶ For information on San Francisco's Barbary Coast see Herbert Asbury, *The Barbary Coast: An Informal History of the San Francisco Underworld* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1933); A description of the Castro District's transformation from a working class neighborhood to center of San Francisco's gay community can be found in Randy Shilts, *Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 65-70.
- ⁷ Muscatine, Doris, *Old San Francisco: The Biography of a City from Early Days to the Earthquake* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), 31-34.
- ⁸ Asbury, *The Barbary Coast*, 3-4.
- ⁹ Alison Bing and Dominique Channell, *San Francisco City Guide* (Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2008), 29-30.
- ¹⁰ Paul Welch, "Homosexuality in America," *Life*, 26 June 1964, 66-74. This article was the first in a national publication to cast San Francisco as exceptionally tolerant toward homosexuals and possessive of an exceptionally large gay community. As such, it has been credited as a watershed piece in establishing the city's identity as a "gay Mecca." Martin Dennis Meeker has traced the first published reference to the city as a "gay Mecca" to the same year in William Konrad, *Someone You May Know* (Beverly Hills: Book Company of America, 1965), 114. Quoted in Marin Dennis Meeker, "Come Out

West: Communication and the Gay and Lesbian Migration to San Francisco, 1940s to 1960s,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 2000), 44.

¹¹ For excellent coverage of the Manifest Destiny mindset gripping the United States in the 1840s see David Stephen Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, *Manifest Destiny* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 141-64; Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York: Vintage Books, 1950) particularly pages 38-39, 46-48; Otis A. Singletary, *The Mexican War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 14-15.

¹² Singletary, *The Mexican War*, 10-11, 149-51.

¹³ John P. Reys, *Cities of the American West: A History of Frontier Urban Planning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 194-99; Malcolm Rohrbough, “No Boy’s Play: Migration and Settlement in Early Gold Rush California,” in Kevin Starr and Richard J. Orsi, eds., *Rooted in Barbarous Soil: People, Culture, and Community in Gold Rush California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 25-28.

¹⁴ Gray Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 29-30.

¹⁵ *The Pennsylvania Packet*, 24 February 1772, 2. Accessed at “America’s Historical Newspapers,” http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive?p_product=EANX&p_action=timeframes&p_theme=ahnp&p_nb_id=B50I4ELKMTIzNjI4NTQ5Ni43ODUwNzk6MToxNDoxMzEuMjE2LjE2Mi4yNw&p_clear_search=yes&d_refprod=EANX&. (hereafter referred to as AHN); *New York Journal*, 5 March 1772, AHN. The articles refer explicitly to “the coast of California.” Yet they also reference “Senora” and “South America.” One has to surmise that they are referring to modern day Baja California.

¹⁶ “From the British Press,” *Evening Post*, 7 August 1804, AHN; *New York Herald*, 8 August 1804, AHN; *Enquirer*, 11 August 1804, AHN; *Newburyport Herald*, 14 August 1804, AHN; *Columbian Courier*, 17 August 1804, AHN; *Oracle of Dauphin*, 25 August 1804; *Green Mountain Patriot*, 4 September 1804, AHN.

¹⁷ “Mexico,” *Nashville Clarion*, 27 July 1819, AHN; “Mexico,” *American Beacon*, 16 August 1819, AHN; “Mexico,” *American Mercury*, 24 August 1819, AHN.

¹⁸ “Gold Mines,” *The Southern Patriot*, 15 September 1834, AHN; “Gold Mines,” *New Bedford Review*, 19 September 1834, AHN.

¹⁹ *Sun*, 22 September 1842, AHN; *Madisonian for the Country*, 24 September 1842, AHN; *Berkshire County Whig*, 29 September 1842, AHN.

²⁰ *Ohio State Journal*, 12 October 1842, AHN; *Ohio State Journal*, 14 October 1842, AHN.

²¹ Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco*, 29. Brechin places the romantic myth of mining as a key element of the metallurgy, militarism, mechanization, and finance that undergirds the what he terms the “Pyramid of Mining.” This “pyramid” served as the foundation upon which San Francisco emerged as the leading city of the West, serving as both the imperial spearhead of the once unconquered region and casting and imperial eye toward the Pacific.

²² “The Effect of California Gold News in Europe,” *The Weekly Herald*, 3 February 1849, AHN.

²³ Kevin Starr, “Rooted in Barbarous Soil: An Introduction to Gold Rush Society and Culture,” in Kevin Starr and Richard J. Orsi, eds., *Rooted in Barbarous Soil: People, Culture, and Community in Gold Rush California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 4.

²⁴ Glenna Matthews, “Forging a Cosmopolitan Culture: The Regional Identity of San Francisco and Northern California,” in David Wrobel and Michael Steiner, eds., *Many Wests: Place, Culture, and Regional Identity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 214-15. By relating the idea of born cosmopolitanism to San Francisco’s acceptance of its image as a Gay Mecca, I do not intend to diminish the remarkable accomplishments of San Francisco gay and lesbian rights activists. The idea that San Francisco’s history of diversity eventually contributed to a greater local willingness to accept this national perception of it not to say that the struggles faced by activists and gays in the city were any less daunting and dangerous than those faced in other urban areas.

²⁵ Albert L. Hurtado, “Sex, Gender, Culture, and a Great Event: The California Gold Rush,” *Pacific Historical Review* 68 (February, 1999): 1-2.

²⁶ Asbury, *The Barbary Coast*, 12.

²⁷ Hurtado, “Sex, Gender, Culture, and a Great Event,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 4-5.

²⁸ Asbury, *The Barbary Coast*, 18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁰ “The Revolting State of Things,” *Sun*, 29 March 1849, AHN.

³¹ “Life in San Francisco,” *Daily Globe*, 4 January 1850, AHN.

³² “Interesting from California,” *The Weekly Herald*, 5 May 1849, AHN; “Affairs in California,” *Constitution* (Middletown, Connecticut), 6 February 1850, AHN.

³³ Asbury, *The Barbary Coast*, 34-35.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁵ “Life in California,” *Weekly Eagle* (Brattleboro, Vermont), 25 February 1850, AHN.

³⁶ “Increase in Emigration, The Gold Excitement,” *New York Weekly Herald*, 13 January 1849, AHN.

³⁷ For detailed coverage of the See America First movement and its influence on American perceptions of place see Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

³⁸ “The Honest Miner,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, 28 September 1867, AHN; The second instance of the local newspaper referring to the Barbary Coast shows a bit of ambiguity inherent in the identity process. In “A Good Precedent,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, 11 June 1869, the writer refers to the entire port area of the city as the Barbary Coast without relating it to a vice district. Instead, it speaks of the political power the area has in keeping port charges exorbitantly expensive.

³⁹ Hurtado, “Sex, Gender, Culture, and a Great Event,” *Pacific Historical Review*, 5.

⁴⁰ “Chicago in San Francisco,” *Trenton State Gazette*, 13 July 1869, AHN.

⁴¹ “An Arrival of Chinese: A Curious Scene in San Francisco—Opium Smuggling,” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, 16 July 1869, AHN.

⁴² “A Sad End,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, 20 February 1872, AHN. this piece is representative of many of this genre of tragedy. It highlights the life of Carrie Blaney who arrived in the city with her husband some two years earlier. Unfortunately, Mrs. Blaney succumbed to the temptations of alcohol and found herself living in the Barbary Coast district. Despite the best efforts “to turn her from her downward path,” Mrs. Blaney ultimately fell dead while entering into one of the very “dens” that brought about her sorrow.

⁴³ “Victimizing and Arizona Miner,” *Arizona Weekly Journal*, 1 November 1873, AHN.

⁴⁴ “Jim Crutcher,” *Owyhee Avalanche*, 18 June 1875, AHN.

⁴⁵ Josh Sides, “Excavating the Postwar Sex District in San Francisco,” *Journal of Urban History* 32 (March, 2006): 359; Asbury, *The Barbary Coast*, 312-13.

⁴⁶ Neil Larry Shumsky, “Tacit Acceptance: Respectable Americans and Segregated Prostitution, 1870-1900,” *Journal of Social History* 19 (Summer, 1986): 665.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 665-66.

⁴⁹ Neil Larry Shumsky, "Vice Responds to Reform: San Francisco, 1910 to 1914," *Journal of Urban History* 7 (November, 1980): 31.

⁵⁰ David J. Pivar, *Purity and Hygiene: Women, Prostitution, and the "American Plan," 1900-1930*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002).

⁵¹ John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. 2nd Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 211-12.

⁵² "Social Workers See Real Turkey Trots," *New York Times*, 27 January 1912.

⁵³ "New York's Biggest Problem, Not Police, But Girls," *New York Times*, 4 August 1912.

⁵⁴ "Dance Halls Here 20% Immoral," *New York Times* 1 March 1924.

⁵⁵ "Dance Hall Evils Minimized in West," *New York Times*, 2 March 1924.

⁵⁶ "Social Workers See Real Turkey Trots," *New York Times*, 27 January 1912.

⁵⁷ Sydney J. Albright, "The Fred Kelly Story," *Journal of the American Aviation Historical Society* 13 (Fall, 1968): 198; "Western Airlines Fiftieth Anniversary Program," Elma G. Leland Papers, Box 1 Folder 2, University of Nevada, Las Vegas Special Collections, Las Vegas, Nevada. (Hereafter UNLV SPC).

⁵⁸ Herbert O. Fischer, "Indianapolis: The Typical American City," *Speed*, February, 1931, 16-17. Uncataloged, Delta Airlines Corporate Archives, Atlanta, Georgia. (Hereafter DACA).

⁵⁹ Herbert O. Fischer, "Indianapolis: Crossroads of the Nation," *Speed*, January, 1933, 16. DACA.

⁶⁰ "Columbus: The American City," *Speed*, July, 1931, 8-9. DACA.

⁶¹ Oscar Kahan, "St. Louis—Thoroughly American City," *Speed*, March, 1933, 16. DACA.

⁶² Ibid., 17.

⁶³ "Columbus," *Speed*, 8. DACA.

⁶⁴ Richard M. Jones, "San Francisco: The City," *Speed*, July, 1931, 16. DACA.

⁶⁵ Herbert O. Warren, "Play Days in San Francisco," *Speed*, November, 1931, 16. DACA.

⁶⁶ Gerald D. Nash, *World War II and the West: Reshaping the Economy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990). For additional discussion on the impact of World War II on the city of San Francisco and the state of California see: Roger W. Lotchin, "California Cities and the Hurricane of Change: World War II in the San Francisco, Los Angeles, and the San Diego Metropolitan Areas," *The Pacific Historical Review* (August, 1994), 393-420; Roger W. Lotchin, "The Metropolitan-Military Complex in Comparative Perspective: San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego, 1919-1941," in Gerald D. Nash, *The Urban West* (Mahattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 1980), 19-30; Roger W. Lotchin, ed. *The Martial Metropolis: U.S. Cities in War and Peace* (New York: Praeger, 1984); Roger W. Lotchin, *The Bad City in the Good War: San Francisco, Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

⁶⁷ Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 111-113; Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 113; See also: Allan Berube, "Marching to a Different Drummer: Lesbian and Gay GIs in World War II," in Martin Dubermann, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey eds., *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Penguin, 1989); John D'Emilio, "Gay Politics and Community in San Francisco sin World War II," in Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey eds., *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Penguin, 1989).

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⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Stephen J. Whitfield. *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 87-88.

⁷⁷ See Brent Spence, “Providing that All United States Currency and Paper Money Shall Bear the Inscription ‘In God We Trust,’” House Report Number 662, Committee on Banking and Currency, 82nd Congress, May 26, 1955, 11823, 82-1 (1955) LexisNexis U.S. Serial Set Digital Collection; Public Law 84-140. Signed by the President on 30 July 1956.

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⁸⁰ Joe Hyams, “Good-by To The Beats,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 September 1958.

⁸¹ Howard Taubman, “Spawning Groud of the Offbeat,” *New York Times*, 13 May 1961.

⁸² “The Beardniks,” *New York Times*, 26 September 1963.

⁸³ Herb Lyon, “Tower Ticker,” *Chicago Tribune*, 28 January 1959; Lawrence E. Davies, “Coast Bohemians Feeling Less Beat,” *New York Times*, 14 June 1959.

⁸⁴ Steven V. Roberts, “In San Francisco’s North Beach, the Many Different Worlds and Generations Never Meet,” *New York Times*, 4 November 1969.

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⁸⁷ Hunter S. Thompson, “The ‘Hashbury’ Is the Capital of the Hippies,” *New York Times*, 14 May 1967.

⁸⁸ Mark Harris, “The Flowering of the Hippies,” *The Atlantic*, September, 1967, 63-72.

CHAPTER 5

DANGEROUSLY SICK: THE PERCEPTION OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN AMERICA AND THE RISE OF GAY SAN FRANCISCO, 1945 TO 1965

Upon arriving at a party on the night of January 1, 1965, attorneys Evander C. Smith and Herbert Donaldson noticed something that ought to be completely unheard of in a nation that prides itself on freedom of assembly. Outside of the gathering's location, Smith and Donaldson quickly noted the presence of multiple police cars, with as many as 55 plainclothed and uniformed officers along with numerous photographers stationed around the building. Once inside, Smith and Donaldson learned, from co-host William Plath, that the policemen had previously entered the premises without a warrant or even the request of permission. They had barged into the hall through a side door, as the party was being set up, and proceeded to make a thorough inspection of the entire location.

As Smith and Donaldson were being informed of this, police officers stationed at the hall's entranceway began harassing guests by photographing people as they entered the premises. After confronting the officers about this practice, doormen allowed two additional officers to enter the building and perform another inspection for unspecified reasons. Having found nothing, these two left, only to be followed a short while later by ten to fifteen plainclothes officers who forced their way past invitation checkers and into

the hall. When confronted, these individuals refused either to identify themselves or vacate the premises. At Smith's request, a Reverend Colwell placed a call to the Chief of Police and advised him that "a bunch of hoodlums without the power of speech" had crashed the party.

Shortly after Colwell's call, the front doors burst open and six uniformed officers rushed in. They walked immediately to the party intruders with whom they conferred briefly, before moving to where Smith and Donaldson were standing. Upon reaching the attorneys, a policeman grabbed each of their arms and physically forced them out the door and into a waiting police van. Here, they were joined by a third detainee, fellow attorney Elliot Leighton. The three were then photographed, recorded with a motion camera, and told, after repeated requests, of the reason behind their arrest. At this time a captain informed them that they were being charged with unspecified fire code violations. Later, these charges would be changed to interfering with police officers in the performance of their duty. While at the police booked the men at the station, officers continued to gather photographic and written data on each person attending the party.¹

At first glance one must wonder what the police were so worried about taking place at this party. If it had happened in the early 1950s, one might suspect it was McCarthyism gone wild with police henchmen attempting to deter and identify communist subversives entering some suspected gathering of party faithful. But this was long past the Wisconsin senator's blustering reign of terror. Likewise, if it were not in San Francisco and the names were not English, one might easily surmise it was an event from some distant nation held in the grips of an oppressive dictatorship. Instead, the photographic record taking and strong-arm tactics that night was aimed at citizens of the United States

exercising their constitutional protected right of assembly within the United States. Their only deviance, relative to the time in which this harassment took place, resided in their sexual orientation. Because of their homosexuality, the partygoers that Smith and Donaldson attempted to protect that night had been labeled just as deviant and subversive as the communists of McCarthy's era or the freethinkers of the totalitarian regime.

Smith and Donaldson had been summoned to the party that New Year's night because trouble with the San Francisco police had been expected. The two attorneys had been retained approximately six months earlier by the Council on Religion and the Homosexual, a non-profit organization aimed at fostering dialogue between the city's gay population and its religious leaders. Their attendance at the ball had been requested because Council leaders felt a strong need to have "on the spot" legal advice concerning party goers' rights at the Mardi Gras Ball.²

In the days leading up to the Ball, the hosts had much reason to suspect the worst from the San Francisco police. Two leading members of the council had visited the police department on December 28, to discuss the upcoming gathering with the chief of police. This desire to meet with the chief grew from police having contacted California Hall management with a request to cancel the upcoming fundraising party. Instead of gaining their desired audience, Reverends Ted McIlvenna and Cecil Williams found themselves "put on the rack," and interrogated by the vice squad for "getting mixed up with a bunch of queers." The policemen also told them that if the party was held, arrests would be made indiscriminately, without care that the judges would later just throw out the charges.³ This threat proved to be far from empty.

Ultimately, the charges were dropped and, after a nine-year legal battle, the arrested attorneys received a favorable judgment for wrongful arrest.⁴ But the importance of this episode is not that some semblance of justice was finally served. Rather, the way in which these individuals were treated simply on the basis of association with homosexuals reveals a deep and dark discriminatory vein in American history. That this vein exposed itself in San Francisco as late as 1965 shows the drastic need for the Gay Rights movement that was to follow. In San Francisco, this movement would play out over the next fifteen years in such a way that a city already considered exotic or abnormal would become equated with homosexuality on a scale matched by no other city in the nation or world. The following material lays the groundwork for understanding San Francisco's stigmatization by more traditional and conservative-minded elements of the American population in the 1970s and beyond. Ideas espoused in 2009 concerning same sex marriage, traditional values, and sin have a long pedigree.

Perception of Homosexuality in Mid-Twentieth Century America

In a nation where, by the 1950s and 1960s, the all-American icon was John Wayne and masculinity-dripping westerns dominated popular entertainment, the idea of the homosexual American just could not fit.⁵ The American male was the bread winner of the suburban family. He was the fighting man returned home from the battlefields of Europe or the Pacific islands to form the backbone of the fight against international communist aggression. To be gay would be, by the views of the day, to be ill, weak, and dangerously un-American. The basis of the homophobia that a large segment of the

American public subscribed to at mid-century, and also displayed by the San Francisco Chief of Police in his harassment of Smith and Donaldson, has a long historical pedigree.

Over the past two hundred years, particularly with the rise of the professional mental health industry, the classification of the homosexual has emerged. That is not to say that same sex carnal acts and meaningful relationships did not occur before the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Instead, as sociologist and historian Michel Foucault has pointed out, the act of sodomy became the “species” of homosexuality during the nineteenth century. Before that, while the acts may have been illegal in many places, they were treated and dealt with as crimes committed by an otherwise normal person. Once punishment was dealt out and adequately observed, the person, while possibly a criminal, was not deemed to be a member of a separate sexual identity group.⁶

This all changed with the advent of the modern mental health profession. At that point, mental health practitioners sought to categorize and label behavior and deviance. Once labeled, the deviant group could be studied to find its traits, proclivities, and possible causes of the condition. Eventually, those belonging to the homosexual group would thus be categorized as mentally ill. Once the illness had been created for the world and diagnosed in the individual, then mental health professionals could set about curing it.⁷

Thus, in Foucault’s opinion, homosexuality did not, and could not have existed as a “species” of humanity before being specifically labeled as such. While he is correct about this in the linguistic sense and in the sense of classification being used as a tool of power, one should not go too far with the idea that homosexuals were not classified and ostracized long before being labeled as deviants in the medical or psychological fields.

There is a long history of segregation and oppression against the “sodomite” well before German-Hungarian journalist Karl Maria Kernbury coined the term homosexual in 1868.⁸ While it is important to note that sodomite did not historically mean the same thing as the modern usage of homosexual, the active homosexual, nonetheless would have been considered a deviant sodomite.⁹

Dating back to the Greco-Roman period, one can find evidence of homosexuality, albeit by different names. During this early period, the practice seems to have been entirely acceptable as long as it did not threaten conventional gender ideals. In the Judeo-Christian lineage the homosexual faced a much more challenging existence. The story of Sodom’s destruction for its wickedness and perversion seems to underwrite the basis of future Christian, Muslim, and Jewish homophobia. Also, such condemnations of homosexuality in the Old Testament as found in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 have served as a religious basis of homophobia until the present day.¹⁰

Between the writing of the Old Testament and the present day, much history has passed, and along with it, many chapters in the western perception of homosexuality. From the rise of Christianity, one can find sodomy associated with the persecution of male-on-male sexual acts. During the middle ages, the Roman Catholic Church defined sodomy in canonical law as any non-procreative sexual act between members of either sex. This included, and was often used interchangeably with, any sex act between males. By the thirteenth century reign of Pope Gregory IX, sodomites were publicly categorized as “abominable persons,” and were being burned at the stake by 1292.¹¹

Homophobia colored the Renaissance as well, as homosexuals found themselves increasingly punished for being heretics, witches, disloyal, and the cause of natural

disasters and disease. While it is true that an increased discussion and literary production on sexuality occurred during this period of rebirth, some of which even celebrates homoeroticism, the prosecution of sodomites increased concurrently. Likewise, the Enlightenment period produced much literature in opposition to homosexuality and only a smattering in favor of it. During this period one sees state laws drawn up to punish homosexuals in addition to existing religious prohibitions. Subsequently, between the mid eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, homosexuals were arrested, convicted, and in some instances executed at a greater rate than in any other period.¹²

Beginning in the Victorian era, literary expression of same sex love increased, as such writers as Walt Whitman explored homosexual relationships in published writings.¹³ Yet at the same time, oppression of the newly named homosexual continued. Oscar Wilde's trial and conviction in 1895 for "gross indecency" with a member of the same sex stands as a perfect example. In an attempt to head off this conviction, Wilde attempted to equate his activities with those of the ancient and enlightened Greeks. Although things Greek held a vogue status in Wilde's circle, his judge felt that Greek acceptance of same sex eroticism bore little influence on the laws of the day. He sentenced Wilde to two years of hard labor.¹⁴

By the 1920s, the term homosexual came into popular usage in the United States. In the decades that followed, homosexuality in the US stood primarily as a "perversion" to be punished, cured, and, in some instances, pitied. It was not at all unusual for a period textbook on human sexuality to cast the homosexual as "abnormal," "unfortunate," and "aggressive," with a "distorted sexual mind and soul."¹⁵ This mindset dominated until the late 1960s and remains an acceptable view in certain circles.¹⁶ Further, the fear that

homosexuals are a danger to American society and culture is nothing new on the North American continent. One can find punishment for same sex acts, with the well being of the status quo in mind, dating back to the early days of Massachusetts Bay Colony. As Governor John Winthrop wrote, concerning the execution of one William Plaine for sodomy: the “dreadful” acts “tended to the frustrating of the ordinance of marriage and the hindering of the generation of mankind.”¹⁷

A substantial public discourse of the issue of homosexuality first occurred in the United states during the late 1940s and 1950s. Contextually, this time frame for the increased discourse on sexuality makes perfect sense. During the 1930s, the family had suffered tremendously as a result of the Great Depression. In many instances, husbands had by choice of circumstances deserted families, birthrates had decreased while divorce rates increased, and many desperate people drifted from the countryside to cities in hope of opportunity. World War II further strained the American family and normative sexual practice and roles as millions of young men left home and family to serve. On the homefront, gender roles meshed as women undertook formerly male jobs and managed the households. Meanwhile, the growing urban population and segregation of males in military service helped spawn a gay subculture. After the war, this far more visible community would coalesce in urban areas around the nation.¹⁸ As mentioned in the previous chapter, San Francisco served processing point of homosexuals out of the military. As a result, thousands stayed, giving a great boost to the vibrant gay community that would emerge in the post-war period.¹⁹

With this strain on traditional family values, homosexuality emerged as never before as a topic of discourse in the American the public sphere. Three specific events

combined to bring the anxiety building over sexual identity to the forefront at this point. These were the publication of Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Cold War paranoia against nonconformity, and the publication of the Wolfenden Report in Great Britain.

Few would have guessed at his birth that Alfred Kinsey would one day help spark the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. Kinsey, the son of the very religious Alfred Sequine Kinsey and Sarah Ann, seemed destined and pushed to follow his father into the field of engineering. Ultimately, when the young Kinsey decided to forsake the study of engineering after two years for his love of biology, a split developed between father and son that could never be reconciled. The elder Kinsey eventually refused even to attend his son's commencement ceremony.²⁰ One wonders if he could have had any indication of the future direction of his son's endeavors.

Those endeavors led Alfred Kinsey to shock the nation with a very controversial book in 1948. While employed as an entomologist and zoologist at Indiana University—he had joined the faculty here in 1919 after earning his doctorate at Harvard and advanced to full professor rank by 1929—Kinsey began the Institute of Sex Research or, as it would become known, the Kinsey Institute, in 1947. With the release of *Sexual Behavior*, he quickly became famous—or infamous in many circles—as a result of the book's controversial claims regarding the sexual proclivities of American males. He would also publish the sequel *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* through the Kinsey Institute in 1953.²¹

Kinsey's more astounding claims, to his contemporary Americans, dealt with the topic of sexual orientation. Previously, public discussion of this topic bordered on the

taboo, with whatever attention it received limited to snickering discreet conversations or the medical/psychological fields. Yet here was an esteemed professor of biology claiming that the majority of the male population has had some sort of homosexual experience during their lifetime. With his findings, Kinsey did no less than alert the American public that many of their dispositions toward homosexuality were, in fact mistaken. As one participant in the study put it, Kinsey's name "became a household word" as his findings "simply blasted this damn country wide open."²²

One can only imagine the public's surprise to read that homosexual play between American preadolescents is, in fact, more common than heterosexual play. A full 60 percent of the individuals who contributed their histories to his study recalled homosexual play of some degree during their pre-adolescent years.²³ Further, 10 percent of the adult population continued to have engaged in homosexual acts into adulthood. Shockingly, while adult males in urban areas were more likely to have experienced homosexual activities during their lifetime than individuals in small farm eastern areas, those in very rural, large farm western areas of the country were the most likely to have taken part in homosexual activity. In effect, Kinsey's data showed that the supposed masculine and virile westerner was more likely to be gay than even the stereotypically effeminate eastern urbanite.²⁴ When these revealing statistics combined with the contemporary historical context of events, it seemed as though American masculinity was very much endangered.

On the heels of Kinsey's claims about American male sexuality, the increased discussion of homosexuality at this time had much to do with contemporary politics and fears spurred on by the Cold War climate. In the aftermath of World War II, American

politics became defined by a series of symbolic dualisms. In this climate, a person could, for example, be either “soft” or “hard” on communism. “Soft” took on a feminine characterizations, while “hard” represented masculinity. Increasingly, during the late forties and fifties, this dichotomy of hard and soft dominated the political discourse in the United States.²⁵

In the political and economic climate of post-war America, the virile masculinity of the American male had taken on increased importance. Some historians have argued that, with the rise of suburbia, the organization man, and the increasing shift from the industrial to the service-oriented economy, a crisis of masculinity emerged in the 1950s. As a result of this crisis, the masculinity of the American male was exaggerated in an attempt to prove its remaining vitality. Any challenge to this masculinity, such as homosexuality, subsequently came under increased attack. This anxiety over manhood combined with the threat of communist expansion and infiltration into American society to create an atmosphere conducive to the greatly increased oppression of the homosexual.²⁶

Beginning in 1950, homosexuals in the United States came under direct attack from their government, as members of the United States Congress asserted direct links between homosexuality and disloyalty. The *New York Times* led off this embarrassing episode with a piece on March 1, 1950 that addressed government investigations into disloyalty following the conviction of Alger Hiss. Appearing before the Senate Subcommittee on Appropriations, Deputy Undersecretary of State John E. Puerifoy replied when asked that ninety-seven state department officials had recently resigned while under investigation. Most of these, Puerifoy added, “were homosexuals.”²⁷

In the weeks to follow, McCarthy would attempt to root out homosexuality as well as disloyalty, never hesitating to link both labels if politically expedient. Only eight days after the *Times* first reported the tie between the investigated and homosexuality, one can find the Wisconsin senator playing the now hot homosexual card by charging an unnamed “high state department official” with having used his office’s influence to have a “flagrantly homosexual” worker reinstated to a job he had previously been removed from.²⁸ The next week, in a new accusation, McCarthy claimed that a former state department official, whose name he only released in private to certain members of the subcommittee, had been discovered to be homosexual by Washington, D.C. police and removed from his position in 1948. Now, the senator had learned, the disgraced man had gained new employment with the Central Intelligence Agency. This could not be allowed to stand, according to McCarthy, because “perverts” were security risks based on their susceptibility “to blackmail.”²⁹ Ultimately, McCarthy eased off on public pronouncements against homosexuals in government. Historian David Johnson suggests that McCarthy’s status as middle-aged bachelor played into his decision to tone down his anti-homosexual rhetoric, as it left him vulnerable to the possibility of highly damaging—even if baseless—questions regarding his own sexual orientation.³⁰

The government persecution of homosexual employees did not stop with McCarthy and the United States Senate. On March 20, 1950, the House of Representatives got involved as New York Representative John J. Rooney charged laxity in rooting out homosexuals from ranks of the Commerce Department. Subsequently, the department fired 27 individuals for homosexuality.³¹ Not to be outdone by his colleague from New York, Representative Arthur L. Miller of Nebraska stood before the House a few weeks

later with a self-professed desire to “strip the fetid, stinking flesh off of this skeleton of homosexuality.” Only his concern for the “delicate” nature of the topic and sensibilities of those in attendance persuaded him from exposing “all the putrid facts” about the “several thousand” homosexuals working for the government. One has to wonder what his speech would have been like if he had not toned it down, considering he still referred to the homosexual as a “bull dicker,” “fairy,” “pimp,” and “sex pervert” who enjoyed forays into “pederasty,” “necrophilia,” and “pygmalionism,” among other interests. Having his crowd properly titillated, the representative then proceeded to explain why homosexuals must be rooted out of government employment:

I sometimes wonder how many of these homosexuals have had a part in shaping our foreign policy. How many have been in sensitive positions and subject to blackmail. It is a known fact that homosexuality goes back to the Orientals, long before the time of Confucius; that the Russians are strong believers in homosexuality, and that those same people are able to get into the State Department and get somebody in their embrace, and once they are in their embrace, fearing blackmail, will make them go to any extent. Perhaps if all the facts were known these same homosexuals have been used by the Communists.

I realize that there is some physical danger to anyone exposing all of the details and nastiness of homosexuality, because some of these people are dangerous. They will go to any limit. These homosexuals have strong emotions. They are not to be trusted and when blackmail threatens they are a dangerous group.³²

A month later, Republican Party Chairman George Gabrielson, in a public show of support for the wave of homophobia raging through congress, wrote of the “homosexual angle” in his party’s first newsletter of the year. To him, these “sexual perverts” who had infiltrated the government “were as dangerous as communists.”³³

Others in government, such as senators Lister Hill (D-Alabama) and Kenneth S. Wherry (R-Nebraska) certainly agreed with chairman Gabrielson. Jumping on the anti-

gay bandwagon, the two senators launched a private investigation into the threat of homosexuals employed by the federal government. After interviewing Washington, D.C. vice cops, the two senators ultimately decided that approximately 3,500 homosexuals held positions in the government, with 300 to 400 of these being in the State Department. Such claims proved incentive enough for a Senate hell bent on rooting out disloyalty to launch an official investigation into the supposed danger of gays in government on June 7, 1950.³⁴

The senate released its finished report, “Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government,” on December 15, 1950. This report served only to fuel the flames of the anti-gay hysteria already gripping Washington, D.C. First, the committee never seriously considered that homosexuals might not be sexual “perverts.” According to their definition of perversion including any “unnatural” sex act, they quickly deduced that all “homosexuals are perverts.”³⁵ Having already labeled them as perverts, the government never really considered that the employment of homosexuals might not constitute an actual problem. Instead, they presupposed that homosexuals employed by government were a major problem and set out to find ways to eradicate those already in service and to avoid the hiring of others.³⁶

The report went on to label homosexuals as unfit for government employment on the basis of two broad reasons. First, as “sex perverts,” they are “generally unsuitable” for government employment. The senators grounded this designation of unsuitable on multiple criteria. Homosexuals, they felt, were criminals as their sex acts were illegal at the time. As such they could not hold government jobs. Beyond this, they “lack [the] emotional stability” required for vital government service. Furthermore, as if the

preceding condemnation was not enough, they were accused of a proclivity to “entice normal individuals” into their “perverted practices.” The senators obviously saw the presence of homosexuals as a dangerous contamination. After all, “one homosexual can pollute a Government office.”³⁷

Second, the senators believed homosexuals to be security risks. Basing this conclusion on testimony from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Central Intelligence Agency, and various military intelligence divisions, the senators felt that “the lack of emotional stability that is found in most sex perverts and their weak moral fiber, makes them susceptible to the blandishments of the foreign espionage agent.” One could not be worried enough about the communist agent using knowledge of an employee’s homosexuality and “perverted practices” as a tool of blackmail. The senators went on to list just such an example, as the Russians used first-hand knowledge of Austrian counterintelligence chief Alfred Raedl to force him to supply the Russians with Austrian military secrets in 1912.³⁸

The senators proved a bit less certain concerning how many of these “unsuitable” “security risks” were in the employment of the government. They did conclude that the military had an unusually high rate of homosexuality, with 4,380 individuals being removed from duty between January 1, 1947 and October 31, 1950. During the same time, 42 civilian employees of the military and 574 members of the civilian government lost their positions on the basis of sexual preference. As for the government workers, it is important to note that actions against 382 of these individuals were taken in the seven months preceding the publication of the senate’s report. An additional 69 cases were under active investigation for homosexuality.³⁹

While the senators were limited from establishing precise numbers regarding homosexuals in government by the fact that only those who had suspected or removed could be counted, they were far more certain as to ways the government should deal with gays and avoid hiring them in the future. First, any homosexuals discovered must be removed from government service. This had been the universal policy of the military since 1949. Further, the rules and regulations of the Civil Service Commission for government employment specifically provided for dismissal on the basis of sexual perversion. To avoid future problems with gays in the government's employment, the senators ultimately endorsed stricter adherence to hiring regulations, thorough investigations of those suspect and public dismissal of those proven "perverted."⁴⁰

By the early 1950s, the mainstream American press has also picked up on the McCarthyist theme of the dangerous and deviant homosexual. In one 1951 example of this, *American Mercury* commentator Alfred Towne warned of the infiltration of homosexuals into the field of intellectual production. In his view, homosexuals had dominated playwriting and production. Mr. Towne wrote direly of how young writers would find themselves susceptible to gay sexual advances in order to get their plays produced. In the end, after invasive revisions, the plays would be unrecognizable to even the original writer. The plays, in Towne's view, had to "conform" to the "new taste" of the international gay "coterie" that had secured control of such "cultural outlets." Ultimately, he foresaw the "corruption of all aspects of American society," because of these homosexual mediators of American discourse and culture.⁴¹

Even as McCarthy-era hysteria over homosexuality began to subside, another wave of homosexual awareness entered the American public sphere by way of coverage of

homosexuality in Great Britain. *Newsweek* kicked off this second wave of publicity with a short piece titled “The Homosexual Issue.” This article, blatantly equating homosexuality with the sexual abuse of minors, highlighted the increased concern in Britain over male on male cases of “indecent with minors,” following rumors of such activities by royal family member Lord Montagu of Beaulieu.⁴²

The subsequent arrest of Montagu increased the “already existing state of outrage and alarm—in papers” over the perceived spread of homosexuality in the nation. The qualifier “in papers,” proves of importance, as the remainder of the *Newsweek* piece devoted itself to condemning the liberality of the British people regarding the sexual preference. Although the author made sure to point out that Britons opposed child abuse, he felt no qualms about using a *New Statesmen* quote to sum up the “tolerant attitudes” of most toward homosexuality. There he stereotyped the British population as believing that “there should be no penalties attached to adult males consorting together, in private, who decide to lead a homosexual life.”⁴³

The concern raised in Great Britain by this episode along with the arrest of several actors on charges of homosexuality eventually resulted in a public storm of discussion and interest. A piece in the *New Republic* pointed to the increase in homosexual offenses in England and Wales from 1280 in 1938 to 5,443 in 1952. Each police court, by the mid 1950s publication of the article, annually listed over 600 cases dealing with homosexual activity on their dockets. Nonetheless, despite this focus on the prosecution of gay citizens, the author stressed that the British public seemed to be increasingly accepting of homosexuals in their midst. He made sure to point out that anti-homosexual laws dating

back to the 1880s became the object of public scorn in Britain, rather than the homosexuals themselves.⁴⁴

In recognition of all this excitement, Parliament asked the British Medical Association to conduct a study on homosexuality and report on how outdated laws concerning it might be changed. The eleven-man committee of physicians and psychiatrists revealed their findings in the *British Medical Journal*. While they consented that Parliament could rescind laws against the private practice of homosexuality between adults, the report cautioned that laws prohibiting sexual relations with minors and public displays of homosexuality should remain. It also drew into question the loyalty of the nation's estimated 500,000 gay men. The committee advised that these individuals could not be trusted to place national loyalty above loyalty to other homosexuals. Thus, they cautioned that "the existence of practicing homosexuals in the Church, Parliament, Civil Service, and Armed Forces. . . .constitutes a special problem."⁴⁵

The author of a *Time* magazine report on this study interpreted this to read that homosexuality was rampant in Great Britain. In an adolescent volley aimed at showing homosexuality as foreign and the British as more likely to be gay than Americans, the *Time* correspondent wrote that: "Though often too polite to mention it, many an American returns from Britain convinced that in some of London's best circles homosexuals are as common as sin and nearly as popular. Even the British have lately gotten around to discussing" it. The author had little to say in response to the British Medical Association's point that the recent Kinsey Report had estimated that 10 percent

of the American population of adult males had been homosexual for at least three years of their life—a far greater percentage than they estimated for the United Kingdom.⁴⁶

By 1957, the British House of Commons finished its own three year in the making report on homosexuality and prostitution. *The Wolfenden Report* as the committee's finding became known, once more ignited a storm of controversy both on the British Isles and across the Atlantic in its former colony. The *Report* found much wrong with a system of law that could sentence an adult male to life imprisonment for consensual sexual relations with another adult male in the privacy of their own home. Committee members also addressed laws that punished prostitution by a maximum fine of less than three Pounds. The committee recommended that the unworkable and outdated laws be repealed and replaced with contemporary laws that decriminalize homosexual acts between consenting adults over the age of 21. Further, these new laws should include stiffer penalties for prostitution, including jail for persistent offenders. Finally, Committee members concluded that, regardless of common belief, homosexuality was not a disease, existed among all classes from the “intelligentsia” to the “dullest oafs,” and as it was practiced by only a “small minority” of the public, should be viewed in proper perspective.⁴⁷

Again, a flurry of activity in the American press following the *Report*'s publication chose to deal with this by dwelling on homosexuality as a “problem” condoned by the British and European populations. In so doing, the media increased the perception of gays as something un-American and dangerous. Both *Newsweek* and *Time* carried stories asserting that the majority of Britons supported changing the laws. From the Church of England to virtually all important newspapers, the law, rather than any increase in

homosexuality, seemed to be the problem.⁴⁸ *The Christian Century* stated outright that the decision to decriminalize consensual homosexual rightfully created “shock among confidently moral Americans” at the British government. The British had created “panic and fury” among the good people of America by “tampering with the familiar outlines” of those things by which individuals judge “their own and others’ goodness.”⁴⁹ Only *The New Yorker* proved a bit more tolerant of the British, pointing out that the Wolfenden Report echoed a liberal perspective that did not speak for all British subjects. In fact, they concluded, it seemed an urban view, as the countryside offered far more opposition to decriminalizing homosexuality. Interestingly, they even offered Gallup poll numbers, showing that thirty-eight percent favored revising the laws relative to forty-seven percent who favored keeping them as written, with the remaining fifteen percent undecided.⁵⁰

With the British public discussion of homosexuality and the McCarthy era hearings having thrust the issue of homosexuality into the American public sphere, press stories on the formerly taboo subject increased markedly. Repeatedly throughout the 1950s, the American press struggled with defining homosexuality while all the while casting it as a danger, deviance, psychological disorder, and foreign infection of American society. In the midst of the British homosexual debate, the American press expressed great shock upon learning that the all-American “home of the rugged Westerner,” Boise, Idaho could actually have an underground homosexual population. Again equating homosexuality with the sexual abuse of children, a *Time* article conveyed a sense of outrage following a “succession of arrests” that reigned in men charged with “infamous crimes against nature,” and preying on teenage boys.⁵¹

For many Americans not yet ready or willing to discuss such things publicly, even this limited and negative coverage of homosexuality crossed the line of propriety. This backlash was particularly evident following one enlightening episode of NBC's *The Open Mind*. Although the network had planned to devote two episodes of its television show to the issue of homosexuality in America, a public displaying anything but an open mind quickly voiced its opinion following the first episode. NBC received such a large volume of complaints following the first airing, that network officials decided to cancel the second segment outright. As one commentator wrote, the public was so "outraged" by the first program that they demanded that, in the future, homosexuality "should be dealt with exclusively" in a more private manner.⁵²

The supposed danger presented by homosexual students also came under review during the mid 1950s. Even scholarly articles in the field of education warned that these younger homosexuals, posed great threats to others if their "psychotic condition" went without correction.⁵³ At the same time, other writers in the popular press questioned aloud "What is a Homosexual?" *Time* writers--once again drawing conclusions from the "wide-open" homosexuality discussion in Britain--responded to this question by asserting that homosexuals "did not have overdeveloped breasts," had "pubic hair...in a normal male pattern," and had not suffered in disproportionate numbers from head trauma. They were, however, predisposed to having inappropriate sexual relations with youths when serving as scoutmasters.⁵⁴

Homosexuality was, after all and according to much of the popular and professional view, some sort of "extreme medical disorder," most likely of a mental character.⁵⁵ As a mental illness, others argued that despite "recent misleading propaganda" claiming

homosexuality as both hereditary and incurable, with proper care homosexuality could be reversed. *Time* magazine wholeheartedly lent its support to the theories of Psychiatrist Edmund Bergler's contemporary *Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life*. Bergler claimed that homosexuality develops from learned experiences, primarily occurring in early childhood. He argued that with proper intervention, the "inner guilt" supporting such learned behaviors could be reversed in over 90 percent of adult homosexuals. Thus, the vast majority of homosexuals could be cured of the mental illness that precipitated their homosexuality.⁵⁶

Throughout the first half of the 1960s, this pattern of viewing homosexuality as a curable mental defect dominated popular discourse on the subject. By mid-1960, *Newsweek* still focused on the *Wolfenden* Report, with a short piece on how many in the British public wished to decriminalize homosexuality but the House of Commons still considered it a topic "too hot to handle." Predictably, the author found cause to interject that Frenchmen are just as likely to be homosexual as Englishmen. Likewise, he made sure to point out that Americans detest this "abnormal sexual" lifestyle.⁵⁷ The same magazine further sounded the alarm about a year later, by proclaiming that as many as one American soldier in twenty-five was a gay. According to chief psychiatrist Ben Karpman of Washington's St. Elizabeth's Hospital, the Army's desire to court martial all of its gay soldiers was "cruel," as "these people are sick" and in need of treatment.⁵⁸

Such views were, not, however, universal. In 1963, a sympathetic and forward-looking *Harper's* article by William J. Helmer offered an alternative view of homosexuality. Helmer, after spending much time with members of New York City's gay population in preparation for the article, concluded that gays did not have insatiable

appetites for perversion, were not overwhelmingly feminine, and could be just as well adjusted and successful in life as their heterosexual counterparts. Further, while Helmer left open the possibility for a “cure” of homosexuality he insightfully argued that if such a cure existed, as many psychiatrists claimed it did for those who “sincerely want to change,” then few if any homosexuals truly desired it.⁵⁹

The coverage of homosexuality in the popular press soon returned to its normal state following the hiccup of the Helmer piece, as articles from the last months of 1963 through 1965 continued to highlight the abnormality and danger of the practice. One could read of how homosexuals had become a “problem” in New York City. Categorized as ill and uncontrollably promiscuous, the homosexuals were said to hang out and work in bars with ties to the Genovese crime syndicate. There was hope, however, as one homosexual man had “achieved good progress toward cure” under psychological treatment.⁶⁰ Still, homosexuality was seen as a “problem” and burgeoning efforts by homosexual groups to gain recognition were deemed disturbing. Meanwhile, reports of curability continued unimpeded but increasingly tempered by alternative voices. Dr. Wardell B. Pomeroy, an associate of Alfred Kinsey and member of the young Mattachine Society board of directors, stated forthrightly that homosexuality was a preference, not an illness.⁶¹

Robert McCorkle and Max Doyle undoubtedly wished that someone of Dr. Pomeroy’s tolerant mindset had been serving on the grand juries that indicted them of committing homosexual acts with one another that same year in North Carolina. McCorkle, after confessing to his homosexuality, received a sentence of five years imprisonment. The more recalcitrant Doyle chose instead to plead not guilty and was

surprised to be sentenced to “not less than 20 or more than 30 years in prison.” The 1837 law used to convict and ultimately sentence Doyle read:

Any person who shall commit the abominable and detestable crime against nature, not to be mentioned among Christians, with either mankind or beast, shall be judged guilty of a felony.⁶²

In 1964, his criminal act—a single homosexual act with a consenting adult—was also considered a misdemeanor in New York, and punishable if performed publicly in twenty-four additional states.⁶³

Finally, *Time* opened its 1965 coverage of gays with a piece aptly titled, “Psychiatry: Homosexuality Can Be Cured.” This article highlighted the views of Philadelphia’s Dr. Samuel B. Hadden on the curability of homosexuals. Hadden accounted for the strikingly low rates of “cures” for homosexuals as a product of homosexuals’ reluctance to enter treatment. Homosexuals, Hadden contended, “actually believe they are happy and satisfied they way they are.” Further, he felt that the resultant low conversion rate between homo to heterosexual had left psychologists and psychiatrists depressed and feeling ineffectual. This mindset, he argued, ultimately made them reluctant to accept homosexual patients, and thus lowered the numbers of successful conversions even further.⁶⁴

Such was the state of American discourse on homosexuality at the time of Smith and Donaldson’s arrest that January morning in 1965. While they were not arrested for being homosexual, as was still possible in the United States in 1965, the two attorneys were singled out for their actions in support of a supposed deviant, dangerous, and sick segment of the population. That same year, one could still find homosexuality listed alongside such disorders as schizophrenia, paranoia, and depression in the *American*

Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychological Disorders.

Likewise, one could still find instances of individuals being placed on lists of questionable and untrustworthy citizens. The state of Florida, for example, unveiled a list of 123 teachers suspected of being homosexual in 1964. This list was the final result of a three-year, \$500,000 investigation originally aimed at rooting out communism in the state government and university system. The pamphlet produced by the commission was, itself, declared obscene and removed from circulation by the state government as it displayed two men kissing and contained “erotic” terms.⁶⁵

Psychologists and psychiatrists meanwhile went on attempting to “cure” homosexuals by a variety of means. These included, marriage, shock therapy, group counseling, and simple repression of desires.⁶⁶ At the same time, police continued to harass otherwise innocent citizens and legislators continued to use homosexuals as straw men to whip for the nation’s ills. But change was also brewing by 1965. The next ten years would witness vast, if incomplete, alterations in the circumstances and perception of the American homosexual. By 1973 the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. Less than two years later, the American Psychological Association went even further by reiterating the psychiatrists’ stance that homosexuality did not constitute a mental disorder and publicly denouncing discrimination against gay Americans.⁶⁷ As the 1970s unfolded, homosexuals would march openly through the streets of many US cities, proudly proclaiming their sexual preference. Along the way, they would make great strides in gaining equal rights and acceptance as practitioners of a legitimate lifestyle. In the midst of this transformation, San Francisco emerged as the center of the gay rights movement in America. As such, it

would to play a central role promoting the acceptance of gays in American society, and earn an identity as the nation's gayest city.

The Early Gay Rights Movement and San Francisco

The gay rights movement was thrust into the limelight in New York City June 27, 1969. That day, in much the same manner as had happened a continent away and five years before at the California Hall, police raided Greenwich Village's Stonewall Inn. As one historian of the ensuing Stonewall Rebellion has claimed, "Stonewall was the shot heard round the world" relative to gay rights. In New York that day, homosexuals who had tired of oppressive treatment and undue surveillance responded violently. For two nights, an estimated crowd of 2,000 fed up citizens battled 400 of New York's finest. Where the stigma associated with being outed kept many of the gay attendees at the California Hall four years earlier from actively resisting police oppression, this was a new day. As such it was a "symbolic end" to the homosexual acceptance of victimization. This was the beginning of a new phase in the homosexual struggle for acceptance.⁶⁸ Shortly there after, many of these same gay and lesbian New Yorkers founded the Gay Liberation Front and gave birth to the term "Gay Power." This idea quickly found a receptive ear in cities around the nation.⁶⁹

While the cry may have gone up first in New York, it would be San Francisco that would emerge from the 1970s as the city renowned for pushing the envelope concerning gay equality. In San Francisco, gay rights organizations had been fighting for recognition for many years by the time New York's Stonewall patrons decided they had had enough. As early as the late 1940s—despite still recurring police crackdowns—the city had

gained a reputation among homosexuals as one of the gayest in the United States.⁷⁰

Beginning the 1950s, the work of San Francisco gay rights organizations would help bring this image to the wider American public.

The Los Angeles-based One, inc., the Daughters of Bilitis, and the Mattachine Society would form part of the early triumvirate of gay rights activism. This early activism, although conservative by later eras' standards, paved the way for the gay rights gains of the 1970s and beyond. It did this by embracing first and foremost a strategy of promoting discourse on homosexuality in the public sphere beyond the tired and overused gay man as danger style article. This would be accomplished via each organization's publication of periodicals and constant criticism of the mainstream press over how they portrayed gay Americans.⁷¹

The Mattachine Society had originated in Los Angeles in 1951, with a leadership comprised of Left Wing sympathizers and, in such instances as Henry Hay, Communist Party members. Using organizational skills gained in previous political activities, these organizers implemented a cell-like structure to protect members against exposure. They directed their actions at publicizing the gay lifestyle to prove that it was not all about sex but rather was a distinct community with its own culture and positive values. With such recognition, Mattachine hoped that not only would the straight public accept homosexuals, but that homosexuals themselves could overcome their internalized stigmatization and shame. This shame, with acceptance, could be replaced with a pride common to all distinct communities.⁷²

Despite the climate of oppression fostered by the excesses of early 1950s McCarthyism and the homophobic attitudes it fostered, the secretive Mattachine had

expanded into the San Francisco Bay area by 1953. From the beginning, the San Francisco foundation differed from its southern California originator. Here, local lesbians took a far more active role in both the leadership and rank and file than in the male-dominated cells of Los Angeles. As a result, its membership grew at a greater rate. Also, the San Francisco element took on responsibility for publishing its own magazine, the *Mattachine Review*. This also added to the group's visibility in the gay community, resulting in further increased membership. Ultimately, the San Francisco branch so outgrew its Los Angeles counterpart that by 1956, it became the organization's national headquarters.⁷³

A few months earlier, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon decided, following a suggestion from friend Rose Bramberger, to become the first members of a social club for lesbians in the San Francisco Bay area. Such clubs fulfilled an important function for gays and lesbians in the 1950s, as socializing in public could often be a dangerous undertaking. Inspired by Pierre Louys's poem "Songs of Bilitis," with its character who lived on the Isle of Lesbos, the group chose the name Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) for their new organization, and elected Del Martin as president and Lyon as treasurer. The DOB then held its first official meeting on October 19, 1955 at the home of Marcia Foster. Although intended as an avenue of socializing, the group's weekly meetings would invariably turned toward problems faced by the women because of their lesbianism.⁷⁴

By late 1955, Martin, Lyon and other early members had decided to take the club in a more political direction. Having recently become aware of the Mattachine Society in San Francisco, the ladies decided to pattern DOB's transformation after this pace-setting forerunner. Its statement of purpose proclaimed four goals for the organization:

“Education of the variant....Education of the public....Participation in research....and investigation in the penal code.” In October 1956, the DOB began its attempt to educate both Lesbians and the general public with its publication of a 200-copy run of what became the nation’s first large-scale distribution Lesbian periodical, the *Ladder*.⁷⁵ From here, the DOB would go on to become the premier lesbian rights organization in the nation. Within two years, and with help from *One Magazine* and the Mattachine Society, it could count chapters in New York City, Los Angeles, and Rhode Island. Soon chapters spread farther to include Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Detroit, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Portland, and San Diego.⁷⁶

Over the course of the next decade, the local DOB and Mattachine Society worked tirelessly to gain positive exposure for the gay community and break down stereotypes and bigotry by educating locals and the rest of the nation on its true nature. Such education was certainly needed during this period in San Francisco, as anti-gay activities by municipal authorities seemed to reach an all time high. For example, in 1959, after Mayor George Christopher’s opponent in the upcoming election, Russ Woolden, accused the mayor of being soft on homosexuals, Christopher’s police force cracked down on gay bars citywide. Woolden, in his attacks on Christopher, claimed that homosexuality and such newly arrived advocacy groups as the Mattachine Society and DOB would “subvert public morals and change our entire societal structure to the point that homosexual activities will be regarded as normal and harmless....Organized homosexuality in San Francisco is a menace that must be faced today.”⁷⁷

Ultimately, Christopher won his re-election over Woolden and the DOB and Mattachine society found their stature among the city’s gay population greatly increased

thanks to the publicity generated by the campaign and Christopher's crackdowns on gay establishments. Then, in 1964, their tireless efforts to educate the public on homosexuality paid dividends on a national scale. That year, *Life* magazine published an article titled "Homosexuality in America" that was monumental in providing a new representation of gay life and helped establish San Francisco as exceptionally gay-tolerant to the American public.⁷⁸

Many in the gay rights movement and at least one historian have credited the "media spectacle" that accompanied the publication of "Homosexuality in America" as a watershed moment in the decision of many gays to migrate to California.⁷⁹ At the very least, it represented a very important moment for the representation of gays. For the first time, the mainstream media portrayed gays as a community with all the relative interests and problems that plague other recognizable social groups. Missing was the characterization of homosexuals as sick, deviant, or dangerous. Interest in the topic also proved heavy as the issue sold out within two days in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Nationwide, it sold a very impressive 7.5 million copies in its run and went on to be published in *Life's* international edition.⁸⁰

While the *Life* article provided a sense of legitimacy and normalness to San Francisco's gay community, it did not magically heal old rifts or bring an end to homophobic mentalities discussed in this chapter. These attitudes would persevere in the face of acknowledgment of the city's large homosexual population and the gains in gay political rights made in the city during the 1970s. These characteristics of post-war San Francisco, combined with the already existing pre-war perception of the city as exotic and not quite American helped solidify rapidly the city's identity as a Gay Mecca. As

will be shown, San Francisco, as both Gay Mecca and engine of the Gay Rights Movement, subsequently became a primary battleground in the culture wars of the 1970s and beyond.

Endnotes

- ¹ Evander C. Smith and Herbert Donaldson, “Chronology of Events Occurring in Connection with Arrest of Above Individuals on January 1, 1965,” Evander Smith—California Hall Papers (GLC46), Box 1, folder 4, The James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library (Hereafter listed as JCH-GLC); Committee for the Mardi Gras Ball, “Here’s What REALLY Happened....,” press statement, January 2, 1965. Evander Smith—California Hall Papers (GLC46), Box 1, folder 5, JCH-GLC.
- ² Smith and Donaldson, “Chronology of Events,” Evander Smith—California Hall Papers (GLC46), Box 1, folder 4, JCH-GLC.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Friedman, Sloan, & Halvonk, to City Attorney’s Office, Evander Smith—California Hall Papers (GLC46), Box 1, folder 30, JCH-GLC.
- ⁵ Excellent explanations of the Western’s popularity in mid-twentieth century America and its echoing of masculinity obsessed society can be found in: Jane Tomkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Michael Coyne, *The Crowded Prairie: American National Identity in the Hollywood Western* (London: I.B. Taurius, 1998); John H. Lenihan, *Showdown: Confronting Modern America in the Western Film*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980); Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998). A thorough and informative study of John Wayne’s life and relation to American identity can be found in Ronald L. Davis, *Duke: The Life and Image of John Wayne* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).
- ⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*, Vintage Books Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 36-38.
- ⁷ Foucault, History of Sexuality; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Second Vintage Books Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 197-216, 249.
- ⁸ Bryne Fone, *Homophobia: A History* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 4. The word homosexuality was coined by German-Hungarian journalist Karl Maria Kertbeny in a, 1868 letter to Karl Heinrich Ulrichs. It was used again by Kertbeny in a pamphlet against Prussian antisodomy laws later that year and then, in an article by German sexual theorist Karl Westphals in 1869. It made its first appearance in English in the 1883 essay “A Problem in Greek Ethics,” by John Addington Symonds. The first American usage of the word seems to be by Dr. James Kiernan in his article “Responsibility in Sexual Perversion,” published in the May, 1892 edition of the *Chicago Medical Recorder*.

⁹ John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 30-31.

¹⁰ Fone, *Homophobia*, 7-8; Leviticus 18:33; Leviticus 20:13. In the King James Version bible, Leviticus 18:33 warns that “Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind: it is abomination.” Likewise, Leviticus 20:13 goes on to repeat the warning and proscribe a degree of punishment: “If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.”

¹¹ Fone, *Homophobia*, 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹³ Witman’s “Calamus,” poems addressed the topic of same-sex relations. Scholarly examinations of Whitman’s writings in regard to homosexuality can be found in: Betsy Erkill, “Whitman and the Homosexual Republic,” in Ed Folsom, ed., *Walt Whitman: The Centennial Essays* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994), 153-71; Bryant Gamin, “Heroic Spiritual Grandfather: Whitman, Sexuality, and the American Left, 1890-1940,” *American Quarterly* 52 (March 2000): 90-126; John Champagne, “Walt Whitman, Our Great Gay Poet?” *Journal of Homosexuality* 55 (November 2008): 648-64.

¹⁴ Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 140-42, 150-52; James Bristow, *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing After 1885* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 2-5, 16-49.

¹⁵ Dr. David H. Keller, M.D., *Know Yourself: Life and Sex Facts of Man, Woman, and Youth Popularly Presented by One of the Medical Profession, Who Has Made Reproduction and Health His Special Study* (New York: Popular Book Corp, 1930), 75-77, Len Evens Papers, 1920-1983, Box 1, folder 13 “Sex Education-1930s and 1950s,” JCH-GLC. Dr. Kellers discussion on homosexuals constitutes a large portion of chapter 12: Sexual Abnormalities. He portrays homosexuals as pitiful and hopeless individuals arrested at an early stage of their sexual and mental development. As such, they lead tortured and depressed lives rooted in their subconscious realization of their deviance. For an excellent monograph charting the construction of homosexual society and perception in the United States during the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century see: George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

¹⁶ Fone, *Homophobia*, 10-11.

¹⁷ John Winthrop quoted in D’Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 31.

¹⁸ John D’Emilio, “The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America,” in John D’Emilio ed. *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 57-73.

¹⁹ Randy Shilts, *Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 49-51; My focus on the emergence of a more vibrant and open gay community in San Francisco in the post-World War II period is not meant to imply that no such communities existed in the pre-World War II United States. As George Chauncey has argued in *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 1-8, a strong and often strikingly public gay community existed in New York City in the pre-war decades. Americans, Chauncey asserts, have tended to ignore and forget the existence of such communities as a result of the strong cultural and political shift against homosexuality in the 1950s.

²⁰ “Alfred C. Kinsey: A Pioneer of Sex Research,” *Journal of Public Health* 93 (June, 2003), 896.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Samuel Morris Steward quoted in Terence Kissack, “Alfred Kinsey and Homosexuality in the ‘50s,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9 (October, 2000): 477. In this piece, Kissack reprints in its entirety an interview of Steward conducted by Len Evans in 1983.

²³ Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1948), 168-69.

²⁴ Ibid., 457-60.

²⁵ K.A. Courdileone, “Politics in an Age of Anxiety: Political Culture and Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960,” *Journal of American History* 87 (September, 2000): 522-23.

²⁶ Ibid, 515-22; Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality In Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 28-29.

²⁷ William S. White, “Never Condoned Disloyalty, Says Acheson of Hiss Stand,” *New York Times*, 1 March 1950.

²⁸ William S. White, “Miss Kenyon Cites Patriotic Record to Refute Charges,” *New York Times*, 15 March 1950.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 3.

- ³¹ “Department Actions Revealed,” *New York Times*, 20 March 1950.
- ³² *Congressional Record*, 81st Cong., 2d sess., 1950, 96, pt4:4527-4528.
- ³³ “Perverts Called Government Peril,” *New York Times*, 18 April 1950.
- ³⁴ Marshall R. McClintock, “Commie Fags: The Politicization of Homosexuality,” unpublished manuscript, Len Evens Papers, 1920-1983, Box 1, folder 7: “M. R. McClintock, ‘Commie Fags: The Politicalization of Homosexuality’ [1945-1955], 1983,” JCH-GLC.
- ³⁵ Senate Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Department, *Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sexual Perverts in Government*, 81st Cong., 2d sess., 1950, S. Doc. 241, 2.
- ³⁶ John D’Emilio, *Making History: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 59. D’Emilio makes the point that the senators never questioned whether or not the employment of homosexuals was truly undesirable.
- ³⁷ Senate Committee, *Employment of Homosexuals*, 3-4.
- ³⁸ Senate Committee, *Employment of Homosexuals*, 5; A concise account of Colonel Raedl’s actions, their implications, and the United States Senate’s use of them to justify the exclusion of gay Americans from federal jobs can be found in Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 337.
- ³⁹ Senate Committee, *Employment of Homosexuals*, 7-8.
- ⁴⁰ Senate Committee, *Employment of Homosexuals*, 10-12.
- ⁴¹ Alfred Towne, “Homosexuality in American Culture: The New Taste in Literature,” *American Mercury* 73 (August, 1951), 3-9.
- ⁴² “The Homosexuality Issue,” *Newsweek*, 16 November 1953, 46-47.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Tom A Cullen, “Homosexuality and British Opinion,” *The New Republic*, 25 April 1955, 13-15.
- ⁴⁵ “Men Only,” *Time*, 26 December 1955, 18.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Committee on Homosexual Offenses and Prostitution, *The Wolfenden Report: Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offenses and Prostitution*, authorized American edition (New York: Stein and Day, 1963), 30-36, 48-51, 151, 187-88.

⁴⁸ "Britain: Facing the Dark Facts," *Newsweek*, 16 September 1957, 50-51; "Great Britain: The Wolfenden Report," *Time*, 16 September 1957, 39-40; "Taboo on Television," *Newsweek*, 9 December 1957, 68; "Question of Consent," *Time*, 16 December 1957, 22-23.

⁴⁹ "Threading Lightly in a Delicate Subject," *The Christian Century*, 18 September 1957, 1092-094.

⁵⁰ Mollie Panter-Downes. "Letter from London: Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offenses and Prostitution," *The New Yorker*, 28 September 1957, 151-53.

⁵¹ "Idaho Underworld," *Time*, 12 December 1955, 25.

⁵² Robert Lewis Shayon, "TV and Radio," *Saturday Review*, 15 December 1956, 27.

⁵³ Milton E. Hahn, "The Sexually Deviate Student," *School and Society* 41 (September 17, 1955), 85-87.

⁵⁴ "What is a Homosexual?" *Time*, 16 June 1958, 44.

⁵⁵ "Lavender and Old Blues," *Newsweek*, 20 July 1959, 82.

⁵⁶ "Curable Disease?" *Time*, 10 December 1956, 74-75; see also Edmund Bergler, *Homosexuality: Disease of Way of Life?* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1956).

⁵⁷ "Homosexuals: To Punish or Pity?" *Newsweek*, 11 July 1960, 78.

⁵⁸ "Homosexuals: One Soldier in 25?" *Newsweek*, 15 May 1961, 92-93.

⁵⁹ William J. Helmer, "New York's Middle-class HOMOSEXUALS," *Harper's Monthly*, March 1963, 85-92.

⁶⁰ Robert Doty, "Growth of Overt Homosexuals in City Provokes Wide Concern," *New York Times*, 17 December 1963; "City Side," *Newsweek*, 30 December 1963, 43.

⁶¹ "The Third Sex," *Newsweek* 1 June 1964, 76.

⁶² "Out of the Briar Patch," *Time*, 25 December 1964.

⁶³ Ibid.

- ⁶⁴ “Psychiatry: Homosexuals Can Be Cured,” *Time*, 12 February 1963, 44.
- ⁶⁵ “Still Another List,” *The Nation*, 22 June 1964, 615.
- ⁶⁶ Martin Duberman, *Cures: A Gay Man’s Odyssey* (New York: Dutton Publications, 1991).
- ⁶⁷ American Psychiatric Association Press Release, December 15, 1973. Randy Shilts Papers (GLC 43), Jour-Box 1, folder 26, JCH-GLC.; American Psychological Association, Press Release dated January 24, 1975, Randy Shilts Papers (GLC 43), Jour-Box 1, folder 26, JCH-GLC.
- ⁶⁸ Margaret Cruikshank, *The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3, 69-71.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ⁷⁰ “Gay History Questionnaire,” Len Evans Papers, Box 1, folder “Gay History Questionnaire; File Responses and Related Correspondence,” JCH-GLC. In this survey conducted by Evans, an equal number of respondents listed San Francisco and New York City as the gayest cities of the 1940s.
- ⁷¹ Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 33-35.
- ⁷² John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940 to 1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 58-60.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, 72, 89-90.
- ⁷⁴ Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2006), 1-6; Robert B. Marks Ridinger, *The Gay and Lesbian Movement*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 21.
- ⁷⁵ D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 101-107.
- ⁷⁶ Ridinger, *The Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 21.
- ⁷⁷ Shilts, *Mayor of Castro Street*, 55-57.
- ⁷⁸ Paul Welch, “Homosexuality in America,” *Life*, 26 June 1964, 66-74.
- ⁷⁹ Meeker, Jr., “Come Out West,” 347-48.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

BATTLEFIELD BY THE BAY: SAN FRANCISCO'S EMERGENCE, TRIALS, AND ACCEPTANCE AS AMERICA'S GAY MECCA

While Dan White's San Francisco may never have claimed the prestigious All-America title, the clean cut young city supervisor was no stranger to it personally by late 1978. In fact, just the year before, "All-American" was the phrase friends and media alike turned to when asked to describe the former firefighter, policeman, paratrooper, baseball player, and father. Having recently rescued a young girl from the thirteenth floor of a burning building, White had parlayed his heroism and wholesomeness into a successful run for local political office in 1977. Often with the support of local police officers, White had campaigned door to door throughout his working class and immigrant district of southern San Francisco. Along the way the prospective supervisor and his volunteers handed out fliers that stressed his desire to "eradicate the malignancies" that "shamed" San Francisco "throughout the nation." White would, he assured, be the most conservative of the area's residents, root out these "social deviates" and promote traditional values if elected.¹

Another successful candidate for the board of supervisors that year fit squarely into White's conception of "social deviates." If White was the quintessentially All-American supervisor, then Harvey Milk must certainly have represented everything the conservative establishment of the late 1970s opposed and feared. Milk's election had, after all, marked the first time in United States history that an openly, and in his case, often flamboyant gay man had obtained an elected office of this importance.² Over the year that followed, the very different Milk and White assumed key and tragic roles in a battle of cultural change that would ultimately cement San Francisco's place as the nation's most widely perceived Gay Mecca.

By the 1970s, the mental foundation for San Francisco's abnormal identity as the epicenter of the nation's gay population rested on a strong foundation. National perceptions of homosexuality had developed in the last thirty-plus years to ensure its treatment as a deviant and threatening entity for many in the self-proclaimed American mainstream. As the previous chapter suggests, a public discourse over homosexuality in the 1950s and early 1960s linking the sexual orientation to disloyalty, deviance, and mental illness cemented this.³ San Francisco's distinctly large gay population, with its roots in the 1940s status of San Francisco as a military muster and discharge center, created the circumstance for the city to emerge as an important center of the American gay population. In the war's aftermath, heavy-handedness by local authorities and a need for community, led to the spread of such influential gay rights organizations as the Mattachine Society into San Francisco and the creation of others such as the Daughters of Bilitis.⁴ The publicity gained by these groups as they coalesced in San Francisco

contributed to the threat of this supposed deviance that seemed planted in an already questionable San Francisco.

As a city viewed as somewhat exotic and vice ridden from its very entrance into the United States, San Francisco served as a reasonable place for “normal” Americans to deposit such strangeness as homosexuality. The open acknowledgement of a gay San Francisco in the 1964 groundbreaking article “Homosexuality in America,” while helping to legitimate homosexuality as an alternative orientation, also served to “out” San Francisco as an epicenter of the orientation.⁵ By 1971, even the President of the United States allowed the stigma of homosexuality to shape his view of the city. That year, Richard Nixon, while discussing the issue of homosexuality in America told aides John Ehrlichman and H. R. Halderman that “I can’t shake hands with anybody from San Francisco.”⁶

Yet during this decade the discrimination against and oppression of gay Americans seemed to be easing dramatically. Acknowledgement of homosexuality no longer resulted in the automatic firings from government positions and questioning of loyalty that so often accompanied it in the fifties. Both the American Psychological and American Psychiatric Associations removed homosexuality from their list of psychological disorders in 1973.⁷ Gay Americans likewise took on increased visibility in the early 1970s as they fought successfully for ordinances and statutes forbidding discrimination in the workplace against homosexuals. At the same time, activists worked to decriminalize homosexual acts on the state level nationwide. Their efforts bore fruit, as nine states updated their sexual laws to ease restrictions on private, consensual homosexual acts by 1974. Before 1970, only one state viewed sex acts between adult

homosexuals as legal. By 1975, an additional thirty-four measures appeared on ballots nationwide. Ultimately, five states repealed their sodomy laws that year, bringing the total number of states to decriminalize private homosexual acts to thirteen.⁸

Many Americans, however, remained uncomfortable with homosexuality. According to the Field Institute's "California Poll" conducted in 1977, only 31 percent of Californians respondents felt that homosexuals should be accepted in society and protected against discrimination. A total of only 43 percent could be classified as "minimally tolerant" of homosexuality. The state, according to the poll's comments, stood "sharply divided" on the issue.⁹ This sharp divide had revealed itself only two years earlier through the fight over the state's "sexual bill of rights." In 1975, after lopsided passage in the assembly, the state senate required a tie-breaking vote by Lieutenant Governor Mervyn Dymally to abolish the 103 year-old ban on anal and oral sex. After Governor Jerry Brown signed the statute, a group calling itself the Coalition of Christian Citizens attempted to bring the statute up for a referendum vote. Ultimately it failed to gain the required 350,000 signatures.¹⁰

This reaction by a part of the Christian right in 1975 was not an anomaly. In fact, one can view it as an early example of a much wider reaction against the increased visibility of gay Americans and significant granting of homosexual rights in the early 1970s. This process, as we will see, culminated in 1978 as San Francisco activists and officials fought the oppressively homophobic state Proposition 6. When this battle ended, the connection between San Francisco and homosexuality became more evident than ever before. Subsequently, the successful resistance to Proposition 6 opened the way for the city to emerge full force as the nation's proud Gay Mecca.¹¹

The Short and Lively Career of Harvey Milk

Few could have guessed that the young son of Bill and Minerva Milk would grow up to become one of the most powerful openly gay political leader in American history. This young man who ultimately contributed to large amounts of tension, heartache, and worried pontification on the part of the supposed protectors of America's cultural and moral values, did not seem all that threatening early on. In school, for example, he loved sports and excelled academically. After finishing high school a year early, his future seemed bright as he gained acceptance to the State University of New York at Albany.¹²

While at Albany earning his degree in education, Harvey proved both the class clown and quite the patriotic, conservative American. Often, after entertaining dorm mates with his self-deprecating humor, Harvey would engage them in late night debates on communism, the economy, and what he viewed as the proper, strictly limited role of government in American society. The collegiate Milk saw the tension in Korea as proof positive of communism's designs on global domination. Likewise, he found any form of government involvement in domestic industry as antithetical to the capitalistic American way. After college, Harvey continued on the patriotic path, as he enlisted in the Navy, earned a commission, and served with distinction as a deep sea diver.¹³

Following his discharge from the navy in 1955 Milk soon landed a job with Great American Insurance Company. Although he proved very adept at his job, Milk bored easily. He subsequently left the insurance trade in 1963 and took a position as an analyst for the Wall Street financial firm of Bache & Company. In this role, Milk proved vastly successful, managing to build several sizable fortunes for investor clients, while also campaigning for Barry Goldwater's presidential run in 1964. Yet, despite his success, his

boss sensed that Harvey was not to be a permanent Wall Street fixture. When he looked at the young financial analyst, he saw a man with wanderlust in his eyes and some sort of inner trouble.¹⁴

Obviously, Milk's inner trouble stemmed from being gay in a nation that did not accept gay people. Beginning as a young teen while on unsupervised visits downtown and continuing through his university, navy, and Wall Street careers, Harvey had surreptitiously engaged in homosexual affairs. At least once, at the age of seventeen, he had been temporarily detained by authorities for suspicion of such activities in a neighborhood park.¹⁵ Always with at least one steady boyfriend hidden away, he lived in constant fear of exposure. Exposure in those days often meant jail, and at the very least, public disgrace and loss of employment. It also meant being labeled psychologically ill, with the stigma that included and subjected to various, and often painful, "cures."¹⁶

Things started changing for Harvey in the late 1960s. He had walked away from his Wall Street job and landed in San Francisco's financial district. Here, working as a financial analyst on Montgomery Street, Harvey continued to lead his double life and prosper financially. Yet his political views gradually shifted as he found himself running with a company of theater actors and producers. For the first time, as biographer Randy Shilts noted, Harvey's hair touched the top of his ears. Something was going on the mind of Harvey Milk.¹⁷

That something burst forth on the morning of April 29, 1970, when Harvey, enraged by Nixon's "incursion" into Cambodia and the subsequent widening of the Vietnam War joined a group of anti-war protesters on his lunch break. The news cameras caught it all, as the "square" looking Milk jumped down into the protesters, pulled out his Bank of

America credit card, and cut it in half. Harvey's statement about corporate backing of war for profit got him fired later in the day, after his antics were brought to the attention of his bosses. The years that followed found Harvey's hair and beard even longer as he produced theater in New York City and traveled around California with partner Scott Smith. Harvey would later recall this time as the best of his life.¹⁸

As all good times eventually end, Harvey and Scott found themselves dangerously low on funds in 1972. That year, the couple invested the last of their savings in an old Victorian home in a run down neighborhood of San Francisco. Here, in the working-class Castro District, rent was cheap and a few gay bars had recently opened. The two lived upstairs in their new house and decided to make a living by opening a camera shop downstairs. Selling cameras quickly became an afterthought at Castro Cameras, as Harvey rapidly transformed the store into a welcoming center for visitors and gay newcomers. By 1973, when Harvey decided to take his first foray into politics by running for a seat on the city's board of supervisors, the camera store was serving as the unofficial city hall of an increasingly gay Castro District.¹⁹

Harvey's first campaign both opened his eyes to his love of politics and the divided nature of San Francisco's gay community. Although he had built a reputation and following among newly arrived gays in the Castro, many in the "old guard" of the city's gay community refused to support him. Primary among these was Jim Foster, the leader of San Francisco's gay Democrats, and a speaker at the 1972 Democratic Convention. Foster, along with the gay Golden Gate Democratic Club and Alice Toklas Democratic Club resented Harvey as too brash, too new on the scene, and overly ambitious. In their opinions, gays needed more mainstream candidates who would start out by seeking lower

offices than one of the powerful city supervisor positions. Their complaints, unwanted advice, and lack of endorsements served only to antagonize the candidate, as Harvey was never one to proceed with caution. Without the support of the gay political infrastructure and having to campaign citywide for his seat, Harvey lost that first race handily.²⁰

Such cautioning of brash newcomers like Milk is understandable. It was a time of anxiety over “outing” and public backlash against vocal gays. Many gays in San Francisco, for example, remained “closeted” to their families, workplace, and friends. One has only to look at the Billy Sipple incident to see the dangers that too much public exposure presented to many gay Americans in the mid-1970s.

On September 22, 1975, Sipple, a former Marine and Harvey Milk campaign worker, joined a crowd outside of San Francisco’s St. Francis Hotel awaiting the exit of President Gerald Ford. As President Ford approached, Sarah Jane Moore raised a gun and fired one shot in his direction. Sipple, upon seeing the gun, had grabbed Moore’s arm. His quick reaction deflected the aim of her first shot and likely saved the President’s life by preventing additional fire. As a result of his quick reaction, Sipple gained nationwide notoriety. However, within two days newspapers began characterizing him as active in San Francisco’s gay community. Milk, a friend of Sipple, then charged that President Ford had delayed thanking the hero because of his sexual orientation. When asked by a reporter if he realized the “enormous” and “national ramifications” on the image of homosexual Americans that could result from a gay man having saved the President, Sipple replied that the personal “ramifications” were also “enormous.” His mother, and much of his family back in Detroit, learned of his sexual orientation for the first time from the news reports. She then disowned her son, who eventually turned to alcohol. He

died in 1989 having never reunited with his family.²¹ Such widely publicized occurrences both added to the perceptual link between San Francisco and homosexuality and, no doubt, contributed to the reticence of many that Harvey's candidacy sought to bring forth into the public spotlight.

That year, Harvey went on to lose his second supervisor's race.²² He then lost a heated run for the California legislature against Art Agnos in 1976. In this race, Harvey's campaign literature portrayed him as a groundbreaking, independent-minded "up-front gay" concerned with both the rights of the homosexual and heterosexual San Franciscan. Agnos's campaign similarly embraced the sexual orientation issue directly, portraying the supervisor as "the first straight candidate to speak out for gay rights."²³ This race proved doubly troubling, as San Francisco's mayor George Moscone, had recently appointed Milk to an important seat on the city's board of permits and appeals. At the time, this caused quite a stir in the city's gay community as it was the highest municipal position ever held by one of their own. Be that as it may, it was not enough for the ever ambitious Milk, who sensed a political opportunity. Only five weeks into his new job—after four weeks of hinting at his intention—Harvey declared himself a candidate for the assembly. An angry Mayor Moscone—who fervently supported Agnos—responded by making his own announcement hours later that Milk had been replaced on the city board of permits and appeals.²⁴

The name recognition and political skills that Harvey gained from this string of unsuccessful campaigns came into play when he declared himself a candidate for city supervisor once again in 1977. As was his norm, Harvey threw himself into the race heart and soul. He campaigned tirelessly, traversing his district, handing out flyers,

shaking hands, and appearing before any group that would listen to him. He further embarked upon a mobilization of the gay community to act as human billboards, keeping his name in constant view alongside busy roadways. Although resentment from more moderate-minded gay leaders continued, Harvey now had the rank and file support of a more highly developed gay community in the Castro and Tenderloin districts willing to work for his election. In his previous campaigns and short stint on the board of appeals, he had proven himself as capable and sincere in his intention to bring San Francisco gays out of the closet and into the political mainstream. But most importantly, for the first time in 1977, San Franciscans elected city supervisors by district rather than citywide vote. This allowed Harvey to run in the heavily gay Castro district where he lived, rather than having to draw votes from all areas of the city.²⁵

On the night of November 8, 1977, as the votes were counted, Harvey Milk made history and helped solidify San Francisco's association with homosexuality. The election results revealed that he had beaten his nearest opponent by a two to one margin. Spontaneous celebrations broke out in front of Milk's Castro Camera. Many of those gathered watched with rapt pride as Milk came forth to address the crowd. As he spoke, casting this victory as a sign of hope for all oppressed minorities, shouts of "Harvey for Mayor" echoed in the background.²⁶ While Milk would not live to see himself as a serious candidate for that office, neither the City of San Francisco nor its image would ever be the same after his short stint as supervisor.

The national media took notice of what happened that night in San Francisco. A major US city had elected an openly gay man to one of its highest offices. The *New York Times* had already laid the groundwork for Milk's election in a piece appearing the day

before titled “A Walk on San Francisco’s Gay Side.” In this article, journalist Herbert Gold revealed how local heterosexuals accepted the growing political influence of gays in this city whose national “reputation has the city crowded with homosexuals.” He went on to detail how the energetic gay community had organized itself and demanded inclusion in the political process in a city “best known for innovations in lifestyles.” Supervisor Harvey Milk assumed a prominent role in the article as the “hard-line” leader of a gay population demanding representation in government by other gays.²⁷ The day following the election, Milk became one of few local supervisors or council members elected that year to be acknowledged nationally. That morning, the *New York Times*, printed a piece titled “Homosexual on Board Cites Role as Pioneer.” The five paragraph article devoted four paragraphs to Milk’s homosexuality and one to Ella Hill Hutch, who had become the city’s first-ever black supervisor.²⁸

One has to question why the election of the city’s first black supervisor did not merit the attention placed upon the election of its first gay supervisor. Most obviously, Hutch was not the first black citizens elected to a high city position in American history. Beyond this, the election of an African American did not play off and strengthen the established stereotype of San Francisco. The election of the gay Harvey Milk did so in a spectacular way. The fact that a gay man got elected to one of the highest positions in the city supported the stereotypes of the abnormal and increasingly gay city. Yet most importantly, Milk’s election came at a time when gay rights was a hot topic on the national scene.

Just as gay Americans had made great gains on the state level at securing their rights and sexual freedoms in the early 1970s, the mid to late 1970s witnessed much progress at

the city and county levels. By the time of Milk's 1977 campaign, activists had secured gay rights ordinances and measures in approximately three dozen various localities. Traversing the national geography from Portland to Miami, these ordinances sparked a powerful reaction from "values" oriented opponents.²⁹ These individuals quickly coalesced into a variety of organizations aimed at repealing any ordinance or statute that could be seen as providing equality under the law for gay Americans.

Perhaps the most vocal and, for a time, most powerful of these reactionary organizations was headed by former beauty queen, singer, and Florida orange juice spokesperson Anita Bryant.³⁰ Bryant, since her days as Miss Oklahoma and then as a pop singer with a couple of top ten hits in the late 1950s and early 1960s, had relocated to Florida and gained employment as a spokesperson for the Florida Citrus Commission. She added to her high profile with multiple television commercials for MinuteMaid Orange Juice as well as by singing the national anthem at 1969's Super Bowl and the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" at President Lyndon Johnson's funeral in 1973. In the meantime, Bryant became increasingly critical of the growing visibility and demands of homosexuals in the United States.³¹

On the morning of January 18, 1977, Bryant stood and watched in disbelief as the Dade County Commission voted five to three to prohibit discrimination against gays in housing, public accommodation, and the work place. As a Southern Baptist mother, Bryant could not fathom raising her children in a world where what she considered to be "sinful" gays enjoyed equal rights with straight people. The flabbergasted Bryant claimed she would not "take this sitting down." She would not stand idly by and accept an ordinance that "condones immorality and discriminates against my children's right to

grow up in a healthy, decent society.”³² Thus, basing her action both on her own religious beliefs and a self-professed concern for the welfare of children, Bryant launched the “Save our Children” campaign.

Thanks to her celebrity, Bryant’s “Save Our Children” escapade drew heavy media coverage. Her comments increasingly took up national news airtime as the campaign drew on. For example, on March 27, 1977 her criticism of the Carter Administration for meeting with gay rights proponents made national headlines.³³ In the aftermath of these claims, administration officials felt compelled to appear on news television programs such as CBS’s *Face the Nation* to explain their activities in an attempt at damage control. Throughout 1977, Bryant’s campaign and her stance against homosexuality were covered on the nightly news by ABC, CBS, and NBC on no fewer than on seventeen occasions.³⁴ In 1978, her organization’s nationwide efforts against gay rights in such places as Wichita, Portland, St. Paul, and across California received an additional eight appearances on the nation’s nightly news broadcasts.³⁵

Back in Miami, Bryant campaigned tirelessly and successfully to bring about the Dade County ordinance’s repeal. Religious and conservative political figures from around the nation journeyed to southern Florida to join Bryant’s “Save Our Children” campaign. Ministers such as Jerry Falwell became prominent in the fight, sending out mailers that labeled gays as perverts hell-bent on molesting children and corrupting society.³⁶ To Bryant and those that accepted her call, homosexuals sought to ruin the nation by “recruiting” its youth into a deviant lifestyle and using them as sexual playthings. In light of such public stances and media coverage, Bryant’s well-publicized activities could not help but stir up anti-gay feelings across the nation and reveal the anti-

gay stance as a potentially powerful political strategy.³⁷ According to poll data from the time, her beliefs that gays should not be allowed equal admittance to all occupations held sway with a substantial segment of the American population. A nationwide Harris Survey released in July 1977 stated that 55 percent of respondents felt homosexuals should not be allowed to work as teachers. An additional 63 percent opposed their employment as counselors for young people. Occupations in which the majority of respondents felt that homosexual Americans had the right to hold included artist (86 percent), factory worker (85 percent), and store clerk (80 percent).³⁸

With such numbers in mind, Bryant's "Save the Children" campaign presented an ambitious Republican State Senator from California with what he believed to be a golden opportunity. John V. Briggs had long set his sights on positions beyond his seat in the California statehouse. Having already made an unsuccessful run at the governorship, the legislator from Fullerton needed a spectacular cause to which to attach himself and hopefully propel him into higher office. That cause, Briggs believed, revealed itself through what he interpreted as an increasingly adamant reaction against gay rights. Following Bryant's lead and proclaiming California's children in dire threat of recruitment into the gay lifestyle, Briggs could pit "normal" California against what he cast as the dangerous "San Francisco influence."³⁹

Upon hearing of Anita Bryant's actions a continent away, Briggs rushed to Dade County to take an active role. While there, he took every opportunity to be photographed alongside Bryant, pass out leaflets, and pontificate about the dangers homosexuality posed for American society. An exuberant Briggs confided to reporter Randy Shilts that this cause would be his ticket to the governorship. Ironically, Briggs had no idea that the

reporter with whom he spoke so candidly was San Francisco's first openly gay journalist at a major media outlet.⁴⁰

Once safely back in California, Briggs launched the "California Save Our Children" political action committee in an attempt to get a constitutional amendment on the ballot and passed in the November, 1978 general election. The wording of the initiative measure, as prepared by the state attorney general, follows:

SCHOOL TEACHERS—HOMOSEXUAL ACTS OF CONDUCT. INITIATIVE STATUTE

Prohibits hiring, and requires dismissal by school district board of any probationary or permanent teacher, teacher's aide, school administrator or counselor who has engaged in a public homosexual act described in Penal Code, sections 286 or 288a, or who has engaged in advocating, soliciting, imposing, encouraging or promoting of private or public homosexual acts directed at, or likely to come to the attention of school children and/or other employees.⁴¹

In explanation as to what exactly constituted a "public homosexual act" in violation of Penal Code sections 286 and 288a, section 3, subheading b of the full measure to appear on the ballot provided this clarification:

"public homosexual activity" means the commission of an act defined in subdivision (a) of Section 286 of the penal Code, or in subdivision (a) of Section 288a of the Penal Code, upon any other person of the same sex, which is not discreet and not practiced in private, whether or not such act, at the time of its commission, constituted a crime.⁴²

Thus, the initiative placed extraordinarily vague requirements on what might constitute a termination-worthy display of homosexuality.

With the politically influential Briggs serving as the initiative committee's chairperson and its executive director the popular Reverend Louis Sheldon of Fullerton pushing the morality of the measure from the pulpit, the initiative quickly gained adequate statewide support to assure its placement on the ballot.⁴³ Secretary of State March Fong Eu certified it on May 31, with the comment that the measure had gained far

more than the required signatures.⁴⁴ The battle over California Proposition 6 or the Briggs Initiative, as it became known, subsequently rocked San Francisco and the state to its core. In the months leading up to the election, San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk emerged in opposition to Briggs as the spokesperson against the proposition's passage. By projection, the fight became one of perceptively gay San Francisco—and to a lesser degree Los Angeles—values versus those heralded as more conservatively mainstream of suburban, small town, and rural California.

Months before Briggs began pushing his initiative, and in the light of Anita Bryant's stirrings in southern Florida, San Francisco advocates of gay rights had attempted to head off what they saw as the impending attempts to codify workplace discrimination against California homosexuals. On January 11, San Francisco's Assemblyman Art Agnos, with the support of the recently elected Milk and numerous gay rights advocates, sponsored a bill in the California legislature that would ban workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation. Agnos and all involved agreed that the bill had no chance of gaining passage in the election year. The assemblyman felt that his fellow legislators were too tied to the "myth" of a voter backlash against anyone supporting gay rights. While neither Agnos nor supporters of the bill harbored any illusion that this "myth" would be overcome and the measure would pass, they felt it was important to make the attempt out of "educational purposes," as they felt a substantial attack on the rights of gay Californians was in the offing.⁴⁵

Almost immediately following the defeat of the Agnos measure, Milk succeeded in keeping the issue in the public eye by proposing a gay rights ordinance in San Francisco. By early February, Milk had solicited the endorsements of United States Congressmen

Phillip Burton of California's 6th District and John L. Burton of the state's 5th district.⁴⁶ In addition, speaker of the California assembly Leo T. McCarthy, assembly majority whip Agnos, and assemblyman Willie Brown came out in support of the ordinance. Brown personally contacted San Francisco supervisor Dan White, the leader of the opposition against the ordinance, and asked for his support in helping to end "discrimination of all types."⁴⁷

By this time, San Francisco's place in the ongoing culture war over homosexual rights had found increased coverage in the national press. With the emergence of Anita Bryant's crusade against gay rights in the preceding year, San Francisco's name in relation to homosexuality appeared far more often than in the past. In 1977, the *New York Times* printed 9 feature columns and editorial letters that specifically linked homosexuality and San Francisco.⁴⁸ In the preceding six years of the decade, the *Times* had linked San Francisco directly to homosexuality on only seven occasions: once in 1976, once in 1975, once in 1972, twice in 1971, and twice in 1970.⁴⁹ *Newsweek* also got in the game in 1977, publishing a feature piece on the increased political power and openness of San Francisco homosexuals. This was the first time *Newsweek* had ever published an article directly linking the city with homosexuality.⁵⁰

Not to be outdone, the television news media also highlighted San Francisco's ties to homosexuality in 1977. In a story about the attempt to repeal Miami's gay rights employment and housing ordinance, *ABC News* focused on the campaign tactics of Anita Bryant's "Save Our Children" organization in pushing for the ordinance's repeal. Specifically, the news segment revolved around a "Save Our Children" television ad that equated the future of Miami's Orange Bowl Parade with images of San Francisco's

annual gay pride parade. The message was clear: If Miami voters fail to repeal the ordinance, the city would end up as another San Francisco.⁵¹

The trend toward increased linkage of the city to homosexuality in the national press continued into the tumultuous year of 1978. On March 8, the *New York Times* saw fit to reprint an editorial by San Francisco columnist Herb Caen. Caen, fed up with all the moral pronouncements against “Sodom and Gomorrah West” being espoused by self-proclaimed upholders of American virtue, lashed out at the anti-gay activism sweeping the nation. Specifically, he called out Anita Bryant’s claim that God had placed a year-long drought on California because of the large number of homosexuals living openly in San Francisco. Instead, he claimed that with the election of Harvey Milk as the first gay supervisor, the rain had returned to its normal levels. This, Caen observed was “the first normal happening in old Baghdad by the Bay since the earthquake of 1906.”⁵² Likewise, a feature piece on the city’s Gay Freedom Day Parade appearing in the *Times* on June 26, explicitly linked the fight for gay rights, the Briggs Initiative, and San Francisco’s identity as a “gay haven.” As *Times* reporter Les Ledbetter wrote, “San Francisco’s reputation as a haven for homosexuals has grown in the past year” thanks to Milk’s election and the fight for the city’s gay rights ordinance.⁵³

On the television airwaves, Walter Cronkite’s *CBS Evening News* also alluded to that “reputation” in 1978. On March 27, Cronkite, along with CBS reporter Don Kladstrup told a nationwide audience of how San Francisco’s openness toward gays had led the nation’s first openly gay politician to push for a local gay rights ordinance. This, Kladstrup noted, came at a time when other cities were repealing gay rights. Although opposition leader Dan White was also interviewed, the segment pointed out that a repeat

of such events as happened in Florida's Dade County was highly unlikely in San Francisco.⁵⁴

Initially it appeared as though CBS had correctly portrayed the situation in San Francisco. On April 3, Milk succeeded in getting his gay rights ordinance passed by his fellow supervisors. Approved by a vote of 10 to 1, Milk's ordinance went farther than any other had to that date. It stated that no discrimination whatsoever on the basis of sexual orientation may occur within the limits of San Francisco regarding employment, housing, or any public accommodations. Dan White stood alone as the only supervisor to vote against the ordinance.⁵⁵

Then, over the summer and fall of 1978, the national backlash against the granting of gay rights threatened to void the San Francisco ordinance by sweeping the Briggs amendment to an easy victory in November. Polls conducted shortly after the initiative secured a spot on the ballot showed that 61 percent of registered California voters favored the amendment's passage.⁵⁶ In light of such numbers, Briggs referred to himself as likely to become "America's newest and biggest folk hero—someone who will make a good candidate against (Senator) Alan Cranston in 1980."⁵⁷

Slowly but steadily, along with his proposition's substantial lead in the polls, Briggs saw his hopes of replacing Alan Cranston in the United States Senate slip away. By the election's eve, local newspapers reported the outcome too close to call.⁵⁸ This swing resulted largely from the highly organized response led by San Francisco's gay community, a growing political weariness of the ambitious Briggs, and a series of well-publicized debates between Briggs and Milk.

Publicity-grabbing antics also played a role in putting a human face on homosexuality and drawing attention to the discriminatory nature of the proposition. Many opponents of the measure felt that if they could accomplish this, many people's consciences—even those of supposedly conservative rural dwellers and suburbanites—simply would not allow them to cast a yes vote. One such instance can be found in the case of Frank Vel's long walk. Vel felt that the anti-Proposition 6 campaign focused too heavily on the urban areas of San Francisco and Los Angeles, while ignoring the small towns and rural areas of the state. Vel argued that these people should not be cast aside as sure Briggs' supporters. Instead, if they had the chance to meet an openly gay man, talk to him, and read about him in their newspapers that might find some common ground. Thus, Vel quit his job in advertising and embarked on a 1,200 mile walk through lightly populated areas of California from the Mexican border to the Oregon state line. Advance troops of activists would arrive in an area before Vel and set up interviews with local media outlets. Along the way, Vel received quite a bit of press, developed a loyal following, and probably changed a few minds in his attempt to bridge the long held urban-rural divide of American history.⁵⁹

Additional ploys aimed at increasing publicity occurred regularly. Taking issue with the assumption underwriting the Briggs amendment that somehow gays were so different as to be easily spotted and removed from educational institutions, a San Francisco man claimed he had once, before embracing his own homosexuality, dated Briggs' daughter. It seemed that the state senator had somehow missed a gay intrusion into his own home and family life! Opponents of Proposition 6 also distributed "Homosexual Identity Cards" in San Francisco neighborhoods. Each cardholder was instructed to check the

appropriate box beside either Camp Briggs or Camp Bryant as their preferred camp destination once the measure passed and they were ordered to report for concentration.⁶⁰

Such bold actions kept the measure on the media's mind and in the public's sight.

The issue also appeared before the national public in the days leading up to the vote. Walter Cronkite's *CBS Evening News* brought Proposition 6 into American homes on the night of October 26. The three minute CBS segment discussed the nature of the ordinance, the claims of its author, and the tightening of the polls. Reporter Barry Peterson, in interviewing "No on 6" spokesperson Sallye Fiske in San Francisco, relayed the theme that, instead of a merely homosexual issue, this fight was for the human rights of free speech, fair employment, and privacy.⁶¹

The anti-Proposition 6 stance also gained momentum heading into the final weeks of the campaign from the actions of political figures. Although hesitant at first, multiple California and national political leaders voiced opposition to the measure. Former California governor Ronald Reagan spoke out against it as did numerous Republican members of California's state legislature. Briggs promptly accused Reagan of being part of the questionable "Hollywood crowd." He could not claim the same about former President Gerald Ford, sitting President Jimmy Carter, and sitting California Governor Jerry Brown who also urged the public to vote no. Quite a few influential California organizations and personalities shared the politicians' concern as the proposition received more and more publicity. Among these, the California Teachers Association, State AFL-CIO, and Hollywood stars ranging from Carol Burnett to James Garner all condemned the discriminatory measure.⁶²

On a more local scale, virtually all of San Francisco's official bodies and major organizations came out in strong opposition to Proposition 6. Those vocally condemning Briggs' efforts included San Francisco's mayor, Catholic and Episcopal bishops, the San Francisco Board of Education, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, and the Bay Area Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild. Even Dan White, the primary opponent to Milk's gay rights ordinance, joined with his fellow supervisors in passing a unanimous resolution against the passage of the amendment.⁶³

Yet much to Milk's chagrin, the opposition to Briggs's measure was not unanimous in San Francisco. The San Francisco Chamber of Commerce stood as the only major San Francisco institution to refuse Milk's calls for a condemnation of the measure outright. Disregarding personal pleas from Milk, the chamber settled on a "no position" stance on the initiative. This incensed Harvey, who in a biting letter accused Chamber president William E. Dauer of being unable to recognize a "basic human rights issue." He further laid out the following "line-up" to inform the chamber members of whom they stood alongside in refusing to oppose the initiative:

Yes On 6

Briggs
Ku Klux Klan
Nazi Party

No On 6

The Downtown Association
The Commonwealth Club
The Examiner
The Chronicle
Archbishop Quinn
Bishop Meyers
Senator Hayakawa
Senator Cranston
Mayor Moscone
Ronald Reagan
All 11 Supervisors
and on and on⁶⁴

Interestingly, Milk's listing of the Nazi Party was not pure hyperbole. A group of Nazis calling themselves the "Nationalist Socialist White People's Party" had offered their support in a letter to the Briggs Initiative campaign.⁶⁵

In reality, Briggs had a few more supporters than Harvey credited him with. Although most politicians and organizations increasingly deserted his cause as the November election drew near, he maintained strong support in rural areas, suburban enclaves such as Orange County, and with members of some fundamentalist Protestant denominations. Reverend Ray Batema of the Central Pomona Baptist Church served as co-chair alongside Briggs of the Citizens for Decency and Morality—the organization formed after the initiative received a spot on the ballot to see it through to election day success. Adopting a quotation from the biblical story of Sodom as the philosophy of the campaign, Batema and Briggs urged their supporters to "go find me ten righteous men" opposed to homosexuality.⁶⁶ It is telling that they looked to the story of Sodom for inspiration on how to wage a battle that was, by that time, often equating gays with San Francisco and San Francisco with Sodom.⁶⁷ One has to wonder if they felt it was impossible, as was the case with Abraham in his search in Sodom, to find what they considered ten righteous men in San Francisco.⁶⁸

Obviously not all Christians agreed with the Citizens for Decency and its stand on gay rights. While Southern Baptists in Orange county campaigned for the measure and condemned President Carter's and other politicians' support of it, Catholic and Episcopal leaders in San Francisco spoke out forcefully against the initiative. Likewise, letters to the editor in Los Angeles in the days leading up to the election found people divided on where exactly the Christian faith comes down on the employment rights of homosexuals.

Interestingly the San Francisco editorial pages carried no letters that voiced worries about the effect that all of this discussion was having on San Francisco's image.⁶⁹

The death knell for Proposition 6 came in a series of highly publicized debates between Briggs and Milk. Increasingly, Milk became more comfortable in the debate format and began to reveal Briggs's politically ambitious nature, cast him as hateful, and expose the absurdity of his claims. Finally, in a desperate ploy, Briggs challenged Milk to a debate over proposition 6 in his home setting of Orange County in an event sponsored by his Citizens for Decency coalition. To Briggs's surprise, Milk accepted the invitation, figuring that if Briggs could talk in favor of the proposition from the steps of San Francisco City Hall, then he could certainly debate the issue before an unfriendly crowd on Briggs's own turf.⁷⁰

The debate that followed proved a mortal blow for the Briggs Amendment. Harvey doggedly stuck to prepared talking points that stressed the discrimination inherent to Proposition 6 as a human rights rather than gay rights issue. As his notes indicated, "proposition 6...is a misguided, confused, dangerous, deceitful [sic], frightening, and un-American attack on basic human rights." Harvey further drove home the point that, as virtually every political leader, educator, religious leader, and law enforcement officer has attested over the course of the campaign, the proposition was "completely unnecessary" as enforceable laws already existed for the protection of children. In reality, the entire affair was nothing more than "a self serving politician dreaming up a moral crusade to ride to power."⁷¹ Those tuned in to the broadcast were also treated to recurrent jeers and threats against Milk by audience members. One attendee later stated: "that was when I realized Harvey was right—he was going to get shot some day."⁷²

Well attended, televised around the state, and covered heavily in the California press, the debates cast Briggs and his supporters in a very bad light, while Milk's performance garnered respect. Congratulatory letters to Milk commonly referred to his debate presence as "fantastic," "magnificent," and "excellent."⁷³ Some of the individuals using such accolades claimed not to have supported Milk or his causes in the past. In the light of the debates, they assured their total support on this issue, and even their votes in the future.⁷⁴ One individual went so far as to say that that his city of San Francisco was very lucky to have Milk representing it, and would hopefully long stand as "a beacon of tolerance."⁷⁵

When election results began to roll in on the night of November 8, it became apparent that, for the first time since Anita Bryant had assumed leadership of the anti-gay rights drive almost two years prior, an attempt to roll back the rights of homosexuals was going down in stunning defeat.⁷⁶ While polls only months earlier had suggested an easy win for the proposition, the polls that really mattered told another story on the morning of November 9. Statewide, fifty-nine percent of those voting cast their ballots against the Briggs Initiative.⁷⁷ In San Francisco, the defeat was overwhelming, with 75 percent voting against the measure.⁷⁸

As thousands of celebrants jammed San Francisco's Market square that night in celebration of Proposition 6's defeat, a stunned Milk addressed the crowd. He urged those present to take heart from this victory and go out and proudly proclaim their sexual orientation to all who would listen.⁷⁹ Their victory had shown that straights and gays could work together to defeat bigotry and that, when gays acted openly and together in

their interest, striking change could come about. Sadly, Harvey had little time left to enjoy the defining victory of his life.

Milk's position of power, outspoken nature, and untiring efforts to defeat Proposition 6 placed the city supervisor at the dangerous forefront of America's culture wars. Throughout his term as supervisor he often faced death threats and what can only be described as horribly bigoted hate mail. These letters dripped with an almost inconceivable hatred, fear, and, quite frankly, ignorance concerning homosexuality. Such letters streamed in, overwhelmingly from people outside of San Francisco. Some bordered on incoherence while revealing a violent hatred of gays and level of mental disturbance clearly warranting professional help. In this category, one can find letters such as those by an individual who chose to sign no name, postmarked in Seattle, addressed to the "San Francisco Board of Stupid Visors c/o Cocksucker Harvey Milk." Perhaps out of touch with reality, the writer seemed influenced by the illusion that Milk was running for governor and detested the fact that "cocksuckers" like Milk were "now very welcomed anywhere in California."⁸⁰

Other letters appeared far more ominous precisely because of the writers' obvious coherence. Among these, one can find evidence of the unease generated by Milk's run for the supervisor's office and near panic following his election. An anonymous letter to the Bay Area State Senator Milton Marks threatened defeat at reelection time in return for support of Milk's candidacy. Having written in caption on a campaign letter from Marks, the anonymous Milk opponent asked if the Senator was a "fruit" himself.⁸¹

Additional mail, while equally vulgar and hate-filled, directly projected Milk's homosexuality onto the city of San Francisco. A person calling him/herself Nguen Rene

Phuc Q from Alameda and the more anonymous “A guy from Iowa” stand out among these. Phuc Q’s letter--addressed to “Harvey Milk, Supervisor, Chief Faggot, Asshole Reamer, and Lesbian Lover”--makes a direct comparison between San Francisco and the biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, while claiming that Milk’s political career might turn the entire nation into a similar “hotbed for queers.”⁸² The “guy from Iowa,” likewise used a profanity-laced tirade to inform Milk that if it would not mean dirtying his “hands on filth” he would come to San Francisco, or what he now realized to be a “cesspool of inequity,” and physically put an end to Milk’s actions.⁸³

Judging from such hate mail, one can hardly blame Harvey for being a man convinced that he would die an untimely and violent death. As the 1970s drew on and Milk’s political career blossomed, he increasingly related this morbid idea to his closest friends. Famously, after recording a message for Mayor George Moscone referencing who he wished to take over his supervisor’s seat in the likely event of his death, Harvey philosophically stated that, “if a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door.”⁸⁴

When “that bullet” entered his brain on the morning of November 27, 1978, it did not come from those who had threatened Harvey in his unsettling flow of hate mail. “That bullet”--a special hollow point shell specifically chosen to inflict the most gruesome damage--came from Milk’s seemingly “all-American” Board of Supervisors antithesis Dan White.⁸⁵ After having assassinated Mayor Moscone, White calmly walked into Milk’s office, leveled his former service revolver, and extinguished the life of America’s leading gay politician. Unfortunately, the bullets fired that day did not “destroy” all those closet doors. They did, however, contribute to San Francisco’s primary perceptual place

as the nation's gay capital. As sensational violent events so often do, the tragic death of Harvey Milk drew ever more national media attention to and characterizations of the place that Milk called home. Such coverage of events at the end of the 1970s—of which Milk's death was by far the most tragic—fixed San Francisco's reputation, once and for all, as the perceptual center of the debate over homosexuality in America. In the decades that followed, the city itself would prove far more accepting of the label than it had in the past and than other cities would of their various, and often abnormal identities.

Throughout this chaotic period San Franciscans displayed far less interest in the influence of the controversial events happening around them on the image of their city than had the residents of Birmingham during and in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement. In this case, as opposed to Birmingham in 1960, there were no lawsuits filed by city leaders against media outlets for portraying the city and its officials in a derogatory manner. Likewise, newspaper readers of the day would not find an editorial bemoaning the smearing of their city as they would in Birmingham whenever some spectacular event with racial underpinnings reached the national media. One of the few instances of local reaction manifested itself in the previously discussed Herb Caen editorial to the *New York Times*. But even in that instance Caen was not finding fault with San Francisco being labeled as gay friendly, but rather with Anita Bryant's belief that gay friendly was a bad thing.⁸⁶ When pointed comments by Briggs, Bryant, and other anti-gay activists attempted to smear the city with homosexual references, little if any concern evidenced itself in the local media from residents or editors. The people of San Francisco in 1978, to their credit, simply did not seem to mind their city being cast as exceptionally gay tolerant. Even the majority of the hate mail directed at Milk during the

Briggs Initiative fight originated in places outside of San Francisco. While much of it cast San Francisco as deviantly homosexual, not a single letter condemned Milk for any adverse impact he might be having on the city's national image.

San Franciscans also exhibited little concern over the image of their city in print outlets well into the 1980s. In stark contrast to Birmingham, where the allusions to past racism and violence often sparked a flurry of letter writing, editorial pages of major San Francisco newspapers proved strikingly silent. For example, local reaction to nationally publicized tension between gay residents and the local police force in 1982 went without a local letter to the editor. Similar silence followed Jeanne Kirkpatrick's infamous use of the label "San Francisco Democrat" in her 1984 Republican Convention speech⁸⁷ In all fairness, however, a far more pressing issue had emerged on the San Francisco scene by the mid 1980s.

AIDS and San Francisco

As the 1980s had dawned, all seemed well in San Francisco's gay community. Thanks to the monumental strides made by Harvey Milk and other long-working activists, San Francisco's gay population enjoyed an openness, acceptance, and even political power unimaginable in other American cities. Over the past few years, they had developed a strong community in which they could live openly without excessive anxiety. The gay community's support had propelled an openly gay man to one of the highest seats in municipal government. Thanks largely to his efforts and the gay community's consolidation and cooperation, the city instituted a strong and far-reaching gay rights ordinance. Further, the mobilization of San Francisco's gay population proved central in defeating the homophobic Briggs Initiative and dealing a strong blow to

nationwide effort aimed at rolling back gay rights. Even following the tragedy of Milk's assassination, the gay community managed to preserve its recent political gains. Newly seated Mayor Dianne Feinstein, in a rare instance of cooperation with her gay constituents, facilitated this through the appointment of Harry Britt--another gay man--as the slain supervisor's replacement. At the same time, Cleve Jones emerged and assumed Harvey's place as the city's foremost gay rights activist and organizer. Having led the "White Night" riot following the light, six-year sentence of Milk's and the mayor's assassin, the militant yet media-savvy Jones stood as the perfect spokesman for the legend of Harvey Milk and gay San Franciscans' rise of the 1970s.⁸⁸

Thus, by 1981, San Francisco beckoned like never before to gay Americans who sought to live openly. By that time, approximately 5,000 gay men heeded the call and chose to move to San Francisco each year. Hundreds of thousands more embraced the city temporarily as they arrived in June for the Gay Freedom Day Parade. For many, it was a good time to be gay in a city that seemingly refused bow to traditional cultural restraints and pressures. Yet, in the coming years, the spread of a formerly unknown disease would bring these good times to a crashing halt.⁸⁹

When a few young and otherwise healthy gay men in San Francisco and New York City began appearing with rare cases of the Kaposi's Sarcoma, various forms of pneumonia, and devastated immune systems in 1981, no one in the health field understood initially that they were witnessing the American emergence of a deadly pandemic. While later theories would credit Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) that it can lead to as having originated much earlier in the remote reaches of sub-Saharan Africa, it only seemed

apparent in the early 1980s that a deadly malady had appeared from within the ranks of the nation's gay population.⁹⁰

AIDS hit San Francisco hard. Within only a few years of its 1981 appearance, many in the gay community knew multiple people afflicted with or having died from the disease. A friend of gay activist and writer Dennis Altman, for example, stopped him on Castro Street in the Spring of 1984, to inform him of the loss of a fifth shared acquaintance to the disease that year.⁹¹ To Cleve Jones it seemed that, by 1984, doctors diagnosed another current or former associate with AIDS every day. The mental strain proved tremendous as he watched friends die and worried about his own risk due to past behavior. At one point, Cleve—the city's most renowned gay activist of the time—considered abandoning San Francisco for the seemingly safer confines of Hawaii.⁹² San Francisco was losing its appeal.

The proliferation of AIDS also brought changes to San Francisco's vibrant and open gay culture. In one example, gay bath houses came under attack by public health officials as transmission points for the disease. Long a fixture in San Francisco and New York City, the gay bath houses served as places where sexual inhibitions fell away and gratification came easily and often anonymously. As early as 1982, San Francisco public health officials realized that sexual behavior at the bath houses contributed to the spread of the disease and launched educational efforts aimed at informing the clientele of unsafe practices. Efforts at additional regulation and closure of the bath houses proved far more controversial. On October 9, 1984, amid much opposition from the gay community, the San Francisco Health Department ordered the closure of 14 bath houses within the city limits. The Harvey Milk Gay Democratic Club stood as the only predominantly gay

organization to support the closure. Others, such as the Golden Gate Business Association, San Francisco AIDS Foundation, The Bay Area Physicians for Human Rights, and The Bay Area Lawyers for Individual Freedom held press conferences that challenged the closures as attacks on the liberties of gay San Franciscans. With support of these organizations, owners of the bath houses quickly filed legal proceedings to keep the establishments open. Ultimately, on November 28, Judge Roy Wonder ruled that bath houses could reopen if they allowed monitors to survey the premises every ten minutes for illicit sexual behavior, removed doors, and closed private rooms. Any violation of these provisions warranted immediate closure. Most of the houses that reopened and attempted to live up to these strictures quickly succumbed as business decreased dramatically.⁹³

In attempting to shut down the bath houses, the San Francisco Health Department, served as a pacesetter for other municipalities. New York City, for example, quickly followed suit. There, however, the measure proved far less controversial and resistance from the gay community was minimal relative to that in San Francisco. In this regard, one can see evidence of the political strength of San Francisco's gay community as compared to that of New York City.⁹⁴

Perceptually, in the earliest years of the disease's emergence, one could easily equate it with San Francisco. The media and population alike, after all, widely recognized the city as the national center of the gay community. Early characterizations of the disease by health officials and the popular media as gay-centered, along with reports of its impact on San Francisco, helped foster an easy cognitive linkage between the two. If San

Francisco existed as the nation's gay Mecca, then it made sense that the new gay disease must be centered there.

Examples of the disease being cast as gay include health scientists' original coining of it as Gay-Related Immune Deficiency (GRID).⁹⁵ In the popular press, one could commonly find the disease referred to as the "Gay Plague."⁹⁶ As instances of infection outside of the gay population mounted, the classification of the disease shifted from GRIDS to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome or AIDS. By late 1982, the popular press commonly employed the AIDS anagram.⁹⁷ Yet it continued to equate the disease with gay men and, increasingly, San Francisco. A front page *Boston Globe* article from 1983, in one representative instance of this, related how San Francisco's rescue workers lived in constant fear of catching the "mysterious" and "deadly" disease of the city's homosexual population.⁹⁸ A scan of period newspapers reveals a tendency for the words AIDS, homosexuality, and San Francisco to appear together in newspaper articles during the first half of the 1980s.⁹⁹

A similar pattern existed in early television news coverage of AIDS. Beginning in 1983 and 1984, network newscasts often equated AIDS with San Francisco. Segments, such as NBC Evening News' "AIDS" featured correspondents reporting on the "deadly disease" caused by "promiscuous homosexual activity" while standing in front of gay establishments in San Francisco. Other national newscasts highlighted the closure of gay bars, opening of AIDS clinics, and fear on the part of health workers and police officers in the city. Other topics that reinforced the relation of San Francisco to AIDS in the national arena explored the frequency of AIDS and prevalence of anxiety among the

city's gay population.¹⁰⁰ The net result was to cast the city as not only abnormally homosexual but also dangerously so.

Much of this linkage resulted from the simple fact that the disease first ravaged the gay population and San Francisco, due to its large number of homosexual men, sustained a disproportionate number of infections relative to other cities. While New York may have had more total AIDS cases, those cases were spread out over a much larger total population. By 1986, no city matched San Francisco's 2,250 confirmed cases and 1,275 deaths out of a total population of approximately 650,000. Further narrowing the impact and providing for the linkage of homosexuality, San Francisco, and AIDS, a whopping 97 percent of the city's AIDS cases by 1986 were among the gay population.¹⁰¹

Unfortunately, such coverage led to homophobic opinions among the public in regard to AIDS and San Francisco. In one representative example, opponents of a gay rights ordinance in Houston in 1985 revealed such an opinion. As they told the *New York Times*, the ordinance's passage would turn their city into "another San Francisco," and thus expose residents to AIDS.¹⁰²

Similar public perceptions of AIDS and San Francisco shifted gradually over time. As the disease expanded into the heterosexual community over the next decade, the gay stigma associated to it eased. In turn, the idea of San Francisco as an AIDS-ridden city ceased to be a major theme of AIDS coverage and conversation. During the 1990s the discussion of AIDS also became increasingly mainstream and often centered on the worldwide spread of the disease. AIDS in Africa and Southeast Asia became particularly frequent topics in the media.¹⁰³

Beyond this recognition of the wider threat of AIDS, celebrity attention to the crisis also helped shift the perceptual AIDS epicenter away from San Francisco. While much of the early 1990s celebrity focus on the disease addressed the topic locally within the United States, by the latter decade and first years of the twenty-first century, the emphasis had shifted markedly to developing nations. African nations, in particular, seemed to take on the central perceptual placement in the battle against AIDS. As the *Economist* noted in 2005, “domestic AIDS is passé.”¹⁰⁴

Gay Tourism and Wedding Vows

Evidence of San Francisco’s ability to overcome the AIDS stigma of the 1980s can best be found in the success of its gay-tourism industry in the 1990s and 2000s. By 2008, this industry had developed into a major, worldwide enterprise with San Francisco as its premier destination. Some, such as anthropologist Alyssa Howe, have labeled this a form of “identity and homeland tourism” that, very similar to a religious pilgrimage, shapes and influences both the life of the traveler and the nature of the population visited. In regard to San Francisco, Howe argues that major gay travel to the city since the 1980s has helped retain a tolerant and nonconformist identity carried by San Franciscans since the days of the Gold Rush. Likewise, those visiting have their lives validated in a way they could never experience in home towns that do not share San Francisco’s gay community, acceptance, or history.¹⁰⁵

Regardless of motivations, statistics for gay tourism reveal that it is a phenomenon worth exploration by various city tourism professionals. Homosexuals, according to recent surveys, are far more likely to travel and possess more disposable income than their straight counterparts. In turn, American gay and lesbian tourists spent an

astonishing \$60 billion per year on travel by 2007. Taking note of this, destinations around the world have subsequently engaged in a healthy competition for a share of this business.¹⁰⁶ A careful look at the treatment of gay tourism in travel guides and online travel sources reveals several aspects about San Francisco's relationship with its perceptual placement as the nation's premier gay destination at the turn of the twenty-first century.

The mainstream travel guides have gone a long way in embracing the industry of gay travel. Some, such as Fodor's, have produced guides exclusively devoted to gay tourists.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, virtually every major publication from Frommers to TimeOut contains sections in their city-specific editions on activities of interest for the gay traveler. None, however highlights homosexuality to the degree of the publications centered on San Francisco. In 1995, for example, a prospective visitor lucky enough to spot *Insight Guides: San Francisco* on the local bookstore's shelf found the face of Harvey Milk smiling out from the book's spine and, inside, an entire feature section devoted to the "gay community."¹⁰⁸ The trend has continued, as evidenced by the 2008-2009 San Francisco edition of Lonely Planet. That guide devotes a section in its historical overview of the city to the success of local gays in winning rights and developing one of the world's most vibrant gay communities. It then goes on to devote an entire chapter to "Gay/Lesbian/Bi/Trans SF."¹⁰⁹

A survey of page numbers devoted to gay and lesbian travel in recent editions of the very popular Frommer's travel guides for major United States cities reveals that San Francisco far exceeds the norm. The 2008 edition of Frommer's *San Francisco* provided 16 pages of resources directly or cross-referenced through the "Castro District" for the

gay traveler. By contrast, Frommer's *Los Angeles 2008* edition devoted 6 pages, *Las Vegas 2008* 4 pages, and *New York City 2008* 5 pages. Lonely Planet's *New York City: City Guide* seemingly bucks this trend by devoting a full 11 pages to gay travel spots in the nation's largest city. However, a quick scan of Lonely Planet's *San Francisco: City Guide* for the same year reveals 16 pages devoted to gay destinations.¹¹⁰

As with print travel guides, websites devoted to gay travel clearly place San Francisco as the top destination city. The home page of Gay.Com's travel section features San Francisco more prominently than any other city. Upon opening the page, the would-be traveler is met with links to an article titled "Only in San Francisco" as well as an additional "San Francisco" link under featured destinations. Travel Online prominently features an article titled "the Out Traveler Guides." In this piece, the author offers an explanation of how to use the site's search engine to find destinations and deals. The well-meaning author writes: "Go to our destinations page and click on any city (for example, San Francisco)..."¹¹¹ Once a person follows these instructions, they are rewarded with a 14 page bibliographical listing of gay travel articles focusing on San Francisco (Las Vegas has 4 articles, Los Angeles 11, Miami 11, Chicago 7, Key West 7).¹¹² The site's "introduction" to San Francisco states blatantly that "San Francisco still reigns as the most gay-friendly, gay-popular and gay-integrated destination in the country, if not the world." In these travel writers' minds other leading destinations for gay travelers, such as West Hollywood and New York City's Chelsea, cannot match up to the experience and ease of acceptance found in San Francisco. There, more than any other destination, "you'll find gay women and men throughout the city. They're integrated

in the city's political, financial and social life and power structure, and you'll see them living, working, eating and playing quite comfortably, almost all over town.”¹¹³

At least one reader of Gay.com’s travel tips and summary of San Francisco took great offense at the portrayal of the city. This is not because it cast the city as gay friendly, but because the reader felt the portrayals disgraced the significance of the location as “where we gained the freedoms we have today.” In the comment section following the article, the reader scolded the writers for attempting to sell the Castro district as a place where the “newer generation comes to hook up.” Instead, He offered that the writers should be more in tune with the area’s history and more respectful of “Harvey, Cleve, Eric and the many other soldiers that paved the way for gay rights.”¹¹⁴ Aside from this critical view on the nature of San Francisco’s attraction to homosexuals, there were no condemnations on any of the website’s pages concerning the marketing of San Francisco as a gay destination and the effect of such marketing on the city’s image.

In line with missing condemnations, local businesses seemed to have no problem in highlighting their city as the nation’s foremost gay destination. Numerous businesses placed advertisements in the San Francisco sections on Gay.com. These included advertisements for local shows, hotels, and, most surprisingly, the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau.¹¹⁵ A click on the supplied link to the Bureau’s “Official Visitors’ Site for San Francisco,” opens an entire section devoted to “Gay Travel.” Here, the traveler is treated to resources and articles on where to stay, what to do, weddings, and “History, Culture, and Information,” about Gay San Francisco. In this latter section, the Bureau promotes San Francisco as “the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Capital of the World!”¹¹⁶

No other major United States city's Convention and Visitors Bureau website features a mention of gay tourism on its home page, or any mention of homosexuality for that matter. This is true for such major tourist destinations and cities with substantial gay populations as Los Angeles, New York City, Miami, and Las Vegas. These cities, while they covet their share of the billions spent annually on gay tourism, advertise in a more circumspect way.¹¹⁷ In the case of Las Vegas, itself the nation's perceptual Sin City, one has to actively search out links to websites of large hotels and casinos that are custom tailored for a prospective gay clientele. For example, The Paris Hotel and Casino's official website makes no mention of gay tourism or anything related to homosexuality.¹¹⁸ Yet if someone in the know does a Google search on "Paris Las Vegas gay" they will be taken to a page inaccessible from the main Paris site or any other linked page on it. This page, titled "A European Inspired Destination," caters exclusively to gay travelers. Championing its "Gay friendly staff," the Paris's gay-oriented page features images of same sex couples and "Gay Friendly Links" for fine dining, nightlife, shopping, shows, spas, and commitment ceremonies."¹¹⁹

Quite simply, the print and internet travel media reveal that in both gay and straight circles, San Francisco is willingly considered the nation's pre-eminent gay destination. This coincides with a 2006 Travel Industry Association survey that ranked San Francisco the number 1 gay-friendly destination. Far from displaying grievances with their city's promotion as gay friendly, some San Franciscans, in recent years, have expressed anxiety over the idea that other cities might be attempting to overtake their city's spot atop the gay destination rankings. In the local press, writers and businesspeople have espoused worry about the temptations, and in some cases, actions of other cities in attempting to

lure away gay tourists. Some, such as Peter Gerhaeuser, sales and marketing director at the city's Renoir Hotel, while admittedly using San Francisco's gay rights history as a tourist draw, lamented that other destinations were increasingly cutting into the city's share of the market in recent years.¹²⁰

In relation to gay rights as a tourist draw, the issue of gay marriage has also drawn much press attention to San Francisco as a result of its attempted legalization in 2004 and again in 2008. Ultimately, the state supreme court struck down the legalization in 2004. In 2008, San Franciscans faced a situation eerily reminiscent of 1978's fight against Proposition 6, albeit with fortunes reversed this time. In the general election that year Californians overturned the latest legalization by voting 52.2 percent to 47.8 percent in favor of a state amendment outlawing gay marriage.¹²¹ In San Francisco, the vote ran 75.1 percent against and 24.9 percent in favor of the proposition. Eighty-one percent of the city's registered voters turned out.¹²²

During both brief periods of legalized gay marriage in San Francisco, members of the local business community and tourist industry acted quickly to promote the city as a gay marriage destination. In one instance the San Francisco Visitors and Convention Bureau joined with the Golden Gate Business Association (the nation's first gay Chamber of Commerce) in a new advertising program to "remind this high-spending tourist population why it should continue making its pilgrimage to the city." The campaign features colorful brochures that highlight the city's important role in the gay rights struggle—from the founding of the Daughters of Bilitis to Harvey Milk's election to the legalization of gay marriage--under the caption "Come Out Here."¹²³

Local response to the gay marriage issue and tourism has been mixed. A recent article in the online version of the *San Francisco Chronicle* received twenty-six comments. None of these comments expressed concern over the effect of legalization on San Francisco's image. Instead, a very evident concern by those commenting was that city leaders were using a potential tourism windfall rather than a real concern over gay rights as the motivation for the attempted legalization. As one commenter on the *Chronicle's* website wrote, "I guess gay marriage isn't about Adam and Steve, it's about the Benjamins."¹²⁴ Even those taking a seeming anti-gay stance based their view on the idea of a profit motive rather than real concern for rights, while saying nothing about their concern for San Francisco's image as a gay Mecca. This view was summed up by another poster who wrote "Gays don't want to admit the real reason Newsom wants gay marriages in SF. Its not about 'rights' at all, it only about money."¹²⁵ Thus, for both those in favor of and in opposition to legalized gay marriage, the main concern (beyond the disagreement concerning the propriety of such marriages) centered on the motivation for legalization rather than the affect of legalization on the city's image.

Thirty years earlier, in 1978, it was obviously more about the rights than the money. In that brief instance, political leaders such as Harvey Milk and those that stood with him bucked a national wave of opposition to preserve the basic rights of a segment of their city's population. In the process, Milk obtained the legendary status that so often accompanies martyrdom. San Francisco, on the other hand, lived on with its reputation as the perceptual center of gay America greatly increased. This reputation, in such times of trial as the early years of the AIDS pandemic, often took on negative connotations. At other times, such as during the 1990s and 2000s, it proved profitable. As revealed by the

active attempts to play up San Francisco as a gay travel destination based on both its vibrant gay community and historic role in the gay rights movement, the modern perception of San Francisco as a gay Mecca remains one with which San Franciscans show few signs of discomfort. Obviously, in relation to Birmingham and its concerns over national identity, San Francisco differs markedly. The same can also be said, as the next chapters will argue, for Las Vegas and its image as the nation's "Sin City."

Endnotes

¹ Kenneth Labich and Michael Reese, "He Hated to Lose," *Newsweek*, 11 December 1978, 28; "San Francisco: Horror Upon Horror," *The Economist* 2 December 2, 1978, 44; William Carlson, "Ex-Aide Held in Moscone Killing Ran as Crusader Against Crime," *New York Times*, 29 November 1978.

² "Homosexual on Board Cites Role as Pioneer," *New York Times*, 10 November 1977. In this piece immediately following his election, Milk compares himself to Jackie Robinson. Just as Robinson stood as a symbol to African American youths across the nation by breaking the color line in Major League Baseball, Milk hoped that his path-breaking election could instill hope in the nation's gay population.

³ A few examples of attitudes toward homosexuals during this period can be found in: United States Senate Subcommittee on Investigations, "Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sexual Perverts in Government," (Washington: United States Printing Office, December 15, 1950); Marshall R. McClintock, "Commie Fags: The Politicalization of Homosexuality," unpublished manuscript, Len Evens Papers, Box 1, folder 7, The James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library (Hereafter listed as JCH-GLC); "Perverts Called Government Peril," *New York Times*, 18 April 1950; Milton E. Hahn, "The Sexually Deviate Student," *School and Society* 41 (September 17, 1955): 85-87; "What is a Homosexual?" *Time*, 16 June 1958, 44; "Curable Disease?" *Time*, 10 December 1956, 74-75; "Homosexuals: To Punish or Pity?" *Newsweek* 11 July 11 1960, 78; "The Third Sex," *Newsweek*, 1 June 1964, 76; "Psychiatry: Homosexuals Can Be Cured," *Time*, 12 February 1963, 44. An excellent scholarly study on this topic can be found in John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940 to 1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁴ Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 111-113; Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 113; John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940 to 1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 72, 89-90; Robert B. Marks Ridinger, *The Gay and Lesbian Movement*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 21.

⁵ E. Havemann, "Homosexuality in America," *Life*, 26 June 1964, 66-74.

⁶ President Richard M. Nixon quoted in "All the Philosopher's Men," *Harper's*, February 2000, 22-24.

⁷ American Psychiatric Association Press Release, December 15, 1973. Randy Shilts Papers (GLC 43), Jour-Box 1, folder 26, JCH-GLC.; American Psychological Association, Press Release dated January 24, 1975, Randy Shilts Papers (GLC 43), Box 1, folder 26, JCH-GLC.

⁸ Louise Cook, "States Overhauling Laws Involving Sex," *Register-Guard* (Eugene, Or) 20 May 1975., Randy Shilts Papers, Box 1, folder 14, JCH-GLC; Randy Shilts, "Consenting Sex Laws," unpublished manuscript, Randy Shilts Papers, Box 1, folder 25, JCH-GLC; Randy Shilts, "States Rights Laws: The Big Blow Out of '75," Unpublished manuscript, Randy Shilts Papers, Box 1, folder 27, JCH-GLC.

⁹ Mervin D. Field, "The California Poll: California Sharply Divided Over Homosexuals and Their Way of Life," (San Francisco: The Field Institute, 1977)., Randy Shilts Papers (GLC 43), Box 2, folder 23, JCH-GLC.

¹⁰ Randy Shilts, "Consenting Sex Laws," unpublished manuscript, Randy Shilts Papers, Box 1, folder 25, JCH-GLC.

¹¹ Martin Dennis Meeker, Jr., in "Come Out West: Communication and the Gay and Lesbian Migration to San Francisco, 1940s-1960s," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, Department of History, (December, 2000) argues that San Francisco's emergence as the nation's Gay Mecca can be traced to the 1940s. While correct in these origins, I suggest that the maturation of the city as the Gay Mecca and subsequently its most widespread association as such came after the 1970s.

¹² Randy Shilts, *Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 5-15.

¹³ Ibid., 15-17.

¹⁴ Ibid., 21-31.

¹⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶ "Psychiatry: Homosexuals Can Be Cured," *Time*, 12 February 1963, 44; A very moving and detailed account of these "cures" can be found in Martin Duberman, *Cures: A Gay Man's Odyssey* (New York: Dutton Publications, 1991).

¹⁷ Shilts, *Mayor of Castro Street*, 38.

¹⁸ Ibid., 40-46.

¹⁹ Ibid., 65-70.

²⁰ Ibid., 73-79.

²¹ Lacy Fosburgh, "Cheers, Then a Shot, And Crowd Screams," *New York Times*, 23 September 1975; Daryl Lembke, "No Call From President: Hero in Ford Shooting Active Among SF Gays," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 September 1975; Daryl Lembke, "Ford to Thank S.F. Man Who Deflected Gun," *Los Angeles Times*, 26 September 1975; Jesus

Rangel, "O.W. Sipple, 47, Who Blocked an Attempt to Kill Ford in 1975," *New York Times*, 4 February 1989.

²² Harvey Milk to friends, letter announcing candidacy, February 26, 1975. Harvey Milk Papers, Box 3, folder 2, JCH-GLC.

²³ Gay Friends of Harvey Milk, "Harvey Milk for Assembly," Political Campaign Flyer, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 3, folder 15, JCH-GLC; Harvey Milk for Assembly Committee, "Why Elect Harvey Milk?" Political Campaign Flyer, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 3, folder 15, JCH-GLC; "Harvey Milk: The Democrat for Assembly," Political Campaign Flyer, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 3, folder 15, JCH-GLC.

²⁴ Shilts, *Mayor of Castro Street*, 128-149; San Francisco Mayor George Moscone to Harvey Milk, March 9, 1976, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 2, folder 7, "Correspondence, 1971-1976, JCH-GLC.

²⁵ Friends of Harvey Milk, Political Flyer titled "Street Fairs, Harvey Milk, and You," Harvey Milk Papers, Box 4, folder 5, JCH-GLC; Friends of Harvey Milk, Political Flyer titled "Harvey Milk/Supervisor 5," Harvey Milk Papers, Box 4, folder 5, JCH-GLC.

²⁶ Shilts, *Mayor of Castro Street*, 183.

²⁷ Herbert Gold, "A Walk on San Francisco's Gay Side," *New York Times*, 6 November 1977.

²⁸ "Homosexual on Board Cites Role as Pioneer." *New York Times*, 8 November 1977.

²⁹ John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 346.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 346-47, 353; Margaret Cruikshank, *The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 15-16.

³² "Bias Against Homosexuals is Outlawed in Miami," *New York Times*, January 19, 1977.

³³ "Anita Bryant Scores White House Meeting with Homosexuals," *New York Times* March 28, 1977; "Powell Defends Meeting," *New York Times*, March 28, 1977.

³⁴ "People in the News," *ABC Evening News*, February 15, 1977; "Special: Gay Rights," *NBC Evening News*, June 2, 1977; "Florida: Gay Rights," *CBS Evening News*, June 3, 1977; "Miami: Gay Rights Vote," *ABC Evening News*, June 6, 1977; "Dade County Florida: Homosexuals," *NBC Evening News*, June 7, 1977; "Elections," *CBS Evening News*, June 7, 1977; "Homosexual Vote: Miami," *ABC Evening News*, June 8, 1977;

“Homosexual Equal Rights,” *CBS Evening News*, June 8, 1977; “Homosexual Rights Referendum,” *NBC Evening News*, June 8, 1977; “Bryant: Homosexual Campaign,” *NBC Evening News*, June 9, 1977; “Bryant: Citrus Promotion Job,” *ABC Evening News*, July 19, 1977; “Bryant, Gay Rights, and Orange Growers,” *NBC Evening News*, July 20, 1977; “Segment 3: Homosexuals,” *NBC Evening News*, September 12, 1977; “Bryant: Homosexuality,” *ABC Evening News*, November 2, 1977; “Anita Bryant: Contract Renewed,” *CBS Evening News*, November 16, 1977; “Briefly: Bryant,” *NBC Evening News*, November 16, 1977; “Briefly: Anita Bryant,” *NBC Evening News*, December 30, 1977.

³⁵ “Easter Service,” *CBS Evening News*, March 26, 1978; St. Paul: Gay Rights,” *ABC Evening News*, April 26, 1978; “Anti-Gay Movement: Wichita,” *ABC Evening News*, May 8, 1978; “Gay Rights: Oregon Vote,” *ABC Evening News*, May 22, 1978; “Gay Rights: Oregon,” *CBS Evening News*, May 22, 1978; “Gay Rights: Oregon,” *NBC Evening News*, May 24, 1978; “High School Student Survey,” *ABC Evening News*, June 22, 1978; “Campaign ’78: Gay Rights in Florida and California,” *NBC Evening News*, November 5, 1978.

³⁶ “Dr. Jerry Falwell, The Old-Time Gospel Hour Clean Up America! Crusade,” Mailer, July 14, 1978, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 6, folder 24, JCH-GLC: Randy Shilts, “The Fundamentalists,” transcript, September 20, 1978, Randy Shilts Papers, Box 7, folder 1, JCH-GLC.

³⁷ “Protect America’s Children,” Mailer, Gary Shilts Papers, Box 7, folder 1, JCH-GLC.

³⁸ Louis Harris, “The Harris Survey: Gay is O.K., But.....,” (Chicago: Chicago Tribune Company, 1977), Randy Shilts Papers, Box 2, folder 17, JCH-GLC.

³⁹ Shilts, *Mayor of Castro Street*, 153-54.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Shilts received much criticism for this article’s even handed and, at times, positive portrayal of Briggs. Shilts attempted to show Briggs as not so much anti-gay as politically ambitious. At the same time, he argued that the senator did not take his anti-gay pronouncements seriously, and that comparisons between Briggs and Nazis were unfounded. One typical response to Shilts’s article can be found in a leaflet titled “The Human Side of Hitler,” Randy Shilts Papers, Box 8, folder 23, JCH-GLC. Distributed by anonymous gay rights activists signing off as “The Red Queen,” the leaflet related a fictional interview of “an up-and-coming aggressive journalist” in the early years of Nazi Germany. When asked about Hitler, concentration camps, and gays, the journalist, conveniently named “Mr. Shits,” claimed that Hitler was “actually quite charming when he’s off stage,” and “doesn’t actually believe in what he says publicly.” If, Mr. Shits continued, Hitler should follow through with a threat to confine gays to concentration camps, “it won’t be because he dislikes us personally, which is very comforting to know.” In closing the flyer lists the “moral” of the story as “Gay opportunists in journalism are as dangerous as straight opportunists in politics.”

⁴¹ California Save Our Children Committee, "Initiative Measure To Be Submitted Directly To The Voters," Randy Shilts Papers, Box 7, folder 1, JCH-GLC.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ John Balzar, "Briggs' Initiative on Gays Wins Ballot Spot," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 June 1978.

⁴⁴ Tom Steel, "Briggs Initiative Qualifies for Ballot," *The Conspiracy*, Newsletter of the Bay Area Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, (June-July, 1978). Harvey Milk Papers, Box 6, folder 24, "Briggs Initiative," JCH-GLC.

⁴⁵ Larry Liebert, "A Legislative Push Begins for Gay Job Rights," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 January 1978.

⁴⁶ United States Representative Phillip Burton to San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk, dated February 1, 1978, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 7, folder 41, JCH-GLC; United States Congressman John L. Burton to San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk, dated February 5, 1978, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 7, folder 41, JCH-GLC

⁴⁷ California Speaker of the Assembly Leo T. McCarthy to San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk, dated February 1, 1978, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 7, folder 41, JCH-GLC; California Assembly Majority Whip Art Agnos to San Francisco Supervisor Ella Hill Hutch, dated February 9, 1978, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 7, folder 41, JCH-GLC; Assemblyman Willie T. Brown, Jr. to San Francisco Supervisor Dan White, dated February 27, 1978, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 7, folder 41, JCH-GLC.

⁴⁸ B. Drummond Ayres Jr., "Miami Debate Over Rights of Homosexuals Directs Wide Attention to a National Issue," *New York Times*, 10 May 1977; Les Ledbetter, "40,000 Join Peaceful March for Homosexual Rights in San Francisco," *New York Times*, 26 June 1977; Grace Lichtenstein, "Homosexuals are Moving Toward Open Way of Life As Tolerance Rises Among the General Population," *New York Times*, 17 July 1977; Floyd Abrams, "The Press, Privacy, and the Constitution," *New York Times*, 21 August 1977; Herbert Gold, "A Walk on San Francisco's Gay Side," *New York Times Magazine*, 6 November 1977; "Homosexual on Board Cites Role as Pioneer," *New York Times*, 8 November 1977; Jean O'Leary, "Letter to the Editor," *New York Times*, 4 December 1977; Colette Holt, "Letter to the Editor," *New York Times*, 4 December 1977; L. Egan and L. Jilly, "Letter to the Editor," *New York Times*, 4 December 1977.

⁴⁹ William Safire, "Big Week For Gays," *New York Times*, 29 September 1975; "Support For Homosexuals," *New York Times*, 19 April 1976.

⁵⁰ S. Franker, "Gay Power in San Francisco," *Newsweek*, 6 June 1977, 25.

⁵¹ Harry Reasoner and Bill Wordham, “Miami Gay Rights Vote,” *ABC Evening News*, June 6, 1977.

⁵² Herb Caen, “Dog Daze in San Francisco,” *New York Times*, 8 March 1978.

⁵³ Les Ledbetter, “San Franciscans Mark Day,” *New York Times*, 26 June 1978.

⁵⁴ Don Kladstrup and Walter Cronkite, “San Francisco Gay Rights Ordinance,” *CBS Evening News*, March 27, 1978.

⁵⁵ San Francisco Board of Supervisors, “Article 33: Gay Rights Ordinance,” Harvey Milk Papers, Box 8, folder 1, JCH-GLC; Supervisor Harvey Milk, “Press Release,” dated April 6, 1978, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 8, folder 1, JCH-GLC.

⁵⁶ “The Latest Poll,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 November 1978. This article listed polls relative to Proposition 6 taken in late August, late September, and on October 30 – November 1.

⁵⁷ Mervin D. Field, “3 Propositions Gaining Favor,” Unnamed, Undated Newspaper clipping, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 6, folder 24, JCH-GLC.

⁵⁸ “The Latest Poll,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 November 1978.

⁵⁹ No On the Briggs Initiative Committee, “He’s Walking the Length of California to Dispel the Lies of Briggs,” Flyer, Randy Shilts Papers, Box 8, folder 22, JCH-GLC; Eli Setencich, “Walking Tall for Teachers,” *Fresno Bee* 31 July 1978, Randy Shilts Papers, Box 8, folder 22, JCH-GLC; *Shilts, Mayor of Castro Street*, 242-43.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 243

⁶¹ Walter Cronkite and Barry Peterson, “California, Proposition 6, and Homosexuality,” *CBS Evening News*, 26 October 1978.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 244.

⁶³ Mayor of Castro Street, 244; Tom Steel, “Briggs Initiative Qualifies for Ballot,” *The Conspiracy*, Newsletter of the Bay Area Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, (June July, 1978). Harvey Milk Papers, Box 6, folder 24, JCH-GLC; San Francisco Board of Supervisors, “Resolution Number 511-78: Opposing the State Ballot Initiative Entitled, School Employees—Homosexuality,” dated June 19, 1978, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 6, folder 25, JCH-GLC.

⁶⁴ San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, Memorandum to Board of Directors, undated, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 6, folder 27, JCH-GLC; San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk to Chamber of Commerce President William E. Dauer, dated October 16, 1978, Harvey

Milk Papers, Box 6, folder 27, JCH-GLC; San Francisco Chamber of Commerce President William E. Dauer to San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk, dated October 18, 1978, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 6, folder 27, JCH-GLC; San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk to Chamber of Commerce President William E. Dauer, dated October 19, 1978, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 6, folder 27, JCH-GLC; San Francisco Chamber of Commerce Public Affairs Manager Gregory P. Hurst to San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk, dated October 23, 1978, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 6, folder 27, JCH-GLC.

⁶⁵ “Briggs Spurns Nazi Help,” *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, 23 September 1978.

⁶⁶ Shilts, *Mayor of Castro Street*, 247.

⁶⁷ Herb Caen, “Dog Daze in San Francisco,” *New York Times*, 8 March 1978.

⁶⁸ “Genesis 18, 26-32, *Holy Bible*, King James Version.

⁶⁹ Ralph Hinman and Bob Andrews, “Baptist Meeting in Anaheim Scolds Carter on Proposition 6,” *Long Beach Independent Press-Telegram*, 18 November 1979; Kelley Tackett, “Letters to the Editor: Christianity and Proposition 6 Debate,” *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 18 October 1978; James Harrison, “Letters to the Editor: Christianity and Proposition 6 Debate,” *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 18 October 1978; Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Cleveland, “Letters to the Editor: Christianity and Proposition 6 Debate,” *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, 18 October 1978.

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⁷¹ Harvey Milk, “Debate Notes,” Harvey Milk Archives, Scott Smith Collection, Box 9, folder 45, JCH-GLC.

⁷² Bob Tuttle quoted in Shilts, *Mayor of Castro Street*, 248.

⁷³ Thomas E. Ainsworth to Harvey Milk, dated October 13, 1978, Milk Papers, Box 9, folder 45, JCH-GLC; Oscar Villanencio to Harvey Milk, dated October 14, 1978, Milk Papers, Box 9, folder 45, JCH-GLC; David Held to Harvey Milk, dated October 12, 1978, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 9, folder 45, JCH-GLC.

⁷⁴ Oscar Villanencio to Harvey Milk, dated October 14, 1978, Milk Papers, Box 9, folder 45, JCH-GLC; David Held to Harvey Milk, dated October 12, 1978, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 9, folder 45, JCH-GLC.

⁷⁵ Phillip Fay Stevenson to Harvey Milk, undated, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 9, folder 45, JCH-GLC.

⁷⁶ Jerry Carroll, “Gay Happy Days Are Here Again,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 November 1978.

⁷⁷ “Statewide,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 November 1978.

⁷⁸ “S.F. Vote,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 November 1978.

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⁸⁰ Anonymous to Board of Supervisors c/o Harvey Milk, May 18, 1978, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 6, folder 6, “Hate Mail,” JCH-GLC; Anonymous to “San Francisco Board of Stupid Visors c/o Cocksucker Harvey Milk,” May 27, 1978, Harvey Milk Papers, Box 6, folder 6, “Hate Mail,” JCH-GLC.

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⁸⁴ Randy Shilts, *Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), vii, xv-xvii, 263-271; Margaret Crunkshaw, *The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 73.

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- ⁹⁰ Michael Worobey, et al., "Direct Evidence of Extensive Diversity of HIV-1 in Kinshasa by 1960," *Nature* 455 (October, 2008): 661-64.
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- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, 490. 498-99.
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- ⁹⁵ Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, 121.
- ⁹⁶ Alan Petrucelli, "The Gay Plague," *Us Magazine*, 31 August 1981.
- ⁹⁷ Paul Jacobs, "22 More Children Contract New Immune Deficiency," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 December 1982, B3. This article reveals both the shift in terminology to AIDS and the spread of the disease outside of perceived pariah groups. Here, straight children had contracted the disease through blood transfusions.
- ⁹⁸ "San Francisco Rescue Workers Wary of AIDS," *Boston Globe*, 13 May 1983, 1.
- ⁹⁹ A few representative examples of the newspaper media linking AIDS, homosexuality, and San Francisco include Ellen Goodman, "Gays Fighting a New Stigma," *Boston Globe*, 7 July 1983, 1; "Blood Bank Will Use Second Test in Drive to Reduce AIDS Risk," *Wall Street Journal*, 30 March 1984, 1; San Francisco Curb on Baths," *New York Times*, 10 April 1984, A. 14; Wayne King, "Houston Voting Today on Banning Bias Against Homosexuals," *New York Times*, 19 January 1985, 1.
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- ¹⁰¹ "AIDS: San Francisco Recoils," *The Economist*, 23 August 1986, 24.
- ¹⁰² King, "Houston Voting Today," *New York Times*, 19 January 1985, 1.
- ¹⁰³ "AIDS Researchers: What Can They Say?" *US News & World Report*, 8 August 1994, 18; Simon Robinson, "Orphans of AIDS," *Time*, 13 December 1999, 60-62; Jack E. White, "When Silence is a Sin," *Time*, 27 December 1999; "A Devastated Continent," *Newsweek*, 1 January 2000, 41.

¹⁰⁴ “Books and Arts: Holding up a Mirror; AIDS and Artists,” *The Economist*, 1 January 2005; Cynthia Reynolds, “Celebrity Chic,” *MacLeans*, 20 December 2004, 51-55.

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CHAPTER 7

SINNING IN THE DESERT: THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICA'S PREMIER ADULT PLAYGROUND

In the early twentieth century, urban boosters faced some difficulty in selling arid or desert locations to prospective settlers. Americans at this time hardly considered the desert quintessentially “American” and did not exactly covet it as a place to raise crops, livestock, or search out a living in the nation’s burgeoning industrial sector. Unlike a booming Birmingham, the desert-situated Las Vegas could not offer the jobs of the steel mill as incentive for migration or immigration. Likewise, its desert location and hard, alkaline soil did not bode well for self-supportive homesteads or agribusiness. Early boosters faced the dilemma of how to overcome the stigma of their town’s desert location in the years following the town’s inception in 1905. The remote and arid railroad town struggled against these obstacles early on before prospering from its sun-baked location as America’s playground several decades in the future. Along the way, Las Vegas’s image traveled an eventful path from little known desert outpost to one of the world’s most renowned destinations. Ultimately, in its journey through the twentieth century, Las Vegas emerged as the nation’s “sin city”—a place where you can go to do the things deemed unacceptable at home.

When William A. Clark bought the Las Vegas Rancho from Helen J. Stewart, it was not too much of a gamble. The year was 1902 and \$55,000 seemed like a good deal of money, even for 2,000 acres of land. But the millionaire Montana senator—known widely to have the Midas touch—was racing to build a railroad from Salt Lake City to Los Angeles. The railroad would cross this southern Nevada valley known for its life-sustaining springs in a vast expanse of inhospitable aridity. First visited by Spanish explorers in the seventeenth century, the valley had gone on to be a layover point on the old Spanish Trail leading to southern California. Thanks to Clark, Union Pacific passenger cars soon enough replaced the wagons, carts, and horses of yesteryear. On the meadow ranch he had just purchased, the new town of Las Vegas would ultimately make a rather unspectacular entrance into early twentieth century America.¹

About six decades before Clark’s purchase, Mormon missionaries had settled the area along the banks of the Las Vegas Creek. Life for the few Latter Day Saints at the Las Vegas Mission from 1855 to 1858 proved difficult in the extreme. The hot weather and lack of almost any imaginable comfort and most necessities kept the eleven families and a few single men in a state of uncertainty and privation. It was a place, as early settler Maria Barston wrote, where “luxuries were few,” and all “thought common necessities were luxuries.”² The Native American population—the very ones that church leaders charged the missionaries with converting—proved more interested in the mission’s crops than its religious beliefs. All too often, the settlers found their precious crops missing. Also, settlers found the place depressing due to its remote location and excessive heat. The discovery of lead ore in 1856, while offering hope of invigorating the settlement, ultimately led only to increased division within the community and less devotion to

agriculture. Finally, most of the settlers received permission from Brigham Young to return to Utah during the winter of 1857-1858. By the end of the Summer of 1858, all Mormon settlers had evacuated the fort.³ By the time of Clark's arrival, no town stood in the valley of "the meadows," or Las Vegas as the Spanish had dubbed it long before. Instead, only a few large and widely dispersed ranches—the Las Vegas Spring Ranch, Spring Mountain Ranch, Kiel's Ranch in North Las Vegas, and Stewart's Las Vegas Ranch—struggled for existence, both against the harsh climate, and at times each other.⁴

Before any historical discussion of the cultural emergence of Las Vegas as America's adult playground can take place, it helps first to look at the city's natural environment. In examining both the characteristics of the local geography and climate along with attempts to shape perceptions of these attributes, one can see the first instances of concern with local image. Before Las Vegas could worry about its image as a sin city, it had first to deal with the stigma associated with its harsh, desert location. Ironically, the perception of this harsh location that early boosters sought to shed ultimately contributed to Las Vegas's success.

A Climate for Sin

Located at the edge of the Mojave Desert and the Great Basin in close proximity to Death Valley, the site of Clark's purchase was distant, inhospitable, and just plain uncomfortable to anyone that might have the misfortune to live there before the advent of air conditioning. Eventually, and against all odds, the site would gain the distinction of housing one of the world's largest arid-climate cities.⁵ While the opposite seems more commonsensical, the distinct geographic placement and harsh, perceptually foreign

climate contributed over time as a key factor in the rise of Las Vegas to its postwar, magnificently risqué form.

Southern Nevada is among the driest and hottest places on Earth. Mid-day high temperatures in the midst of Summer can routinely reach the 110 to 113 degrees Fahrenheit range and 100 degrees at midnight is not out of the question. One cannot count on rainfall to alleviate the heat, as the yearly average is right around 4.5 inches. All in all, Las Vegas averages more than 200 days of sunny weather a year. Unfortunately, it is too hot to venture in out in comfort after 10 a.m. and before sunset on a good number of these days.⁶

The task of managing perceptions of the climate and environment has concerned city boosters since the earliest years of their town's existence. Chamber of Commerce literature from the 1910s reveals an almost paranoid avoidance of revealing the city's true desert nature to outsiders. Booklets and pamphlets from 1913 and 1915 employ such titles as "Semi-Tropical Nevada: A Region of Fertile Soil and Flowing Wells," or "Las Vegas, Nevada: Where Farming Pays." In promoting the Las Vegas valley as a "fertile" land, the pamphlets misled prospective migrants concerning the climate and soil at best, and lied outright at worst. One has to wonder what those migrants who took the bait thought upon arriving after having been lured by such claims as "anything that would grow in Southern California would grow in abundance in Southern Nevada and that "no one ever heard of heat stroke or heat prostration" in the Las Vegas valley."⁷ As historian David Wrobel has so clearly pointed out, boosters in the last few decades of the nineteenth century through the 1930s "literally tried to imagine western places into existence through embellished and effusive descriptions." Often, in an age where the

productive capacity of the land stood as a crucial selling point, these boosters were not averse to imagining “desolate frontiers” as lands endowed with “agricultural advantages, and devoid of danger and privation.”⁸ In the case of Las Vegas, one has to hope that at least some lucky settlers brought enough money for a return trip home or enough to travel on to a more agreeable climate for agriculture.

The trend of casting Vegas as something of a water-rich agricultural utopia continued through the 1920s, although adjusted somewhat by the news of the massive dam project to begin just to the east of town in the Colorado River’s Black Canyon. A 1924 Chamber of Commerce pamphlet devoted seven of its eleven pages to the valley’s plentiful water, rich soil, and tremendous agricultural potential. The remaining four pages focused on the dam project—which also received title page placement—important buildings, and industry and mining operations. While the Chamber used the word “wonderful” to describe the local climate, they seldom employed the term desert. Authors of the brochures limited such language to before and after illustrations intended to show the agricultural potential of the land. For example, the pamphlet listed the “greater portion” of the area as being covered by “stretches of desert.” The agricultural “possibilities” of these “stretches” could be easily “unlocked” through cultivation to provide bountiful harvests of whatever a person might want to plant. The pamphlet, then featuring a grove of very large fig trees, asks: “Look much like a desert to you?”⁹

The rationale behind downplaying the young city’s arid climate resides in historical perceptions of the desert in American history. Americans have held strong and often varied beliefs about the desert environment. At various times, these perceptions of the desert have run from foreboding, overbearing, unconquerable, and suggestive of death to

resource rich, escapist, transformable, and recreational.¹⁰ Such identifications of the desert played heavily in Las Vegas's history. From the preceding discussion, one can see the early city boosters attempting to avoid casting the city's climate as arid, hot, or otherwise permanently desert-like. Instead, they partook of the contemporary trend to cast the environment as welcoming to a transformation that awaited only an adequate number of farmers to turn it into an agricultural wonderland. In many ways, this resembled the nineteenth century truism of rainfall following the plow.

As Las Vegas began to "sell" itself in earnest to the rest of the nation as an entertainment destination in the post-World War II years, the chamber adjusted its representation of the city's desert climate. In 1948, a Chamber publication titled "Story of Southern Nevada" no longer attempted to sell Las Vegas as an agricultural paradise. Although it contained a brief section on agriculture, it limited itself to highlighting a number of agricultural enterprises in the Moapa Valley. The only reference to Las Vegas in this section was a picture of a turkey ranch somewhere "near Las Vegas."¹¹

As for direct references to the desert climate, the 1948 booklet displays a tendency that became commonplace with the rise of the tourism-based economy. Throughout the piece, assertions of the dry climate's beneficial qualities counterbalance its few fleeting references to the desert, which were also offset by references to modern Hoover Dam and cool Lake Mead. In one example, the booklet's climate section leads off with a photo of an exotic looking "shifting sand dune" said to be in the "Sun drenched Las Vegas valley," but that could believably reside in the Sahara. After this, the main text of the section makes sure to highlight Las Vegas's "year 'round sunshine" unhampered by rain, it

emphasizes the cooling effect of “aridness.” This plentiful Sun and dry air can only result in “comfortable living.”¹²

In 1947, the Union Pacific Railroad, along with other Las Vegas business leaders and influential citizens, decided that the city needed increased publicity in hopes of drawing more tourists to the area. That year, the Union Pacific hired famed publicist Steve Hannagan to head up the effort of selling Las Vegas to the American public as a vacation destination. Hannagan, widely regarded as a promotional genius, had formerly headed publicity campaigns for Sun Valley, Idaho, Miami Beach, and the Indianapolis 500. With a staff of three photographers and four writers, he began to publicize Las Vegas in a variety of ways. One was to photograph out of town visitors entering local resorts and send those pictures, along with such captions as “Having a wonderful time in Las Vegas,” to their hometown newspapers. The idea was to create envy in the photographed person’s neighbors by suggesting that Las Vegas was “the place to go.”¹³

At the same time, under Hannagan’s lead, The Las Vegas News Bureau, as it became known, stressed Las Vegas’s proximity to a plethora of natural and manmade wonders. These included Lake Mead, Zion National Park, and Death Valley. Thus, the constant Sun and warm climate became beneficial to the tourist interested in partaking of the area’s natural wonders.¹⁴ What boosters formerly viewed as a desert worthy of avoidance, became one of the area’s strongest selling points.

By 1954, at least some of the Chamber’s booster material ceased having special sections under the heading climate. In some, such as “Las Vegas, This is Our City,” the local aridity was used as a selling point for tourism. Under the “Vital Statistics” heading, a single paragraph addressed the city’s desert climate. Primarily it stressed the 219 sunny

and 50 partly cloudy days as opposed to only 66 days with predominant cloud cover. This under an average low temperature of a warm 51.5 degrees Fahrenheit, 15 percent humidity and less than .56 inches of rain for the entire year of 1956. All of this combined, in the Chamber of Commerce's opinion, to make Las Vegas a choice destination for people who sought happiness, "sunshine and a mild, dry climate."¹⁵

Thus, historical context and prevailing attitudes toward desert played an important role in the shifting portrayal of Las Vegas to the outside world. In a society where agricultural productivity remained important to settlers, the arid, pre-tourism oriented Las Vegas attempted to sell itself as a potential site of agriculture. However misleading this might have been, the city boosters were concerned with increasing the population. With the needs of the city shifted toward drawing tourists rather than permanent residents in the late 1940s and 1950s, the desert became yet another eccentricity to sell to the American public. Thanks to almost constant sun and lack of rain, its desolation became a commodity marketed right alongside the good times in the casino. In decades to come, however, increased environmental consciousness would lead some to question the idea of a resort city in the desert.

In recent years, Las Vegas's hyper-arid climate has combined with its astonishing growth to create much anxiety over whether water limitations will ultimately constrain the city's growth. Much of this stems from the 1922 water pact or "law of the river," that allocates Colorado River water among southwestern states on a very unequal basis. Based on population and water needs at the time, southwestern states' portions of the 7.5 million acre-feet Colorado River allocation is divided as follows: California gets 4.4 million acre feet, Arizona gets 2.85 million, and Nevada gets 300,000.¹⁶

When this water allocation was drawn up, the young Las Vegas claimed only 5,000 residents and had yet to earn its “Sin City” image. Yet by 1963, when the United States Supreme Court upheld the primacy of Southern California concerning Colorado River water allocation, Las Vegas has grown both in size and notoriety.¹⁷ By this time, known for the Rat Pack and mob involvement in casinos, the large springs on the city’s Westside that once served as an oasis of sorts for westward travelers of the nineteenth century had dried up due to depletion of the local water table.¹⁸ In the late 1980s, ground in areas of Las Vegas began sinking slowly, as the now dry aquifers began to collapse and the metropolitan population approached one million. That year, Patricia Mulroy, as head of the Southern Nevada Water Authority, laid claim to all of the ground water in the southern half of the state and proposed over 1000 miles of pipeline to deliver it to southern Nevada. Most, if not all, ranchers and rural Nevadans balked at supplying their water to the self-interested, notorious city to the south. In the end, Mulroy gained her true objective of an additional allotment of almost 300,000 acre feet by virtue of claiming Virgin River water that also flowed into nearby Lake Mead.¹⁹

The issue of water relative to the future of Las Vegas as both the nation’s leading adult playground and as an ever-growing population center created opposing viewpoints in the twentieth century and early twenty-first. Many felt that the city must eventually bow to nature’s dictates. There are those who feel that Las Vegas is attempting to flaunt natural conditions as it has flaunted social and cultural mores over the course of its history. A BBC story published in July of 2005 offers a fine example of this viewpoint.

The BBC portrayed Las Vegas as a “city of fantasy,” quickly running out of water due to suburban growth, desert location, and insufficient conservation. Because of this

pattern, city leaders eyed their northern neighbors' underground water. The BBC piece argued that, because Vegas had been "flaunting its reputation for excess" even in the area of water use, the city was on the prowl for more water to feed its ravenous appetite. This time, as planning forecasters prophesized an increase of one million residents in the next few years, it did not seem to be a ploy to gain additional Colorado River water. Instead, the very real prospect of an Owens Valley-type water grab scared central Nevada ranchers into preparation for a water war divided along the lines of "crops versus craps."²⁰

In intellectual circles, Las Vegas's water situation has also combined with its image to create differing takes on the city's present and future environmental prospects. Well known Las Vegas historian Hal Rothman, for example, saw Las Vegas's flamboyant use of water as merely an extension of the Las Vegas identity. Such things were what people expected from Vegas, and thus contributed to the city's and region's bottom line by giving the people what they wanted. Further, he argued that Las Vegas will not be the one to suffer from water scarcity. Instead, because of its cash-cow entertainment industry, Vegas will have the money to bring in the water from wherever it might be. After all, in the American Southwest, water is a marketplace commodity, and "there is no shortage of money" in Las Vegas.²¹

Beyond viewing reckless water usage as an extension of Vegas's established identity, Rothman's views closely parallel those of historian of water Marc Reisner. Reisner, in his popular work *Cadillac Desert*, wrote that "in the West...water flows uphill toward money."²² Although money, in more affluent places like Las Vegas, might allow water to break the laws of physics, Reisner points out that, in a place as vast and dry as the

western United States, the selective breaking of natural laws is not enough. There is simply not enough water to green the entire arid sections of the West. Further, over the entire course of American settlement, irrigation, and attempts at transforming the western climate, the United States has managed to “green” an area about the size of Missouri. For the most part, nonrenewable stores of ground water supported most of this greening.²³ While that area is no pittance of land, to be sure, it pales in comparison to the wider West. Vegas, however, is not as large as the whole West, and, as Rothman points out, has the money and will to make things happen. Thus, although the commodity is limited and the potential demand great, those with the means will be able to obtain it. The rest of the West be damned.

Other intellectuals have taken a different approach. Urban prognosticator Mike Davis, for example, sees much to condemn in Las Vegas’s water usage, as well as most everything else about the city. Davis charges Las Vegas and cities like it with being wasteful blights on the world’s landscape. He finds no redeeming value in such existences built on the crass and over-indulgent exploitation of natural resources. Eventually, Las Vegas’s failure to acknowledge that it lives in an environment with very finite water resources must, in Davis’s opinion, lead to the city’s downfall. Because of its willful ignorance concerning the limitations of its natural environment, Las Vegas is already among Davis’s “Dead Cities.”²⁴

Davis’s declensionist line of thinking is much in line with that of environmental historian Ted Steinberg, who has written extensively about the dangers of society placing itself at increased environmental risk through its own disregard for common environmental sense. Thus, one could view Las Vegas as paralleling a city built on an

earthquake zone, river flood plain, or coastal area prone to hurricanes. Steinberg argues that the always eventual disasters that society terms “Acts of God,” are, in reality, very much acts of humans.²⁵ Yet, Rothman’s contention that Las Vegas can buy its way out of its environmental predicament has merit in this case. Water is not an immovable object like a fault in the earth or a hurricane ravaged coastline.

Beyond the debate in academia over Las Vegas’s future in regard to water or lack thereof, popular media have also frequently picked up on the extreme desert climate of the city. Hollywood, for example, often highlighted the desert setting and extreme heat of the Las Vegas valley. In one of the funnier instances, in 1997’s National Lampoon’s Vegas Vacation, Randy Quaid’s character, Cousin Eddie, cooks a steak for Chevy Chase’s Clark Griswold by simply throwing it down on an exposed boulder outside the city limits. Later in the same film, Cousin Eddie again draws attention to the oppressive heat by telling Clarke, after entering a casino, that “it’s a blazer out there today. Good to be in the air conditioning like God intended.”²⁶

The news media have also invoked America’s reticence to embrace the desert on multiple occasions in its portrayals of Las Vegas. As early as 1905, one can find the print media in other cities referring to Las Vegas and the hostile desert it inhabited. The *San Jose Mercury*, for example, wrote of a Japanese minister’s son “toiling in the desert” at Caliente and Las Vegas instead of joining his siblings at Stanford University.²⁷ Likewise, following the Bullfrog gold strike of the same year, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* placed Las Vegas, as well as the towns of Goldfield and Bullfrog squarely in the desert.²⁸ By the end of the year, the *San Jose Mercury* claimed that railroad laborers lured to Las Vegas by “unscrupulous” recruiters were “starving in the desert.”²⁹ A few months later, when

flooding washed out much of the railroad in the Las Vegas area, that generic desert had become the “Nevada Desert between Caliente and Las Vegas” to newspapers around the nation.³⁰

By the time that the Chamber of Commerce was busily promoting Las Vegas as one of the nation’s premier agricultural areas in 1914, such newspapers as the *Oregonian* were featuring travel narratives about its desert characteristics. In fact, one piece detailing the southern Nevada travels of an otherwise unidentified Queen Thelma, uses the word desert prominently in the article’s title.³¹ Likewise, by the time of the 1922 railroad strike, readers from California to Florida learned of train transport halting at such “desert points” as Las Vegas, Nevada.³² In at least one instance, writers went so far as to label the train shutdown as the “Desert Strike.”³³

Regardless of whether Las Vegas is truly running out of water or if its deep pockets might be able to finance the reach northward for more of the precious liquid when needed, the image of a water-starved Vegas is not what the town attempts to convey to the outside world. This is made obvious by the Chamber of Commerce attempts first to cast the town as an agricultural wonderland in its earliest years, and then as a climatically pleasant playground as the emphasis shifted to tourism. Yet the very fact that intellectuals, environmentalists, and popular media sources continue to debate and discuss the desert character of Las Vegas proves that the suspension of environmental reality has not been completely successful and that opposing views of desert identity remain strong in the twenty-first century.

The attempt to project Las Vegas as something other than a desert city does, however, reveal the importance which those with a stake in the town’s success place on the

intricacies of image. In a nation that is historically inclined to recoil at the mention of desert and associate it with wasteland, one cannot doubt the motivations of those who would rather sell their city as “semi-tropical,” or pleasantly sun-drenched throughout most of the year.

Ironically, the very desert location that boosters have shied away from has been a major contributor to the success of Las Vegas as an adult playground. While the previous examples of advertising campaigns reveal a booster-held belief that people might not want to visit or live in an uncomfortable place, the seeming remoteness of Las Vegas allows for its brand of fun. Las Vegas’s desert location is distant enough from suburban living rooms to allow for a sense of detachment. This detachment, as David Schwartz has argued, allows for the existence of things that would not be acceptable in mainstream America.³⁴ Under the lights of Vegas, out over the mountains and across the desert, otherwise upstanding people can do otherwise unacceptable things with impunity. The idea of isolation has provided legitimacy and power to the slogan “what happens here, stays here” since its 2002 creation.³⁵ In turn, the distant location and the image of a place set apart provides the city with an even greater amount of its continued success as an adult playground.

In this regard, Las Vegas makes use of a final characterization of the desert in American popular opinion. The desert as area of escape has been a thread in the conceptualization of arid areas in the United States throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. One can find evidence of this most obviously in the western genre of American film. The pursued, overburdened, or spurned protagonist heads into the desert to shake that which otherwise constrains or threatens to constrain him.³⁶ When viewed as

a place to escape the equally overbearing norms of society, the desert becomes the perfect setting for a city such as Las Vegas.

Gambling and Sin Las Vegas Style

Much like Birmingham and its association to the racial violence of the 1960s, seemingly abnormal events and characteristics in Las Vegas's history have influenced the national media's coverage and the public's perception of the city. The young desert city, after its initial incarnation as a railway stopover, first claimed notoriety in its early years as a divorce center. From there, it went on to be known for mafia involvement in its major industry, gambling, risqué sexuality, and ultimately as "sin city."

Las Vegas's entrance into the divorce industry received notice early on. In 1911, the *New York Times* saw fit to print two articles dealing with the young town's arrival on the divorce scene. *Times* writers portrayed the railroad town as an impending rival to Reno's virtual monopoly on granting the nation's easy divorces.³⁷ Between this first mention in 1911 and the end of World War II, Las Vegas made quite a name for itself vis-a-vis the divorce and marriage industry. Most of this notoriety resulted from the matrimonial difficulties and adventures of Hollywood celebrities as carried out in Vegas. During this period, one can find no fewer than eighty feature pieces in the *Times* dealing with the marital woes of such stars as Edgar Rice Burroughs, Clark Gable, John Hearst, Lana Turner, and Mickey Rooney among others.³⁸

Often, the prospective divorcees would travel to Las Vegas and stay at a divorce ranch while the required 6 week residency period passed. One such ranch, Twin Springs, offered the matrimonially challenged a wide array of recreation to help pass the time. If

not interested in heading the two miles into town, they could spend their days horseback riding, swimming, playing their favorite games in recreations lounges, fishing, or just generally relaxing.³⁹ Other stars, such as Oliver Hardy, took the utmost advantage of Las Vegas's matrimonial industry, getting divorced one morning, and remarrying that afternoon at his attorney's home.⁴⁰

In the early 1930s legalization of gambling in Nevada, improvement of access roads, and the nearby construction of Hoover Dam further heightened the town's prospects. As the dam became a destination for curious travelers, Las Vegans embraced the idea of a gaming-centered economy. World War II's soldiers and defense workers then reinforced the logic of this idea through their eager patronization of the town's still small gaming emporiums.⁴¹ City leaders and businesspeople subsequently employed various themes designed to draw tourists to Las Vegas hotels and legal casinos over the decades that followed. These ranged from the idea of America's "last frontier" to atomic testing to an almost simultaneous promotion of "Sin City" and family-friendly adult Disneyland.

Examples of locals promoting the western "frontier" image of the city in 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, for example, abound. From the inauguration of the annual Hellderado Day Parade in 1935 to the names, décor, and marketing of such early resorts as Thomas Hull's El Rancho (1941) and R.E. Griffith's New Frontier (1942), western themes seemed to be everywhere.⁴² Even the menus at the El Rancho's café in the 1940s highlighted the western theme. A buxom cowgirl sporting shorts and a cowboy hat graced the menu's cover. Inside, cowboy and western artwork accompanies such listings as the El Rancho Prime Rib Dinner for \$2.00 and the Filet Mignon for \$2.50. It all ended with "You're Welcome Podner!"⁴³

The local Chamber of Commerce contributed heavily to the ubiquitous nature of Las Vegas's western image through its publications. Its "History of Nevada" in 1935 prominently featured winking cowboy symbol Vegas Vic on its cover, albeit missing the "Howdy Podner!" caption so often associated with him.⁴⁴ Beginning in 1947, the always image-conscious chamber hired the West-Marquis Advertising agency to shape the image projected to the rest of the nation. Focusing on the Los Angeles, Pacific Coast, and selective national advertisements that suggested including a stop by Las Vegas in any western trip, the agency exposed an approximate 50,000,000 readers to Las Vegas's western resort characteristics per year in the late 1940s.⁴⁵ By 1948, the Chamber's "Story of Southern Nevada," for example, included a cowboy on horseback among such other artistic renditions of the place definers as Hoover Dam, Fremont Street casinos, and an airplane. Inside, readers found information about the "frontier atmosphere" of Helldorado, accompanied by pictures of a cowboy on a bucking bull and an "Indian chief" in full headdress."⁴⁶ The chamber continued with this theme into the 1950s, as evidenced by its "Las Vegas: This is Our City," brochure. A cowboy on horseback and covered wagon dominate an aerial view of the city on this publication's cover. Inside, the Chamber greeted with the slogan "Howdy Podner!" before informing them of how Las Vegas residents "reflect the true hospitality and decency of the West." Prospective visitors are then welcomed whole-heartedly to this "frontier city." In case they might have difficulty finding local points of interest, the Chamber also included a two page, artistic map featuring the heading "The Las Vegas Area, Wonderland of the West" and once again employing Vegas Vic and his normal "Howdy Podner!" No fewer than six depictions of cowboys and their horses in various old West poses graced the map's pages.

Yet alongside this western “frontier” portrayal, the Chamber also provided an early characterization of Las Vegas as “the entertainment capital of the world.”⁴⁷

Travel brochures and flyers throughout the 1950s continued to feature Vegas Vic, the “Howdy Podner!” slogan, and emphasize Las Vegas’s ties to the West.⁴⁸ Yet in the 1960s, the city had obviously moved away from the cowboy and western themed promotions. By mid decade, travel brochures promoting local motels featured only one small Vegas Vic image beside the phrase “relax in comfort.” Further de-emphasizing the rugged aspects of the frontier and the western environment, the brochures stressed “lavish accommodations,” “gourmet” restaurants, and room service in the “world’s largest” conglomeration of motels. At decade’s end, brochures promoted Las Vegas as a “motel holiday” value where tourists could “enjoy a million dollars worth of fun for a low, low cost.” In the place of Vegas Vic and the “Howdy Podner!” slogan, scantily clad showgirls, a brightly burning Sun, and claims to having the “nation’s finest motels” beckoned visitors.⁴⁹

Locals certainly took an active role in projecting a desired image for their city. These efforts gained attention and visitors, as the idea of a tourist-based economy surpassed all expectations in Las Vegas. With the largest booms after 1945, and on a far greater scale after the 1980s, the city finished the twentieth century anchoring the fastest growing metropolitan center in the United States. Between 1990 and 1997, the metropolis grew by 48 percent, adding 409,453 residents.⁵⁰ By the turn of the twenty-first century, it surpassed all other major metropolitan areas in percentage of growth, with an astounding 83 percent over the previous decade.⁵¹ As historian Hal Rothman argues, the post-industrial gaming economy of Las Vegas offered the same financial opportunity that had

earlier drawn residents to such industrial boomtowns as Detroit. In post-modern Las Vegas, an individual with even marginal education could expect to make a good living. A relatively low cost of living combined with the high wages and ample benefits of a unionized gaming and tourist industry to render such expectations generally realistic.⁵²

Despite its rapid growth and democratic opportunity, Las Vegas also experienced problems. First, its existence as a gambling center proved too tempting for less than reputable figures. Second, for much of the period following 1945, its open promotion of legalized gambling and physical gratification seemingly lay outside the confines of American moral norms. Las Vegas quickly established, and has maintained, its position and image as the center of American gaming.⁵³ Such an image resulted in a plethora of both negative and positive media representations of the city.

The problem of organized crime undeniably played a role in Las Vegas's development, history, and popular image. It first reared its head in 1945 with the murder of race wire owner James Ragan and known-gangster Bugsy Siegel's efforts to purchase the El Cortez casino. This, along with the construction of the Flamingo Hotel established a pattern in which, over the next two decades, many strip resorts depended upon disreputable financing and direct mob involvement for their construction and operation.⁵⁴ In 1950 the Kefauver Hearings into organized crime brought increased, albeit limited, national attention to organized crime's infiltration of the city's gaming industry. From this, national best sellers such as Ed Reid's and Ovis Demaris's *Green Felt Jungle* appeared, along with a variety of newspaper articles, casting Las Vegas as a violent, greedy, immoral, and crime-infested city.⁵⁵ The early 1980s witnessed a rebirth of such

ideas, as federal investigations exposed the mob's involvement in local gaming interests.⁵⁶

Yet, despite decades of charges, Americans seemed to maintain an affection for the seemingly wayward city. As for the popular appeal of this center of gambling and "sin," David Schwartz and John Findlay offer insightful explanations. Schwartz argues that post-war suburban Americans did not mind gambling and a certain freedom of morality if it safely confined itself to areas distant from their own communities. At a safe distance, the suburbanites could enjoy the escapist pleasures of the otherwise deviant place, and then return home without endangering their communities' moral standards.⁵⁷ Findlay contends that Las Vegas offered much more than mere escapism; its gambling evoked the American perception of the risk and opportunity-laden western frontier and identity. To Findlay, Las Vegas also embodied a new and innovative western society emanating from southern California in the post-war period. Gambling, and by association Las Vegas, offered modern Americans the thrill of chance so central to the westward expansion of the nineteenth century. This chance further nurtured ideas of democracy and egalitarian tendencies.⁵⁸ Social standing alone did not determine the odds of winning or losing at the tables.

Over the years, media representation of Las Vegas has born out the ambivalent nature of its stigmatized identity. The love side of this ambivalence availed itself through the writing of renowned journalist Gladwin Hill. Later known for his path-breaking environmental reporting, the *New York Times* correspondent's typewriter served as a virtual booster megaphone for Las Vegas in the 1950s. Throughout the decade, Hill offered up a steady dose of such articles as "Klondike in the Desert," "The 'Sure Thing'

Boom at Las Vegas,” “Las Vegas is More Than the ‘Strip,’” and “Las Vegas Keeps the Wheels Turning.” Each of these pieces, while acknowledging the centrality of gambling to the Las Vegas experience, cast the growing tourist destination in an unusually favorable light. Hill consistently championed both the city’s democratic opportunity and western placement, while offering up a selection of population and economic growth statistics that any Chamber of Commerce publicist would proudly claim. Las Vegas, as portrayed by Hill, was not the sinful conglomerate of organized crime and vice. Instead, it resembled a “cruise ship” on land where gambling and tourism served as economic motors driving a booming and surprisingly diverse urban area. In this exciting place “that could pass for Broadway,” both the “man in workpants” and the “dinner dressed patron” had the same chance of realizing that “western tradition” of striking it rich. Beyond the gaming floors, a more diverse Las Vegas existed. Here, Hill expounded upon the favorable influence of religion, the industrial boom of Henderson, and the windfall of defense spending. Quite simply, Hill’s Las Vegas stood as a western entertainment center basking in a post-World War II boom. This Las Vegas served as a place where a more democratic spirit prevailed, people had fun, and where real estate investment could never be a losing proposition. It seemed to be a place where people got it right.⁵⁹ Yet not all media representations of Las Vegas portrayed the town in such a favorable light, not even during this early period.

Media stigmatization of Las Vegas lacked the cataclysmic event found in Birmingham’s response to the Civil Rights Movement or Harvey Milk’s election in San Francisco. It subsequently proceeded in a more subtle manner. As with Birmingham’s racial intolerance, Las Vegas’s gambling and, to a lesser degree, organized crime

eventually became favorite topics for the national media's shaping of the city's image in American minds. Pre-1945 media representations of Las Vegas, however, appeared primarily as contextual material for pieces examining celebrity marriage problems.⁶⁰ Las Vegas received mention on its own merit in the *New York Times* only four times during its first forty years. The first two instances occurred in 1911, as the newspaper examined the young "rival" to Reno's established divorce industry.⁶¹ The city did not appear again as the lone subject of a *Times* article until 1936. That year, the newspaper briefly examined the "Wild West town" neighboring Boulder Dam.⁶² Three years later the newspaper offered a one-paragraph examination of the city's decision to close its bars for three hours in observance of Good Friday. According to the *Times* reporter, the "saloons" of "America's last frontier hit the Sawdust Trail" on that day.⁶³

Between 1945 and 1949, the *New York Times* continued to cover Las Vegas primarily in relation to Hoover Dam's emergence as a tourist destination. These stories, however, tended to place more emphasis on Las Vegas's growth as a tourist draw in its own right. Representative titles include "Las Vegas Vacation Center: Seeing Boulder Dam by Automobile," and "Lively Las Vegas: New Vacation Wonderland is Growing up Rapidly Around the Great Lake at Hoover Dam."⁶⁴ One 1947 article conceded Las Vegas's status as a stand-alone a tourist attraction. "Desert Attractions: Tourism is Las Vegas' Major Industry and Spring Business is Booming," marked the first instance of the national media acknowledging the city as a tourist destination in its own right.⁶⁵

Each article of this period, although highlighting attractions other than casinos, invariably mentioned the city's legalized gambling. *Times* reporter Ward Howe characterized the city as "the gateway to Boulder Dam," where "neon signs lend a garish

effect and signal invitations to try one's luck."⁶⁶ Jack Goodman used the first two paragraphs of his article to detail the growth of local gaming resorts before stipulating that "not all vacationists are heading for the gambling casinos."⁶⁷ Fellow reporter Grady Johnson introduced the city as "known only for its legalized gambling and easy divorce laws," before noting its low rates of juvenile delinquency and the outdoor recreational activities at Mt. Charleston and Lake Mead.⁶⁸

Explicit ties to preexisting regional conceptions of the West also appeared in each of these early articles. Howe reaffirmed the locals' propensity to call the city "a frontier town," while himself characterizing it as a "gateway" and "picturesque desert town."⁶⁹ Goodman emphasized both its "desert" location and proximity to "many noteworthy western park areas." A photograph of men on horseback and dressed as cowboys at a nearby dude ranch accompanied his article.⁷⁰ Johnson's article called attention to the West as a place of recreation, its dry climate, and democratic tendencies. To him Las Vegas resided "in the heart of some of the West's most scenic playgrounds," where visitors could "soak up sun and breathe the dry desert air." It was also a place where individuals in "dinner jackets, cowboy shirts, and jeans," mingled on the same dance floors without notice.⁷¹ These articles conformed to a pattern of showcasing Las Vegas's exceptionalism, symbolized by gambling, western isolation, democratic social activities, and a liberal sense of morality.

As with the South, the West certainly owned a distinct regional image by the mid-twentieth century. Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis had long ago described the vast West as both safety valve of opportunity and fountain of American democracy.⁷² In the late nineteenth century, the western paintings of Thomas Moran, Albert Bierstadt, and

Frederic Remington joined with popular western writers such as Owen Wister and Bret Harte to cast the West as individualistic, masculine, and free.⁷³ Around the same time, the United States initiated its national park system, with most of the parks located in the West. These parks, which preserved extraordinary and seemingly representative landscapes provided ever-increasing numbers of tourists with false images of a pristine West.⁷⁴ The first five decades of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of the motion picture industry and specifically the popularity of the western movie. These films carried on the tradition of the frontier image.⁷⁵ That the mid-century media chose to cast the emerging tourist city of Las Vegas within the colorful contours of this established western image is not surprising.

The production of Las Vegas's more soundly negative image of organized crime association resembles Birmingham's racist stigmatization in that its national media coverage has been primarily event-based. On November 16, 1950, the *New York Times* printed a small story titled "Investigation in Nevada." This article was the only one to appear in the *Times* that year specifically addressing Senator Kefauver's local hearings into organized crime's influence over the Las Vegas gaming industry. The article did, nonetheless, tie the gaming industry to the late gangster Bugsy Siegel and mob figures in New York.⁷⁶

Thirteen years later, the *New York Times* made up for its subdued treatment of the Kefauver Hearing. In November 1963--the same year that Birmingham became front-page news and the lead story on television networks--the newspaper ran a series of front-page stories exposing organized crime's control of the Las Vegas gaming industry. In the first of these articles, Reporter Wallace Turner wrote of casinos run by convicted felons

misusing “hundreds of millions of dollars.” Further, he labeled the gambling-fueled mob as a powerful “new force in American life.”⁷⁷ In the third article of the series, he credited Las Vegas with bringing together a “greater collection of skilled law violators than exists anywhere in the country.” He went on to detail the involvement of such public personalities as Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin with gambling interests, implying an association with organized crime. Yet even Turner’s indictment of Las Vegas as a criminal haven could not resist linking the city to its isolated western placement. The “desert and mountain milieu” served as the setting for this “most intensive concentration of gambling” ever to appear in the world’s history.⁷⁸

Extensive exposure of the city’s organized crime problem also appeared during this period in other media outlets. As mentioned, the best-selling book *The Green Felt Jungle* (1963) dismissed Las Vegas as a city controlled by crime and without redeeming value.⁷⁹ Fred J. Cook, however, beat Reid and Demaris to the punch by publishing his *A Two-Dollar Bet Means Murder*. In this book based on his 1960 article “Gambling, Inc.” that ran in the *Nation*, Cook devoted a whole chapter to the mafia’s “golden paradise” of Las Vegas.⁸⁰

Television exposés further linked the city’s vice-centered gaming and entertainment industry with organized crime. David Susskind’s popular television talk show, *Open End*, aired a two-hour special on March 15, 1964 that sought to detail “the link between a seemingly innocuous nickel bet and narcotics and prostitution” controlled by organized crime.⁸¹ Two years later, NBC televised a three and one-half hour special titled “American White Paper: Organized Crime in the United States,” which examined organized crime in Las Vegas and Youngstown, Ohio. In the end, it argued that while

local interests controlled the crime in Youngstown, Las Vegas's gambling industry fostered more insidious national affiliations.⁸²

One can view this dramatic upswing in media coverage of Las Vegas's ties to organized crime as the culmination of a wider historical trend in which the United States public sought to identify itself and the national purpose in the 1950s and early 1960s. By the end of the 1950s, the American press, government, and public had begun to question the nation's success and direction in its Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union. International events had seemingly eroded the unquestioned confidence of world leadership the United States experienced in 1945. The Soviet Union's emergence as a nuclear power in 1949, its successful launch of Sputnik in 1957, and its economic growth rate that seemingly outstripped that of the United States in the mid-1950s, along with the disastrous Suez Crisis, the failure to help the Hungarian Revolution, and the U2 spy-plane incident all combined to cast uncertainty among many Americans. Occasional economic downturns during the Eisenhower years strengthened this idea that something had gone wrong. Led by the press and government, some Americans began to look inward for the cause of their seeming deficiency. Corruption, conformism, and crass materialism stood central to the conclusions they reached.⁸³

As early as 1952, Dwight Eisenhower's presidential campaign had revealed this uncertainty within American consciousness over the moral centering of the nation. Eisenhower constantly cast the campaign as a "crusade" to bring the nation back "to the things he thought America stood for."⁸⁴ Even his campaign slogan of K₁C₂ (Korea, communism, and corruption) emphasized the threats facing America and the waywardness of its culture.⁸⁵ Concerns over internal weakness, corruption, and

communist infiltration obsessed the nation. The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) had been exposing imagined communists with impunity while such popular game shows as the *\$64,000 Question* proved dishonest. Meanwhile, consumerism had taken hold as the suburbanites enjoyed their increased personal wealth and buying power of the immediate post-1945 period.⁸⁶ Some contemporaries, such as John Kenneth Gbraith in his 1958 best-seller, *The Affluent Society*, warned about the excesses of consumerism and private-sector wealth while highlighting the persistence of public-sector poverty in America.⁸⁷ Countervailing forces of traditional morality and hedonistic materialism thus fought for the American public's allegiance throughout the 1950s and early 1960s.

From this cultural apprehension, Las Vegas emerged as an easy target for those frustrated by the nation's drift. With the media's help, as evidenced in the increased concentration on organized crime in the early 1960s, it became an isolated repository for the perceptual containment of widespread corruption and American materialistic shortcomings. Obviously, such opinions have not been universal, as America is far from monolithic in culture and ideas. For example, churchgoers in the South in the 1950s and early 1960s might have displayed a real problem with the organized crime and gambling of Las Vegas, while in the Northeast, churches held "Las Vegas Nights" that celebrated the exotic character of the city.⁸⁸ Yet, at least to some portions of the nation, the city, much like Birmingham, became a deviant example against which they could define their moral center. Even beyond the negative connotations that gambling and organized signaled to some, Las Vegas also displayed substantial attractive qualities. As a representative of the American West, it served as an available counterbalance for

suburbia's and conformist society's perceived tendency to emasculate formerly individualistic men.⁸⁹ As William Whyte observed in 1956, the conformist impulse of post-war suburban society worked to transform men from independent "inner-directed" beings into "other-directed" grey-suited clones of corporatism.⁹⁰ Las Vegas offered a convenient yet isolated escape from these consensus norms if they became too overbearing. No such partially positive attributes attached themselves to media representations of Birmingham.

In this enlivened characterization of Las Vegas as a bastion of organized crime, as with the contemporary casting of Birmingham as a center of racial intolerance, the media's intertwining of character defect and tribally based stigma is clear. Organized crime's infiltration and control of gambling served as the deviant event for Las Vegas. Likewise, Birmingham's reaction to civil rights protests stood as the perfect abnormal action to provoke widespread condemnation. These events took place in the context of established local stereotypes and deviance. Media coverage had already revealed the comfortable acceptance of gambling and divorce in Las Vegas before exposing mafia involvement. Coverage of Birmingham likewise established the primacy of segregation and violence in the city before the violent upheavals of 1963. Additionally, the media had placed each city squarely within the established stereotypes of their respective regions; for Las Vegas, the freer, more democratic, and isolated West, while Birmingham fell into the accepted image of the racist South. This made Las Vegas's gambling and Birmingham's racism more readily identifiable and associable with each regional city. The cities therefore developed a dual-level stigmatization, based on both events and perceptions of setting reinforced by a popular culture particularly shaped by Cold War

anxieties and other frustrations. The national media's coverage of local events following the deviance-establishment period of 1945 to the mid 1960s, reveals that this dual-level stigma, once applied, proved a lasting characterization. As social commentator Walter Lippman noted in 1922, editors concerned with maintaining circulation prove hesitant to deviate from established norms in public expectations.⁹¹

Coverage of events in Las Vegas during the latter decades of the twentieth century continued to draw upon the reputation for deviance established at mid-century. The media's continued relation of Las Vegas to organized crime, both when events warranted such associations and when they did not, illustrated its reliance on the city's stereotype as abnormal. In one example of event driven association, the front page of the February 24, 1980 *New York Times* featured an article on the federal investigation into organized crime. Through secret recordings and undercover work, the Federal Bureau of Investigation uncovered widespread racketeering, union corruption, murder, bribery of elected officials, and skimming of Las Vegas casino revenues by organized crime figures with ties to Kansas City. This article and others that followed made much of the Las Vegas connection, even though large corporations were in the process of taking over the industry.⁹² More importantly, they treated the mafia's involvement in the gaming industry as no surprise. One revealing passage stated that "in recent years . . . organized crime has infiltrated a variety of businesses in addition to gambling and pornography."⁹³ In other words, the story implied that the only surprise was in organized crime's spread beyond the realm of Las Vegas's acknowledged vices.

As the decade of the 1980s wore on, the national news media continued to associate Las Vegas with organized crime. These pieces include 1986's "Busting the Mob," in

U.S. News and World Report, that asserted ties between the mafia and Las Vegas merely because “racketeers” had purchased travel agencies that booked trips to the city.⁹⁴ The same issue’s cover story, “Mafia, U.S.A.,” listed Las Vegas as the fourth most active mob center in the United States. The story gave no real explanation as to why the city deserved such a high ranking.⁹⁵

In addition to the reminders of Las Vegas’s mafia associations, the MGM fire of November 21, 1980 offers an example of how established media stereotypes of deviance often extended beyond the boundaries of events directly associated with perceived abnormalities. The *New York Times*’ initial coverage of the fire proved straightforward and factual. A front-page article by Pamela Hollie respectfully conveyed the tragic circumstances of the fire that left just over eighty people dead and approximately 3,500 trapped for several hours.⁹⁶ But the next day an article appeared that employed virtually every available stereotype of the city. Referring to Las Vegas as a distant “desert fantasy land,” reporter John Crewdson detailed how the greed of gambling and desire for a good time quelled any remorse for the fire’s victims. He focused his story on individuals occupying the casinos around the newly “black gap in a brilliant neon universe.” Citing individual reactions as representative of a larger city reaction, Crewdson wrote of a man at the Desert Inn Casino placing a \$10.00 bet with his friend over the fire’s eventual body count. The article further stated that tragedy was meaningless to a city that experiences “a thousand tiny personal ones” on a daily basis. The reporter ended his assault by questioning the morality of locals who continued gambling as the fire raged. Quite simply he applied the time-honored one-dimensional stereotype of the city’s gambling and sinful deviance to a horrible event that owed no direct connection to gaming.⁹⁷ This

resulted in one of the most thoroughly unscrupulous articles ever to grace the pages of the long-respected newspaper, and one has to question the judgment of *Times* editors in publishing such a piece.

Las Vegas also ended the twentieth century with the media drawing upon its established stigmatized reputation. The election of Mayor Oscar Goodman provided the opportunity for national media to review the city's relationships with organized crime. In his career as an attorney, Goodman had made a name for himself defending such infamous mafia clients as Tony Spilotro. As his June 8, 1999 runoff-election victory played out, the *New York Times* could not resist highlighting his past, and by association, the city's history of criminal association. Storylines such as "A Colorful Lawyer Is Running for Mayor" and "Mob Lawyer Wins Race," indicated the direction of the *Times*' coverage.⁹⁸ Each of these articles and others covering the event specifically listed Goodman's past defense of Las Vegas gangsters. Reporter Todd Purdum went so far as to offer detailed descriptions of how Goodman kept Spilotro out of Las Vegas jails "despite accusations that he had killed 22 people." Purdum also wrote of Las Vegas's stigmatized image directly, calling it a "sin-soaked city, which has worked hard in recent years to reinvent itself as a family friendly resort in which mob rule is a distant memory."⁹⁹ Yet neither he nor his fellow reporters displayed any qualms about playing up Goodman's relationship with that distant memory. As the next chapter explores, this election also highlighted a sharp division within the Las Vegas population over the desirability of the "Sin City" label.

This practice continues unimpeded. It revealed itself recently in a series of *New York Times* exposés on Las Vegas that appeared from May 30 to June 4, 2004. These articles,

while focusing on Las Vegas's spectacular growth, simultaneously cast the city as virtually uninhabitable by family-oriented people. Instead, a post-apocalyptic wasteland emerges in the series of articles, one that fosters only uncontrollable adolescents, gambling, drug addiction, hardened strippers, and shattered dreams.¹⁰⁰ Regardless of what this series of articles suggested, the Las Vegas metropolitan area has its fair share of families and individuals attempting to raise children in a responsible manner. The numbers of such people, in fact, increased dramatically during the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. As the next chapter will examine, this dramatic demographic growth ensured that increased tensions emerged within the city over the propriety of the image its leaders sought to project.

Endnotes

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⁴ As Moehring and Green point out in *Las Vegas: A Centennial History*, 5-7, residents of these ranches were not always the best of neighbors. Helen Stewart's husband Archibald, for example, fell victim to a shooting on the Kiel Ranch following a confrontation over a former ranch hand's—recently hired by Kiel—gossiping about Mrs. Stewart. As she blamed Conrad Kiel for the death, Mrs. Stewart never spoke to him or his sons Edwin and William again. In 1899, both Edwin and William were found dead from gunshot wounds. Initially ruled a murder-suicide, it was later classified as an unsolved double murder.

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⁶ The Weather Channel, "Average Weather for Las Vegas, NV.," weather.com, http://www.weather.com/weather/wxclimatology/monthly/graph/USNV0049?from=month_bottomnav_undeclared (accessed May 7, 2009); Rothman, *Neon Metropolis*, Rothman wrote that people tend not to venture out between 10 am and 3 pm. I would argue that the 3 pm is much too early, as temperatures remain well over 100 until sunset and beyond during the Summer months.

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⁸ David Wrobel, *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 2.

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¹⁹ Christensen, “Build it and the Water Will Come,” in Rothman and Davis, *The Grit Beneath the Glitter*, 115-120.

²⁰ Carmen Roberts, “Vegas Heading for Dry Future,” BBC News Online, July 29, 2005. available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/sci/tech/4719473.stm> (accessed July 12, 2008).

²¹ Rothman, *Neon Metropolis*, 210.

²² Mark Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (New York: Viking, 1986), 13.

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⁷⁵ Several books deal with the western film genre's perpetuation of western myths in the popular consciousness. Of note among these are Mitchell's *Westerns*; and Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). Other scholars have credited westerns with speaking to contemporary American concerns through the established myths of the West. Key examples of these works include: Michael Coyne, *The Crowded Prairie: American National Identity in the Hollywood Western* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997); and John H. Lenihan, *Showdown: Confronting Modern America in the Western Film* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1980). Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), offers perhaps the most sophisticated treatment of the western film in relation to American ideas and events.

⁷⁶ "Investigation in Nevada," *New York Times*, 16 November 1950.

- ⁷⁷ Wallace Turner, "Las Vegas: Gambling Take Creates New Force in U.S.: Millions in Untaxed 'Black Money' Give Obscure Figures Power that Extends from Underworld to Government," *New York Times*, 18 November 1963.
- ⁷⁸ Wallace Turner, "Las Vegas: Casinos' Hoodlums Face a Cleanup: State Starting to Act Against Shady Figures Who Run or patronize Gambling," *New York Times*, 20 November 1963.
- ⁷⁹ Reid and Demaris, *The Green Felt Jungle*, 1-11, 14-29, 82-85, 92-99, 194-220. Basically the entire book is a condemnation of Las Vegas's gambling, immorality, and corruption. The pages listed offer a representative glimpse of their opinion of the city.
- ⁸⁰ Fred J. Cook, *A Two-Dollar Bet Mean Murder* (New York: Dial Press, 1961), 172-202; Fred J. Cook, "Gambling, Inc.," *Nation*, 22 October 1960, 260.
- ⁸¹ "Open End Lists Crime Discussion," *New York Times*, 24 February 1963.
- ⁸² George Gent, "The American Way of Crime," *New York Times*, 21 August 1966.
- ⁸³ John W. Jefferies, "The Quest for National Purpose of 1960," *American Quarterly* 30 (Autumn, 1978): 451-70.
- ⁸⁴ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 273-77.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 277.
- ⁸⁶ William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 121-23, 129-30, 145.
- ⁸⁷ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958).
- ⁸⁸ Conversation between Eugene Moehring and Author, 6 July 2009. Moehring recalled attending "Las Vegas Nights" at Catholic churches in New York City during the 1950s and 1960s. Through these themed gatherings, the churches portrayed Las Vegas as exotic and positive. Attendees certainly were not put off by the city's ties to organized crime or gambling.
- ⁸⁹ Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey*, 121-123, 134. Chafe sees suburbia as having a emasculating effect on the perceived identity of the American man through its bringing him more squarely into the normal routines of family life and assault on individualism.
- ⁹⁰ William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956).
- ⁹¹ Lippman, *Public Opinion*, 323-24.

⁹² Jeff Gerth, "U.S. to Seek Charges From a Wide Inquiry on Organized Crime: F.B.I. Surveillance Used in Several Cities: Allegations to Focus on Union and Businesses," *New York Times*, 24 February 1980; Wallace Turner, "Federal Robes Can't Disguise Local Hackles In Las Vegas," *New York Times*, 27 April 1980.

⁹³ Gerth, "U.S. to Seek Charges From a Wide Inquiry on Organized Crime," *New York Times*, 24 February 1980.

⁹⁴ Stewart Powell, "Busting the Mob," *U.S. News and World Report*, 3 February 1986, 24-28.

⁹⁵ "Mafia, U.S.A.," *U.S. News and World Report*, 3 February 1986, 27.

⁹⁶ Pamela G. Hollie, "Hundreds Are Injured as Blaze Traps 3,500 on the Upper Floors," *New York Times*, 22 November 1980.

⁹⁷ John M. Crewdson, "On Las Vegas's Strip, a Few Refused to Be Interrupted," *New York Times*, 23 November 1980.

⁹⁸ Todd S. Purdum, "A Colorful Lawyer is Running for Mayor: Las Vegas Would Be His Primary Client," *New York Times*, 2 May 1999; "Lawyer Faces Runoff for Las Vegas Mayor," *New York Times*, 5 May 1999; "Mob Lawyer Wins Race," *New York Times*, 9 June 1999.

⁹⁹ Purdum, "A Colorful Lawyer is Running for Mayor," *New York Times*, 2 May 1999.

¹⁰⁰ Dean E. Murphy, "As for the Myth of Unlimited Cheap Housing, the Mortgage Has Come Due," *New York Times*, 30 May 2004; Dean E. Murphy, "Seekers, Drawn to Las Vegas, Find a Broken Promised Land," *New York Times*, 30 May 2004; Patricia Leigh Brown, "A Besieged School District and Its Nomadic Students Struggle to Keep Up," *New York Times*, 31 May 2004; Patricia Leigh Brown, "New Teachers, Pupils, and Classes With Revolving Doors," *New York Times*, 31 May 2004; Charlie LeDuff, "A Las Vegas Judge Finds His Test Case at Home," *New York Times*, 1 June 2004; Charlie LeDuff, "Adolescents in Adult City: Often From Elsewhere, and Often Going Nowhere," *New York Times*, 1 June 2004; Sarah Kershaw, "A Life as a Live! Nude! Girl! Has a Few Strings Attached," *New York Times*, 2 June 2004.

CHAPTER 8

MAINSTREAM CURRENTS: LAS VEGAS AND RESPECTABILITY AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

When *Time* magazine proclaimed Las Vegas the “New All-American city” in 1994, it was not celebrated or dwelled upon by the local community to the same degree that the “All-America City” title had been in Birmingham twenty-four years earlier.¹ Las Vegas, had, nonetheless, moved into more mainstream circles in the late 1980s and 1990s while the rest of American culture moved in the direction of Las Vegas with a continued relaxation of anti-gambling attitudes. The city had also exhibited commonalities with other American cities such as taking part in such wider demographic patterns as southwestern or “sunbelt” population growth in the postwar decades. As a result, Vegas eventually became more normalized, complete with suburbs, expanded need for services, and a more heterogeneous population.² Yet to say that Las Vegas wholeheartedly embraced the idea of becoming mainstreet U.S.A. is far from accurate.³ Although its suburban population boomed, corporate gaming-backed megaresorts blossomed, and leaders of industry and boosters sought to cast the city as encompassing more than gambling, the city never fully relinquished the edgy, adult-oriented identity.⁴ Ultimately, by the early 2000s, Las Vegas turned decidedly and purposefully away from “normal” America as its boosters and advertising campaigns adopted slogans that boasted of and

successfully employed Las Vegas's perceptual placement outside the norms of mainstream American culture.⁵

The only problem was that while advertising slogans informed tourists that whatever illicit behavior they committed in Vegas "stays in Vegas," thousands of new residents who had recently flocked to the booming city actually had stayed there, permanently.⁶ All too often, their vision of home departed from what the city tried to sell tourists. Simultaneously, city leaders and boosters also sought to place Las Vegas among the top tier of American cities through such means as the procurement of major league professional sports franchises while continuing to trumpet its risqué image. With this in mind, those city representatives often reacted decisively whenever the press or some influential person smeared their city's image.⁷ Thus, Las Vegas's population at the turn of the twenty-first century found itself split in multiple directions concerning the image it projected to the outside world.

As with Birmingham and the racist image the world held of it after 1963, Las Vegas's image rests on small portions of the metropolis's total geography. Overwhelmingly the image of Las Vegas comes from two distinct places within the larger metropolitan area. Fremont Street, or the old downtown "Glitter Gulch," serves as one popular conception of the city. To the south, the mega resorts of "the Strip" or Las Vegas Boulevard constitute the second major symbol of Las Vegas's visual identity. Interestingly, although the Strip is constantly referred to from a national perspective as Las Vegas, it resides outside the city limits. South of Sahara Avenue, it is situated in unincorporated Clark County. Thus, a modern urban area of over 1.5 million people exists under the narrow image of two local corridors. The perceptual geography of Las Vegas can also

be said to vary chronologically. Some people, depending upon their age and the eras they have experienced, might limit their idea of authentic Las Vegas to the downtown Fremont Street area. To a younger set, the Strip that the downtown proponents view as pure artifice might symbolize the real Vegas.

Local Tension Over Image

The year was 1999 and *Las Vegas Review-Journal* editor John Kerr did not want famed defense attorney Oscar Goodman to win the mayor's office of his storied city. Kerr worried that the election of the outspoken attorney to such figures as mobster Anthony Spilotro, and bookmaker and alleged mob frontman Frank "Lefty" Rosenthal might irrevocably damage boosters, businesspeople, and leaders' recent efforts to recast Las Vegas as a more family-friendly resort.⁸ This was a new Vegas after all, a place where, as NBC correspondent Kelly O'Donnell exclaimed "image matters!" It was a town that, for the last few years had sought to leave behind such labels as "Sin City," "the neon jewel of the desert," and "the town the mob built." In the Las Vegas of 1999, the production of a more mainstream image seemingly bore great importance.⁹

In reality, Las Vegas casino interests had attempted to make their establishments more widely appealing for quite some time. The Hacienda's owners "Doc" and Judy Bayley, for example, sought family tourists from the time of resort's opening in 1957. Their child friendly resort featured multiple swimming pools and a \$17,000 go-cart track to entertain the kids while mom or dad enjoyed the casino.¹⁰ Another example of catering to family visitors exists in William Bennett and William Pennington's purchase and transformation of the Circus Circus in 1974. By offering carnival-like entertainment

for children, Bennett and Pennington made their casino and hotel more attractive to adults by offering something for the children to do while they gambled. As historian of Las Vegas Eugene Moehring has pointed out, many other casinos followed Circus Circus's lead in the 1970s and 1980s in acknowledging the family visitors market. Some, like the Las Vegas Hilton, went so far as to provide a special "children's hotel."¹¹

One can readily observe this gradual shift through coverage of the city in airline flight magazine advertisements. Throughout the 1970s and through about 1981, advertisements for Las Vegas casinos in Western Airlines *Western World* magazine invariably featured scantily clad women and, at times, showgirls fondly posed around obvious phallic symbols. The Dunes Hotel made the most of this latter, suggestive visual art, with its frequent employment of its famed and interestingly shaped sign always adorned by the most beautiful nearly naked showgirls.¹² Yet a distinct shift occurred in the early 1980s. Advertisers, beginning around 1982, noticeably toned down the suggestive images and slogans they employed. In the place of buxom women and showgirls, they stressed such things as hotel amenities, values, and shopping.¹³

Finally, Steve Wynn took the Vegas vacation to a new level with his 1989 opening of The Mirage. A spectacle complete with regularly erupting volcano, white tigers, magicians, and dolphins, The Mirage symbolized what Wynn referred to as the "New Las Vegas."¹⁴ This version of Las Vegas, while ultimately making the city more family friendly with the eventual incorporation of such special attractions as a pirate show outside the Treasure Island resort, complete with ships, the medieval themes of Excalibur, an amusement park at the MGM, thrill rides on top of the Stratosphere, and a full scale roller coaster weaving around New York, New York was not simply an attempt

to recast Vegas as a family destination. Instead, as Convention and Visitor's Authority President Manny Cortez revealed in 1993, the "goal" was to market Las Vegas as "a multifaceted resort destination." This expansion beyond a mere gambling destination, Cortez, and others such as Wynn felt, would help Las Vegas compete in a world far more populated with gambling destinations.¹⁵

Yet the news media and industrial publications often characterized this expansion of Las Vegas into a more inclusive resort as a desire to recast the city as a family destination. In the mid-1990s, such phrases as "family theme park," "family experience," and "family vacationers" figured prominently in travel industry accounts of Las Vegas's transformation. Likewise, popular television news shows informed the public of Las Vegas's new "mainstream" and "family" orientation.¹⁶

In this context, Kerr's election editorial, "Anybody but Oscar," espoused the viewpoint of those seeking to move the "New Las Vegas" beyond its outcast past. The election of someone so perceptively tied to "old Vegas" threatened their intentions, whether they sought a city with wider allure than offered by mere gambling and other adult vices, or recast as a family destination. Therefore, in his scathing piece, Kerr scoured Goodman as "the barrister-to-butchers," a man who won fame and fortune defending the most despicable members of society. Kerr pondered how the public could ever take Las Vegas seriously with this high-profile mob-lawyer turned politician at the helm of municipal government.¹⁷ Surely, such a situation would play up the long-serving stereotypes and stigmas associated with the city.

What he and many other recent transplants in coming years refused to see was the alternative viewpoint that held that playing up this image was exactly what Las Vegas

needed. Certain stigmas are not always bad—particularly if a city has based its economy on its perceived deviance. Thus, the mayor’s election of 1999 and the few years that followed offer a window through which to glimpse the local competition over Vegas’s image. This struggle was carried out between those nostalgic for the town’s historical identity and mindful of its economic well-being’s tie to that identity, and those who sought a more “normal” existence, isolated from the goings on of Las Vegas Boulevard and Fremont Street.

Mayor Goodman fits squarely into the prior group of leaders interested in selling Las Vegas as an adult destination. After having been elected mayor by 64 percent to Arnie Adamsen’s 36 percent on the night of June 8, the new mayor sought a return of Las Vegas’s identity to what he saw as its rightful place.¹⁸ The mainstream or family-oriented approach was fine for other cities, but in his mind Vegas was special. It was a town built on the allure of showgirls, the coolness of the Rat Pack, the danger of the Mafia, and the sexuality of the topless review dancer. This is what set Las Vegas apart from other cities in an age when casino gambling had become far more acceptable and widespread. If one ignored the history and image of the town, Las Vegas, in Goodman’s words, “would be nothing more than El Paso with casinos.”¹⁹

In such a mood, Goodman used the first meeting of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority--as mayor, he now had a seat on the LVCA--to push the idea that Las Vegas should shift its image away from the family-safe destination and return it to the risqué promotion of “old Vegas.” Soon, instead of emphasizing Vegas as a place where the kids could also have fun, Vegas advertisements would assert, “what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas.” By century’s end, the wildly successful slogan would become

part of the Las Vegas lure and lore. It would take root in American popular culture, often repeated and bastardized to fit new contexts.²⁰ By 2008, the phrase would even appear as the title of a major Hollywood motion picture starring Cameron Diaz and Ashton Kutcher.²¹ Although unsuccessful at the box office, the film reveals how deeply the sinful Vegas image has seeped into American culture in less than a decade.

A nostalgia that permeates the city informs Goodman's desire to return to the "old Vegas." One can easily find examples of this idea of a better time before Howard Hughes' buying sprees and the rise of impersonal corporate gaming interests. Whether or not such romanticized times ever truly existed, the recollections of long-time Las Vegas residents bear out the widespread belief that they did. Mae Farei, for instance, who moved to Las Vegas in 1955, found mid-century Vegas a "beautiful" and "safe" place where a single woman felt comfortable walking the streets. But her happiness proved short-lived, as everything seemingly began to change as the city grew and "big companies" replaced early casinos.²²

A similar theme permeated the recollections of long time residents Suzette Cox and Phillip Cook. Cox, having moved to Las Vegas from San Diego in 1953, recalled the town of that era as far superior to its late twentieth century version. She found 1950s Las Vegas more personal, a place where you always ran into someone you knew and could easily score free tickets for shows by knowing the right people. The more modern version of Las Vegas, in her opinion, was "not as much fun."²³

Of course, many such laments are really about Las Vegas's growth from small town to metropolis. Others, however, look specifically to the days of organized crime with a sense of longing. Phillip Cook made no attempt to conceal his reasons for preferring the

old Las Vegas. Having resided in Las Vegas since 1936, Cook witnessed what he termed as “tremendous change” in the city. One change he did not care for was the rise of big business and demise of mob influence. Cook recalled fondly that, when the mafia held an interest in local casinos, there was no crime in Las Vegas. The mafia, he believed, “protected” local citizens from petty and violent crimes that might scare off tourism. Thus, Cook remembered a time when “the mafia was good for Las Vegas.” Conditions were not so good later in life as the “tight knit” Las Vegas of his youth became a “legitimate city.”²⁴

Oscar Goodman seldom, if ever, wavered in his commitment to playing up this early Vegas image. In so doing, his city tapped into both a widespread nostalgia of cooler, hipper, and less complicated past, while also filling the need for escape and entertainment. It was this sense of the risqué, of a notorious past and exciting present, that made Las Vegas successful. The city prospers because it sells a good time in an environment a little too edgy for downtown Omaha, Des Moines, or Orange County.²⁵ Thus, Goodman, never one to miss an opportunity, embarked on a mission to promote an image of Vegas rooted in the past and far from the mainstream, sharp edges and all.

“The Mayor” Sells Vegas as Only He Can

It is exactly such nostalgia—regardless of the accuracy of such characterizations—that Mayor Goodman sought to use to his city’s advantage in selling the old, more risqué Las Vegas. By reacting the way it did to his election, the *New York Times* suggested, the former “mob lawyer” possessed the perfect baggage to reawaken the risqué image of this “sin-soaked city.”²⁶ Goodman accomplished this through serving as the “face of Las

Vegas.” In this capacity--one he considers the most important of his duties as mayor--he constructed a celebrity image tied to the expectations and stereotypes of the city often rooted in its past. For example, Goodman occasionally attended important gatherings flanked by Las Vegas showgirls. This includes arriving at a meeting of Major League Baseball owners with what he calls “my showgirls” in his constant and as yet unsuccessful effort to secure a major league sports franchise to the city.²⁷ At other times, he appeared in print serving as a spokesperson for Bombay Blue Sapphire Gin, or perhaps relishing his role as the only mayor to shoot the pictures for a Playboy.com photo spread.²⁸ In between, he appeared on such television shows as NBC’s *Las Vegas*, a show that made five successful and frankly interesting seasons out of exploiting every cliché and stereotype ever associated with the city.²⁹ But such appearances were old hat to Goodman, who, even before becoming mayor, appeared as himself in Martin Scorsese’s brutal telling of the Mafia involvement in Las Vegas, *Casino*.³⁰

Because of such actions, other mayors treat Oscar Goodman as a celebrity when he attends various mayors’ conventions around the nation. As he says, “when I go to places I’m treated as though I’m royalty; I’m treated like I’m a rock star.” This treatment stems from both Goodman’s antics and from the fact that he is not just the mayor of Anytown, USA. Instead, he leads one of America’s most infamous towns. Love it or hate it, almost everyone has an image of what Las Vegas is. And that image often revolves around vice and fun. Las Vegas is, among other things, the capital of gambling in the United States and a city with a long, widely reported and portrayed history of underworld connections. As a result, Oscar Goodman or “The Mayor,” as he claims his fellow mayors refer to him, is the perfect character to sell the city to the rest of the nation and the world.³¹

Whether one approves of his methods or not, he draws attention to what Las Vegas is famous for and likely helps bring in a few tourists in the process.

Outside of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, or maybe San Francisco, difficulty arises in finding a city of the early twenty-first century in which a mayor has received such attention, be it adoration or disdain. Even then, such attention often stems from the actions of the mayor relative to some event rather than being drawn directly from the image of the city, as is the case with Goodman. The case of New York City's Rudolph Giuliani stands as a perfect example. If any city rivals Las Vegas for the celebrity available to its mayor, that city must be New York. But even then, one can see the limits of celebrity tied to actions in the city. Rudolph Giuliani would likely have never been the household name that he became had it not been for the spotlight that the terrorist attacks of September 11 cast upon him. By 2008, he managed to parlay this tragedy-response fame into a serious run for the Republican Party presidential nomination.³² Yet in Las Vegas, Goodman builds an enormous amount of celebrity simply by playing up what the public expects of the city. In other cities, while celebrity can be obtained in relation to contextual issues and events, one does not see it gained by acting out the established identity of the city.

Thus, a large part of Goodman's celebrity stems from what people expect from Las Vegas. If, for example, he were mayor of Atlanta and told a class room of fourth graders that he would most like to have a bottle of gin when asked what he would want to have with him if marooned on a desert island, he could have very well been in danger of losing his job. Yet, in 2005, when he did just this in Las Vegas, the public never seriously threatened his position. Although obvious, it is significant that many of those who

complained the loudest were parents of Las Vegas schoolchildren. They felt that Mayor Goodman had failed in presenting himself as a strong role model.³³

As a result of his plays on the Vegas image, Goodman has usually gained attention, if not constant praise. Some of his constituents and, at times, the local and national media have looked askance at the mayor's actions. On the local level, this stems in part from changing demographics in Las Vegas. As economic opportunity drew in thousand upon thousands of new residents to the resort city in the 1990s and early 2000s, many newly arrived suburbanites, like those displeased with the mayor promoting gin in their children's classrooms, saw the risqué image of the city at odds with their intention to raise a family in a condition of normalcy.

One should not, however, form a view of Las Vegas's growth, based singularly on tourism, gaming, and the promotion of the risqué. As Eugene Moehring has shown, Las Vegas has shared economic and political characteristics with its Sunbelt neighbors over the course of the twentieth century. In Las Vegas, for example, as in San Diego, San Antonio, or any number of southwestern cities, heavy federal investment through military presence, the closely related technology industry, and public works projects has contributed mightily to demographic growth. The city has also traveled an economic and infrastructure route very similar to such other southerly located resort cities as Honolulu and Miami. One must realize that Las Vegas, while widely recognized as a vice center, is also a full fledged metropolis complete with the characteristics and trials faced by other cities of its region and across the nation. These include such modern issues and problems as crime, congestion, and adequate health services to mention only a few.³⁴ Yet Las

Vegas residents and leaders also face the challenge of balancing a profitable Sin City identity with an increasingly mainstream suburban population.

Those Nasty Billboards

Despite his apparent success in publicizing Las Vegas, some residents of the city have not embraced the idea of the overwhelmingly risqué desert metropolis. There are those who do not want their children exposed to the adult playground that is Vegas's historical image and that Goodman has so enthusiastically promoted. The negotiation over Vegas's image and reality as such a playground and the necessity for it also to be a place for parents to raise children subsequently came to the forefront in 2004 over the issue of billboard advertisements. That year, citizen complaints against a racy billboard outside of the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino just south of the city limits blew up into a full fledged campaign against obscenity complete with legal action.

The billboard in question ran during the 2003 National Rodeo Finals held each year at the Thomas and Mack Center on the campus of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. This suggestive advertisement for the Hard Rock Casino and Hotel prominently featured a discarded cowboy hat on a bedroom floor beside a shapely pair of high heel clad female legs, with skimpy panties lowered to mid-calf. In large letters and in an obvious play on words, the caption read "Get Ready to Buck All Night Long."³⁵ At least a few people failed to see the humor.

Residents put off by the advertisement responded by taking their complaints to one of the most powerful institutions in Nevada. On March 18, with help and prodding from the Nevada Concerned Citizens watchdog group, the residents planned to gather at the

meeting of the Nevada Gaming Commission. There, they would voice their anger and concern and ask the Commission to intercede on the people's behalf in response to what they considered an obscene advertisement. According to Concerned Citizens co-chair Lucille Lusk,

the concern has been bubbling out there for quite some time, but it came to fruition with the ad campaign 'what happens here stays here.' The general level of acceptability has been exceeded....[The casinos] have tread along the edges for a long time....Now they've taken it over the edge without respect. This is indeed a family community. We still have children here.³⁶

This ad obviously pushed the button of Lusk and other, like-minded people in the community. Although there had been murmurs and complaints about the Riviera Hotel and Casino's racy taxicab ads that featured the nearly bare bottoms of a line of women, the "Crazy Girls," the uproar over the Hard Rock's "Buck" billboard was unprecedented.

According to Las Vegas Advertising Federation spokesperson Patti Gerace, people first started to notice the racy advertising following the opening of the Palms Casino and Hotel in 2001. As the Palms and Hard Rock competed for the same 21 to 40 year old target demographic, each casino tried to gain notoriety by issuing ads a bit edgier than the other. A sort of billboard and advertising arms race ensued, with each concept going a little farther than the last. Ultimately, some in the public decided that, with the "Buck" ad things had surpassed all common decency. Gerace expressed surprise that it took so long for the public to stage an organized protest in response. But even she said that the ad "kind of shocked" her when she first saw it and worried that "maybe they've gone too far."³⁷

Another organization that entered the fray was the city's recently created Main Street Billboard Commission. As the commission's president, Mike Wixom joined forces with

Nevada Concerned Citizens to ensure that authorities removed the “obscene” billboards and limit them to the area surrounding the Las Vegas Strip. On April 22, 2004, Wixom and the others in the anti-billboard coalition won a victory of sorts when the Clark County Commission passed an ordinance prohibiting the construction of new billboards in unincorporated areas. Although the commissioners did not address the content of the billboards, most of the people pushing this ban and in attendance at the April 22 meeting had voiced concerns over sexually explicit advertising. As anti-billboard activist Carolyn Edwards related after the vote, “It’s great that the entire county commission is continuing to put quality of life first.” Wixom was more specific in his comment regarding the victory, stating that his organization was “very pleased” with the ordinance, as it would affect the racy content of billboards, “because [the billboards] won’t be there.” He further stipulated that his organization would continue the fight against the infiltration of Las Vegas communities by sexually explicit advertising.³⁸

On the same day that the County Commission ruled against the proliferation of new billboards outside of the city limits, the Nevada Gaming Commission met to discuss the issue of the Hard Rock’s racy advertising. Just as they had promised they would, a little over 300 anti-billboard activists who had busied themselves lobbying the commission to punish the Hard Rock showed up for the meeting. In this conclusion of proceedings dating back to January 21, the powerful Gaming Commission imposed a fine of \$300,000 on the Hard Rock for three instances of “indecent” and “inappropriate” advertising that was harmful to the state’s image. The other two ads, in the Control Board’s view, promoted drug use and casino cheating. The board found that the Hard Rock’s advertisements had violated an agreement from 2002 that required the casino to refrain

from including any “questionable elements” in advertising campaigns and state gaming laws that required gaming corporations to exercise “decency, dignity, good taste, honesty and inoffensiveness” in their public relations.³⁹

The Billboard battle of 2004 eventually made its way to the pages of the *New York Times*. Here, in a lengthy article on the portrayal and reality of Las Vegas women, *Times* reporters Sarah Kershaw and Patricia Leigh Brown presented the city as extraordinarily exploitative of women and very much defined by the sex industry—although open to more mainstream professional employment by females. In an attempt to debunk the idea that all women in Vegas were involved in the sex trade or hotel cleaning industries, Kershaw and Brown, at times, presented a blistering condemnation of Las Vegas gender relations. This was a city, they concluded, where “the female body may be second only to the slot machine as the most visible local icon.” Thus, they pondered, who could be surprised when other journalists mistakenly assume that former mayor Jan Jones had been an exotic dancer.⁴⁰ The very existence of such an article explaining that not all women in Las Vegas are maids, prostitutes, or strippers, says much about the warped national image of the city in 2004. After all, the President of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in 2004 was a woman, Carol Harter: Pat Mulroy headed up the Southern Nevada Water Authority; Dina Titus served as Nevada State Senate Minority Leader; and Shelley Berkley served as a member of the United States Congress. Following the 2008 national election, Titus joined her as a member of the U.S. House. Reality is not so simple as the popular view of Las Vegas as rampant sexual exploiter of women suggests. Instead, as historian Joanne Goodwin has suggested, the power relationships that underlie gender relations in Las Vegas are far more complex.⁴¹

Nevertheless, the *Times* article ultimately linked the billboard controversy to overwhelming female exploitation in Las Vegas. The writers aptly depicted the racy billboards as the literal and symbolic center of a “collision between two Las Vegases.” On the one side, the hedonistic playground and economic engine of the gaming industry needed to play off and promote the risqué image. On the other side, many inhabitants of the sprawling suburbs were equally determined to limit any such expression.⁴²

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) took notice of the billboard controversy before its conclusion. Pitted against the city’s decency in advertising coalition, the ACLU threw its support behind what its members saw as the First Amendment right of casino companies to advertise as they saw fit. Allen Lichtenstein of the ACLU of Nevada argued that even in the case of a privileged license agreement, such as between the Gaming Board and various casinos, the government cannot become the judge of “matters of taste” concerning free speech.⁴³ The oft-quoted Mike Wixom disagreed, claiming that Las Vegas families were having their right to a happy life violated as they could not take their children to school or anywhere else without having the billboards’ blatant sexuality forced on them. As Wixom concluded, “I can turn off the TV. I can turn off the radio. But I can’t turn off a 40-foot billboard the size of a semi-truck.”⁴⁴

Regardless of whether Wixom or Lichtenstein was correct, the billboard issue did not fade away following the 2004 Gaming Board decision. Instead, edgy billboard advertising continued to create controversy as late as 2008. On May 30 of that year, local Las Vegas television reported that, once again, citizens were outraged over a sexually provocative billboard. This time, members of the Commerce Center business development’s Business Association, along with some residents, voiced concern over a

billboard promoting what they believed to be a swingers' club. In response to numerous complaints, association president Paula Sadler contacted members of the county commission to record an official complaint. The sign's image featured three shirtless men closely observing one scantily clad woman spanking another, equally scantily clad woman.⁴⁵

Several months earlier, Lichtenstein had made up for his 2004 billboard-related defeat at the hands of the Nevada Gaming Board. On July 13, 2007, he succeeded in having federal judges overturn two 1979 laws that prohibited the advertisement of brothels in Clark County. Having had the laws brought to his attention by *Las Vegas City Life* editor Steve Sebelius, Lichtenstein launched the successful legal action much to the displeasure of clean billboard advocates. The ruling stipulated that any brothel billboard advertisements must meet the same decency standards as other local billboards. Owners of nearby Pahrump's famed Chicken Ranch brothel stated that they would advertise in the Las Vegas vicinity, but would keep such advertisements "conservative." Lichtenstein saw no danger in the advertising of brothels spreading beyond Las Vegas and southern Nevada, since, everyone knows, "what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas."⁴⁶

The battle over the billboards in the early 2000s reveals several things about a mature Las Vegas. First, and most obviously, not everyone in the city was comfortable with the local production of the racy "Sin City" image. Not everyone wanted to expose their children to the side effects of Goodman's much touted "adult playground." At the same time, the gaming industry and, to a lesser extent sex industry, are parts of the tourism industry, which is the dominant economic engine of Clark County. If this industry found itself in decline as a result of oppressive regulation of advertisement by local government,

there was a very real chance that the Las Vegas Valley could cease to be one of the fastest growing population centers in the nation. The jobs provided directly and indirectly by tourism-related enterprises were the main contributor to Las Vegas becoming what historian Hal Rothman termed the “last Detroit” of the twentieth century. Just as the promise of high paying automobile manufacturing jobs had drawn thousands to Detroit, so too did the prospect of middle class wealth with marginal educational attainment draw thousands to the service industry of Southern Nevada.⁴⁷

Whether or not their paychecks depended upon the existence of first amendment exercise of free speech in advertising, foes of the billboards fought for the enforcement of decency standards just the same. In the end, they gained a victory in the censorship of casino and hotel advertisement, but did not win the war. By bringing the fight against billboard obscenity to the forefront of people’s minds, they indirectly helped bring about the lawsuit that ultimately legalized the advertisement in Clark County of brothels. At the same time, the sensational aspects of the fight over racy billboards in Vegas garnered national attention. This attention only added to the national image of the sexually exploitative city in the desert where the “truism” holds that all “women who work here are either making beds or lying in them.”⁴⁸ Somehow, the multiyear battle over first amendment freedom of expression failed to further the image of a Las Vegas devoted to child rearing.

The billboard issue did not mark the first time that risqué advertisement came under fire in Las Vegas. In the early 1990s, the county commission attempted to end the distribution of suggestive handbills to tourists along the Strip. In this instance, however, it appears that concern over the impact of such explicit materials being pushed on tourists

outside of major Strip resorts fueled the commission's drive. Despite legal efforts to ban the handbill distribution, one still encounters them as of 2008.⁴⁹ Likewise, Las Vegas remains distinct among American cities in regard to the distribution racks of sex advertisements and swingers magazines that can be found on numerous street corners around town.⁵⁰ These outward indicators of the Sin City image have yet to face the same level of scrutiny as have the billboards and handbills.

Mayor Oscar Goodman had his own ideas about how local government could protect the sensibilities of those "concerned citizens" who felt ill at ease with proliferation of risqué advertisements. He believes that one way to deal with the issue and still preserve Las Vegas's all-important "adult playground" and "Sin City" images would be to construct a district in which to house sexual-themed entertainments. Yet as Goodman pointed out, this could never happen as those who opposed the billboards would obviously oppose a red light district. In the end, he feels they all need to "get a life."⁵¹

Goodman had garnered national attention by talking about adult entertainment districts in the past. In two very critical feature articles, *New York Times*' columnist Bob Herbert selectively used the mayor's ideas in September 2007 to suggest that Goodman supported a turn of the nineteenth century style red light district complete with prostitution, and an array of other vices. As a result, his articles cast Las Vegas in a devastating light. Even before reading, one can guess that an article titled "City as Predator" is not going to be favorable to the city on which it focuses. And, in this case, unfavorable qualifies as one of the greatest understatements in the history of such statements.⁵²

Herbert began his “Predator” article by issuing the provocative statement that “there is probably no city in America where women are treated worse than in Las Vegas.” Going on to quote experts who claimed that Las Vegas represented the “epicenter” of the American sex trade, Herbert further pontificated that the city’s “vast and astonishingly open sex trade” ruins “tens of thousands” of girls and women, albeit on an unnamed chronological basis. Whether he meant annually, biennially, or every decade, his intended image is the same: an oversexed and immoral city hell bent on the sexual exploitation of every woman it encounters. Beyond this, he specifically targeted Mayor Goodman as the “tone” setter of this “systematic, institutionalized degradation.” Goodman’s crime had been to relate to Herbert in an interview that perhaps the prospect of a well-regulated red light district, complete with legalized prostitution, should be open to discussion. While Herbert obviously took great offense at this statement, the Mayor’s response to the article’s author having slammed his city as exploitative of women met fire with fire.⁵³ Goodman publicly stated that if Herbert ever stepped foot back inside the limits of Las Vegas, he would personally beat him about the head with a baseball bat. Herbert, perhaps out of respect for Goodman’s anger over the “cheap shot” and a touch of anxiety over the mayor’s past connections, has yet to return.⁵⁴

Interestingly many who commented on the online version of Herbert’s article tended to espouse views equally critical of Las Vegas, prostitution, and its legalization. One reader, going by the name MJCIV from Massachusetts, equated the notion of legalized prostitution in Las Vegas with Emile Durkhiem’s warnings about the dangers of a societal overload of deviance. He felt that the legalization of prostitution offered a great example of the normalization of the taboo that eventually must lead to a complete reform

of society. The very thought of legal prostitution in Las Vegas was “sickening.”⁵⁵ Reader Cory E. Friedman of Crown Point, New York shared similar views. Friedman felt that “it’s a slippery slope when society legalizes sin for profit. First gambling, then prostitution, eventually extortion and murder for hire. Each step just desensitizes society to conduct which can never be stamped out.”⁵⁶ Lenora Lev, a women’s and gender studies professor from Brookline, Massachusetts, felt Herbert had done the world a great service by “standing up” to the “blustering bully and would be gangster” that was Las Vegas’s mayor and the “glorifying of stripping, prostitution, and strip clubs.”⁵⁷

These people, including the story’s writer Bob Herbert, have all internalized the “Sin City” image of Las Vegas. While Las Vegas has historically served as a kind of distant, desert repository for the nation’s sins relative to sex, gambling, and organized crime—just as Birmingham has done in respect to racism—these commentators reveal another strain of thought that finds the city’s very existence offensive and dangerous. At a basic level, its permissiveness—from its gambling to the politically incorrect displays of the female form—strikes in the face of their modern sensibilities. As a result, they see the city as a danger not only to those who travel there, but also as a metastasizing cancer on the remainder of the nation’s sensitivity and morality. One can also see a variation of this process as the foundation of the billboard censorship advocates. These individuals, because of a myriad of circumstances, have found themselves living in the city that they, themselves view as sinful. It certainly cannot serve them as a distant and safe repository of sin, if they must raise their families within it. Fair or not, this slanted view is a very real by-product of Las Vegas’s image as portrayed in the second half of the twentieth century.

What they perceived as Las Vegas's moral danger to the rest of the nation motivated some individuals enough that they traveled to the city in an attempt to force their "morality" on its residents and revelers. The Reverend Craig Groil provides one such recent example. Highlighted on the ABC news program *Nightline*, Groil explained that his "Strip Church" was taking the truly Christian path by "reaching a society that a lot of us don't want to touch." This dirty society was "Sin City," a label for Las Vegas used no fewer than five times by *Nightline* correspondent Martin Bashir during the seven-minute timespan of the piece. Here, Vegas was cast as the "worst place as a parent to raise children," where people cannot help but give in to "the temptations" that "this city has to offer." Thus, with a million dollar yearly budget from sources unnamed, Groil had journeyed to this "metropolis in the desert where people come to escape reality." Once there, he sought to promote a new reality by handing out water bottles along the strip as tourists ventured from casino to casino under the hot summer sun. Along with these water bottles, the tourists received invitations to the "Strip Church," and the Groil's website XXXChurch.com.⁵⁸

Those lucky or unlucky enough to visit Groil's website could find multiple associations between Las Vegas and pornography. In addition to soliciting donations, the site—promoting itself as the "#1 Christian porn site—also attempts to get people to interact by sharing their "confessions" of how pornography, fornication, and Las Vegas had ruined their lives. Surprisingly, a few did just that. But of these few, it is interesting that most were not residents of Las Vegas and did not mention Las Vegas.⁵⁹ Groil, through his website, church, and water bottles, did not seem to be making much of an impact on removing "the obvious temptation" for the approximately two million who

“work and live in Las Vegas” or the 36 to 40 million who visited annually by the end of the 2000s.⁶⁰

The Quest for Major League Sports

One key marker in the modern United States that separates big time cities from those that have yet to make it is the presence of a major league sports team. Be it a team from the National Basketball Association, the National Football League, Major League Baseball, or even the National Hockey League, a major league team says that a city has arrived. Once having secured one of these teams, a city’s image, like that of its sports franchises, goes from minor to major league. The sports teams allow equal comparisons between the city and the New Yorks, Los Angeleses and Chicagos of the nation.⁶¹ This is one area in which Mayor Oscar Goodman sought desperately to have his city be a part of the mainstream current. This is also one aspect of Las Vegas’s existence where its stigma directly harmed the city’s ability to enter the big time.

On Sunday, November 16, 2008, the Pittsburgh Steelers defeated the San Diego Chargers by a score of 11 to 10. In the eighty-eight year history of the NFL, that was the first time a game had ended with that unlikely score. The problem, however, was that the score was wrong. At the game’s conclusion, the Steelers ran a fumble in for a touchdown, raising the score to the more common 17 to 10. The officials erroneously ruled that the fumble had been a forward pass, thus negating the touchdown and returning the score to its previous margin. While this made no difference as to the game’s outcome—Pittsburgh still won the game—news outlets made sure to mention that it made a huge difference to bettors, as bookmakers had favored Pittsburgh by 4 points. When

the final score was removed, winners became losers and vice versa. Media outlets looked instantly to Las Vegas. They quickly related that, in the “gambling city” the decision had caused much controversy among bettors and sports book operators alike, as they struggled to figure winners and losers of the over \$10 million bet that Sunday on this single, run-of-the-mill, game.⁶²

Judging from that amount of money and the national stir arising from an otherwise inconsequential football game early in November, one can see the scope of the sports betting industry in modern Las Vegas. Fortunes change hands on a daily basis in such places as the Las Vegas Hilton Sports Book. There, in a setting that greatly resembles what one would expect from a NASA mission control in Houston or Cape Canaveral, special entertainment exists in just watching and listening to the serious sports bettors. To many of these people and others at casino sports books all across the valley, sports betting is a serious profession. These are the Las Vegas veterans, the best in the world at forecasting the odds, setting the lines, and picking the winners.⁶³ While this is, in a way, quaint and unique to Las Vegas, it is also a main reason that the city does not have and may never have a major league team. Despite the best efforts of Las Vegas boosters, politicians, and business people over the years, the closest the city has come to its own major league sports team is a AAA Dodgers affiliate, a minor league hockey team, an arena football team, the National Rodeo Finals, a NASCAR Sprint Cup race, and a one time—albeit traumatic—hosting of the NBA All Star Game.⁶⁴

Las Vegas first experienced rejection in the area of professional sports because of its gambling culture as early as 1993. That year, in the midst of Las Vegas’s attempted recasting as a family destination, the Disney-owned Anaheim Ducks turned down the city

as a prospective location for its hockey team. In a Disney-issued statement, Disney Sports Enterprises President Tony Tavares said that Las Vegas's image and gambling industry were "incongruous" with the Disney Corporation. Tavares made no attempt to tone down the reason for the refusal, saying that the reason Las Vegas lacked a major league sports franchise was entirely due to the city's culture and availability of sports betting. While he claimed to harbor nothing personally against the people of Las Vegas, he just could not conscience the mentioning of Disney and gambling together.⁶⁵

Despite Tavares' proclaimed good will toward Las Vegas, some residents obviously took offense at this snub. Among those, a Luxor spokesperson, after being told of the Disney rebuke, said that Las Vegas would soon have more family friendly destinations than Disney's entertainment capital of Orlando, Florida. Likewise, Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce President Mark Smith characterized the decision as stemming from an "unfortunate attitude" that disregarded "billion dollar" investments in family entertainment and rested on the old fashioned idea that all Las Vegas only offers gambling. Others, such as director of franchise development Dan Spellings, saw the rebuff as a real slap in the face to Las Vegas. To him it ignored the million or so individuals in Las Vegas who were "hungry for well-presented family entertainment." These were the "Las Vegas who bristle at the city's pervasive image as Sin City, and proudly point to its new family attractions."⁶⁶

Despite the sting of Disney's slap, Las Vegas continued its efforts to make inroads into major league sports. Ironically, these efforts increased markedly following Goodman's election and Las Vegas's public relations shift back to the "sin city" and "adult playground" identity. Subsequently, and in no small part due to the mayor's

efforts, throughout the first years of the twenty-first century, there always seemed to be news or rumor of some professional league either relocating or expanding a team into the Las Vegas valley.

The first of these renewed efforts manifested itself in 2000. With the new millennium's dawn and, since the world had not succumbed to some mysterious Y2K computer glitch, Las Vegas boosters decided that, if major league baseball was not ready to come to them, then they should go to it. Quite simply, Las Vegas decided to join other gambling interests in attempting to advertise via major league baseball. For a fee of \$1.5 million, Major League Baseball granted the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Bureau the privilege of erecting signs in major league parks throughout the nation. Further, in an unprecedented show of cooperation by a league historically paranoid over anything resembling sports betting—just ask Shoeless Joe Jackson or Pete Rose—owners of five teams agreed to discuss the possibility of moving their Spring training camps to the city.⁶⁷ The new century certainly looked bright for Las Vegas's hopes of one day capturing a major league franchise. That day seemed to draw a bit closer in 2001 when Major League Baseball stepped in and purchased a floundering Montreal Expos franchise. After the purchase, rumors of relocation soon became a full-fledged selection process of finding a suitable new home for the team. Las Vegas, despite lobbying hard for the honor, eventually lost out to Washington, D.C. However, as financing for a proposed stadium in Washington faltered in 2004, it looked as if the newly named Washington Nationals might never take the field in that city. Las Vegas, along with other cities previously under consideration glimpsed a spark of hope and mounted a new effort to convince MLB to give their city a second look. Mayor Goodman, in typical form,

showed up at MLB's winter meetings in a black stretch limousine, flanked by a cadre of showgirls and an Elvis impersonator.⁶⁸

Although he failed to convince the shareholders that Vegas was the best home for the former Expos, Goodman was undaunted. He pledged that he would try again when the next team relocated or the league decided to expand. When asked about Vegas's most obvious obstacle, that of sports betting, he refused to admit it would cause a problem for any local team. This, even though local sports books had changed policy and recently began accepting bets on such local teams as those fielded by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Instead, he argued that Las Vegas's proliferation of legal betting made the location more desirable for any league worried about the influence of gambling. Las Vegas was, after all, the "quintessential regulator" of such things, and would always ensure against any type of shady dealings. With continued faith, he felt assured that one day Las Vegas would get its team. Eventually, Goodman related—once again playing the Vegas role—"We'll make them an offer they can't refuse."⁶⁹

One cannot blame Goodman for his optimistic playing down of Las Vegas's ties to gambling and the likelihood of some league one day granting his city a professional franchise. Obviously, the stigma of gambling had decreased markedly across the nation by 2000. Gambling's increased acceptance by this time revealed itself in the national spread of casinos that now offered a majority of Americans' access to gaming machines or tables within only a few hours drive. As the result of an ongoing process begun with the legalization of casino gambling in Atlantic City in 1978, casinos outside of Las Vegas had blossomed on Native American lands and intracoastal waterways like the Mississippi River and the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.⁷⁰ The media took great interest in this

increase with numerous articles in national and international publications examining the “Gambling Spree Across Nation,” “America’s Gambling Craze” and “America’s Gambling Fever.”⁷¹ American gambling, as the *Economist* pointed out in 1990 obviously appeared to be “on a roll.”⁷²

One must be careful, however, not to go too far with the idea of gambling’s acceptance in American culture in the last three decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first. Opposition to gambling as well as anxiety over the nation’s morals relative to the practice continued to be a major force in American culture. In one telling article from 1975, *U.S. News and World Report* editors listed changing views on gambling as one of the many signs of a declining morality in the United States.⁷³ Some still voiced concerns about supposed immorality and damnation bred by rampant acceptance of gambling in 1999. The popular televangelist James C. Dobson saw fit to condemn gambling as one of the greatest dangers to the nation’s souls and social fabric in an article posted on his “Focus on the Family” website. Here, readers learn that Americans spend more money on gambling each year than on groceries, that addiction runs rampant even among adolescents, and directly leads to increased crime and corruption. Dobson went on to “scratch the veneer” off the supposed gambling success story of Nevada and particularly Las Vegas. In this effort, he employed the tired statistics stating that the city ranks first in the nation in suicides, lists over 100 pages of ads for prostitution (Dobson automatically transforms ads for escort services into prostitution ads) in its yellow pages, and harbors an alcoholism rate of 1 in 10 adults. The insidious industry, according to Dobson, had further resulted in Las Vegas’s wide and accurate recognition as the most corrupt city in America.⁷⁴

If any owners and commissioners of the various sports leagues shared any of these ideas concerning Las Vegas and the influence of gambling, the prospects of placing a team there certainly seemed bleak. In fact, despite the upbeat talk from Goodman, Major League Baseball's decision against relocating the Expos in Las Vegas—two times no less—was a bitter pill for many in the valley. This had been and remains the closest that the city has come to obtaining a major league franchise in any sport. News reports had even mentioned Las Vegas in the weeks leading up to the initial decision as a finalist alongside the northern Virginia area.⁷⁵ Although the team ultimately ended up in Washington, D.C., several important variations existed between this attempt and all of the talk and dreams of luring a major league sports teams to Vegas that went on in the years before.

First, this time, the city launched a professional and very legitimate effort to obtain the team. Headed up by Chicago businessperson Lou Weisbach, the Expos to Las Vegas drive enjoyed widespread support in the local community from the population to the municipal government. Most importantly, it had the backing of casino gaming, with the blessing of Steve Wynn and the willingness of Caesars Inc. to serve as landlord for a proposed 40,000 seat \$420 million stadium located one block off Las Vegas Boulevard.⁷⁶ This was a new and important development in the city's quest for a major league sports franchise. Only two years previously, Goodman had publicly stated that casino industry opposition stood as a major reason behind Las Vegas's failure to secure a team. He felt, as late as 2002, that the directors of the gaming industry harbored great resistance to any form of entertainment that might lure their patrons "out of their smoke-filled casinos."⁷⁷

With the idea that casino corporations torpedoed major league expansion into the Las Vegas area negated by the circumstances of the failed Expos bid, that left a few other obstacles that could possibly explain Major League Baseball's reticence to relocate to southern Nevada. Obviously, population stood as a major concern. In 2004 the estimated population of the Las Vegas metropolitan area stood somewhere between 1.6 and 1.7 million. That provided a television market share that ranked the city 51st in the nation.⁷⁸

At first glance, such population statistics do not appear promising enough to lure a professional team to the city. Yet one must also remember that, by 2004, Las Vegas drew approximately 32 million visitors to town annually. Thus at any one time, the number of people in the city was substantially larger than population figures provided. Further, these "extra" people were on vacation, in spending mode, and on the prowl for entertainment. It is also important to note Las Vegas's rapidly growing population in 2004. Experts forecast that, by the time the relocated team was ready to play on opening day 2007, the Vegas metropolitan area's population would easily surpass the 2 million mark. When one added the number of visitors in town at any given time to this 2 million-population number, Las Vegas's population numbers looked much more promising. Such a combined total made the city competitive relative to population with such cities as Tampa Bay, Baltimore, St. Louis, San Diego, and Minneapolis. Major League Baseball had granted all of these cities franchises at various times, and all of their metropolitan populations fell between the 2.5 to 3.0 million mark at the end of 2003.⁷⁹ Thus, although it is pure speculation to think tourists would attend baseball games, one can make an

argument that Las Vegas's population in 2007 was not unrealistic to allow for the placement of a team.

One obstacle that these cities with relatively similar population bases did not have to encounter was the existence of gambling and a stigmatized reputation growing from both the existence of the industry and its ties to organized crime. As discussed in the previous chapter, the national public subscribed to the idea of Las Vegas as a gambling escape and sometimes den of organized crime. The media continued to draw upon the stereotype whenever warranted and just as often when it did not. Thus, one has to suspect that Major League Baseball, with its strict prohibition against anyone associated with betting on the sport, gave little thought to a franchise playing down the street from the Hilton Sports book. Although baseball made no comments regarding the city's gambling and corrupt image, the stance of other leagues indicates that the topic remained a concern. National Basketball Association president David Stern, for example, blatantly refused even to consider Las Vegas as a destination for an NBA team until the city's casinos prohibit all betting on the league's games. As Palms Casino and Hotel owner and part owner of the NBA's Sacramento Kings Gavin Maloof said, there are "certain conditions" that are highly unlikely to ever be met for the NBA to "put a team here."⁸⁰

The city's strange and often-contentious relationship with the National Football League offers another indication that the movers and shakers of the major league sports industry look upon Las Vegas's image in a consistently critical fashion. Although the city has never been a serious contender for an NFL franchise, that has not stopped the development of an anxious and often strained relationship between the two. A series of events in 2003 laid bare this animosity for the entire world to see. In the run-up to that

year's Super Bowl, the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority attempted to buy much coveted and very expensive game time television-advertising slots. In a very uncommon move, the NFL rejected their \$4 million along with their one-minute ad. League officials based the rejection on a little-known clause in its contracts that prohibits the advertisement of gambling on any of its networks.⁸¹

The ad in question neither mentioned nor depicted gambling in any manner. Instead, it featured an attractive lady entering a limousine wearing sexy evening attire and then exiting the same limousine at Las Vegas's McCarran Airport dressed in a proper business suit. When confronted over the fact that the ad did not advocate gambling, the NFL's senior vice president for broadcasting Dennis Lewin, claimed that the league would have rejected the ad regardless of its content. Jeff Pash, an NFL executive vice president and legal counsel, clarified Lewin's earlier statement by saying that the NFL rejected the ad because Las Vegas "is principally associated in people's minds with one thing." This explanation came only after Las Vegas proponents confronted Pash over the league's allowance of a Southwest Airlines ad that urged prospective travelers to "blow" less money by flying on the budget conscious airline so that they could "blow" more once they arrived in Vegas. To Pash and the NFL, this ad proved acceptable as it promoted the airline rather than the city. It is also important to note that Southwest was a sponsor of the 2003 Super Bowl.⁸²

The reaction to the NFL's snub exploded in the local Las Vegas media. In the eleven days following the January 13 announcement that Las Vegas would not be permitted to advertise during the Super Bowl, seven feature stories, one editorial, and two letters to the editor appeared on the pages of the *Las Vegas Review Journal*.⁸³ To say that the

NFL's opinion of their city ruffled both the local press and residents would be an understatement. The newspapers referred to the NFL as hypocritical, dishonest, seedy, and "anti-Las Vegas."⁸⁴ The *Review Journal* editor made sure to highlight the league's hypocrisy—as did virtually every other piece on the topic—by arguing that the NFL was a league built around gambling and, in fact, for many years featured Jimmy "the Greek" Snyder as a pre-game show regular and allowed Monday Night Football commentator Al Michaels to reference point spreads.⁸⁵ Columnist John L. Smith offered perhaps the most well researched condemnation of the NFL's attitude. In his lengthy piece, Smith provided a very dirty laundry list of nine NFL team owners whose backgrounds included bookmaking, ties to organized crime, or, in most instances, both.⁸⁶ An enraged Oscar Goodman echoed the same line, stating that the NFL "should get its own house in order," before attacking Las Vegas.⁸⁷

Other arguments against the NFL's stance centered on the perception of gambling in twenty-first century America. As several pieces pointed out, 47 of 50 states allowed gambling in some form by 2003. The dissemination of gambling, although much of it taking place on American Indian land or international waterways, marked not a birth of chance in America, but a return to one of the most salient American penchants. To borrow a term, the American people had always been a "people of chance."⁸⁸ By castigating Las Vegas for its gambling enterprises, many, as evidenced by the local press reaction, subsequently felt that the NFL was being old fashioned and "outdated."⁸⁹ As Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority Spokesperson Rod Powers related, "Gaming is so common in the United States....the stigma is largely diminished. And Las Vegas has evolved into a resort destination."⁹⁰ Ironically it is also worth noting that the

widespread press coverage of the NFL's denial of the advertisement resulted, in Mayor Goodman's opinion, in far more exposure for the city than could have ever been gained from one minute of Super Bowl airtime—and it cost nothing.⁹¹

In evaluating the NFL and other professional leagues' continued disdain for Las Vegas, one must also take into account the well-cultivated risqué image of the city. Beyond gambling, as Hal Rothman has pointed out, prospective franchises must also fear the temptations that Las Vegas would present players. In an age where every superstar's movement is tracked by paparazzi and mainstream journalists, franchise owners must question how long it would take before, as Rothman put it, "a video of somebody's \$50 million investment stumbling out of a strip club at 9 a.m. on game day hit the 5 o'clock news. When that happened, it would confirm every bad stereotype about Las Vegas ... and the NBA."⁹²

Choosing a Path

Here, the paradox that defines modern Las Vegas's relationship to its image clearly exhibits itself. On the one hand, as exemplified by the promotions of Mayor Oscar Goodman, the city seeks to play up its risqué image. In this regard, to associate itself with the ghosts of its past and temptations of its present is money in the bank. Las Vegas is, after all, an escape. It is a place into which the straight laced can venture safely, commit what some might consider sins away from prying eyes of neighbors and family, and then leave those sins behind without worry.⁹³ It is, as Hal Rothman once said, a perceptual "sin free zone."⁹⁴ Not sin free in the manner of being without sin, but sin free

in attempting to convince would be tourists that sins do not count against them in this stretch of desert.

At the same time, the promotion of this sin-free attitude as summed up in the ubiquitous “what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas” tagline absolutely flies in the face of those who seek a more normal life than that associated with the perception of an adult playground. While the suburbanite of Des Moines might enjoy the idea of escaping for a little “eye-candy” and fun in Vegas, his Las Vegas counterpart might not feel the same. This is exemplified by the challenge family-oriented suburbanites have voiced to the promotion of the risqué image through their opposition to racy billboard advertisements. Would the Des Moines traveler want his son or daughter asking what does it mean to “buck all night” after passing a billboard alongside Interstate 80 on the way to school some morning? If he would not, then there is a good chance the Las Vegas parent making the daily journey down Paradise Road might feel the same.

While many might say, as Mayor Goodman did, that it really does not matter what such people think—they chose to live in Las Vegas rather than Des Moines after all—the city’s stance in regard to its relationship with major league sports is really quite similar. In this instance, those that promote Las Vegas’s edginess to sell tourism now seek a measure of acceptance into the mainstream. By doing this, they risk denying outright the very image that they have spend their careers promoting. The result is a bipolar city that seeks to be two opposing things. When its mayor shows up to sell Vegas to major league baseball owners with showgirls in tow, he should not be surprised or offended when the NFL dismisses his city as too risqué.⁹⁵ As Las Vegas remains what it is and its leaders promote it as the same, it will continue to carry a stigma in the eyes of some. It is

unavoidable that certain organizations, the NFL for example, will occasionally fall into the category of critics. Yet in truth, while the adult playground image may have rendered a major league sports team unlikely at best, that same image has sold millions of hotel rooms, provided even more hits at the blackjack table, and driven the economic engine of southern Nevada. It is very unlikely that any place, even the fabulous Las Vegas, can promote itself as both Sin City and mainstream USA simultaneously.

Endnotes

¹ Kurt Anderson, "Las Vegas: The New All-American City," *Time*, 10 January 1994; Gerald Astor, "All America Cities 1970," *Look*, 23 March 1971.

² For the best coverage of Las Vegas's participation in the "Sunbelt" population migration of the post World War II period see: Eugene Moehring, *Resort City in the Sunbelt: Las Vegas, 1930-2000*. Second Edition (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000); An excellent study of Las Vegas's late twentieth century diversity and multiculturalism can be found in Jerry L. Simich and Thomas C. Wright, eds. *The Peoples of Las Vegas: One City, Many Faces* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2005).

³ The argument that Las Vegas has become Americanized and has served as a pacesetter of American urban style and culture and that America has, in many ways evolved toward its example in the embrace of the service oriented economic base, acceptance of gambling, and boosterism is not new. Recent examples of this can be found in Rothman's *Neon Metropolis* and Mark Gottdiener, Claudia C. Collins, and David R. Dickens, *Las Vegas: The Social Production of an All-American City* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1999). As Gottdiener, Collins, and Dickens point out, this line of thinking runs back decades to the publication of Tom Wolfe, *The Kandy Kololed Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1965). Wolfe referred to Las Vegas's outlandish architecture as the "new landmarks of America, the new guideposts, the new way Americans get their bearings." Even in popular writing, Hunter S. Thompson tied Las Vegas to wider American in his outrageous *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (New York: Random House, 1971); Other examples of the Las Vegas as leading edge of urbanism can be found in Robert Venturi, Denise S. Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972); John Findlay, "Suckers and Escapist? Interpreting Las Vegas and Postwar America," *Nevada Historical Society Review* 33 (Spring, 1990): 1-16; Alan Hess, *Viva Las Vegas* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993).

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Here, Stays Here Strikes Sour Note with Some at Conference,” *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 18 December 2003; “What Happens Here Has Been Used Elsewhere,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 22 July 2005; Steve Fries, “A Firm Hits Jackpot on Las Vegas Ads: Campaign Phrase Enters the Lexicon,” *Chicago Tribune*, 17 March 2004.

⁶ Discussion of Las Vegas’s suburban growth in the post 1980 era can be found in Geoff Schumacher, *Sun, Sin & Suburbia: An Essential History of Las Vegas* (Las Vegas: Stephens Press, 2005), 17-18, 117-133, 247-48; Eugene Moehring and Michael S. Green, *Las Vegas: A Centennial History* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2005), 225-49; The United States Census for 2000 reveals the Las Vegas metropolitan area’s extraordinary growth over the last decade of the twentieth century. The metropolitan area led all others with an 83.3 percent increase between 1990 and 2000. In numbers of residents that correlates to an increase from 852,737 to 1,563,282. The next closest metropolitan areas in regard to percentage of growth were Naples, Florida with 65.3 percent (increase in residents from 152,099 to 251,377) and Yuma, Arizona with an increase of 49.7 percent (106,895 to 160,026). U.S. Census Bureau, “Census 2000: Ranking Tables for Metropolitan Areas,” Table 5, Metropolitan Areas Ranked by Percentage Population Change, 1990-2000, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs/phc-t3/index.html>.

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CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION: THE DYSTOPIAN CITY AND HISTORY

Not all cities can be “All-American” all the time. Further, as this study has argued, not all segments of all cities constantly desire the title. Sometimes, as is the case with Las Vegas and to a lesser degree San Francisco, just a little of an abnormal or risqué element in a city’s identity constitutes that city’s claim to fame and adds to its prosperity. In other cases, such as Birmingham, the shift from All-American to un-American results in deeply held and painful stigmatization that both inhibits the city’s success and affects the mindsets and activities of local inhabitants. Thus, as the situations and characteristics of the three cities suggest, the influence of city stigmatization on an urban location is relative to both the city’s past and the prevalent cultural ideals and values of its present.

The Importance of Shifting Context

One central theme that has emerged from this study is the importance of historical context to perception of place identity. Quite simply, American attitudes concerning what is right and wrong, sinful and pure, and even American and un-American change over time. Occasionally a sensational event punctuates a long process of gradual change and changes in prevailing perceptions. When this occurs, residents can find their city’s

imagined place in the nation greatly altered. In these instances, the change closely resembles Kuhn's paradigm shift.¹

Subsequently, this sea change or paradigm shift is a useful framework to apply to the transition of Birmingham's image in the mid-twentieth century. Once the prime example of an American success story, praise of the "Magic City's" rapid growth to industrial dominance gave way with startling abruptness and permanence to the stigmatized identity of "Bombingham."² In the process, the city itself did not change except perhaps to become less outwardly racist. Instead, the cultural context in which the city existed changed to such a degree as to be unrecognizable in regard to acceptable racial beliefs.

The actions of politicians provide further proof of the completeness of this shift. Before the transition to a self-reflexive awareness concerning racism, politicians could often profit from directly espousing racist views. Alabama Governor George Wallace, for example, was not the first to use blatant and outspoken racism in the 1960s to gain, hold, and increase his political power. His rabid racial inauguration speech on the steps of the Alabama state capitol in 1963 and opportunistic stand in the University of Alabama doorway that same year stand as examples of such dangerous political theater. In proclaiming "segregation today....segregation tomorrow....segregation forever" and making his symbolic "stand in the schoolhouse door" he knew what, in the reactionary context of the time and place, many white Alabamians wanted to hear.³ One can only imagine the impact upon a public servant's career in more modern times if they espoused a racism only a fraction as virulent as Wallace's.

A good indication of the modern consequences of outright use of racially charged language by a political figure during a campaign presented itself in the 2006 US

senatorial race in Virginia. Incumbent Senator George Allen appeared set to cruise to re-election easily until he directed the little known slur “macaca” at a young man of Indian heritage during a campaign rally. Someone in the crowd captured the remark on video and downloaded it to the online video site YouTube.com. Within days, the news media noticed the popular and rapidly spreading video. In turn, Allen’s “macaca” utterance claimed headlines nationwide. Armed with suggestions—by long-term associates of Allen—of more widely recognized racial slurs, the media relentlessly reported the story through election day. A much-damaged Allen lost his re-election bid.⁴

Another recent example of the unacceptability and fear associated with the racist label by modern politicians presented itself in Senator John McCain’s reaction to statements made by Congressman John Lewis during the 2008 presidential campaign. Lewis, a man who faced down racial intolerance in the 1960s on the Freedom Ride buses, at the segregated lunch counters, and with a police billy club splitting his skull at the foot of Selma’s Edmund Pettis Bridge, felt that many of the McCain campaign’s rallies were coming dangerously close to inciting race-based hatred against opponent Barack Obama.⁵ As he related in an interview, much of the impassioned rhetoric at these gatherings seemed to be “sowing the seeds of hatred and division” in way eerily similar to the race baiting heyday of Wallace.⁶ Immediately upon hearing of Lewis’s rebuke, a sanctimonious McCain characterized the implication of racism as a “character attack” against governor Palin and himself that went “beyond the pale.”⁷ Thus, where every politician from George Washington to George Wallace could speak openly—even if idiotically—about race, things changed so dramatically by the turn of the century that

even the insinuation of possibly and indirectly firing racial antagonisms resulted in the loudest, quickest, and most self-righteous retorts.

This outward political discomfort with racial division is merely one aspect of a larger societal transformation begun in the days of the battle against fascism that resulted in racism being labeled as a distinctly un-American activity by the end of the twentieth century.⁸ Birmingham was unfortunate enough to have exhibited an outburst of the most violent racism just as the paradigm shifted away from acceptable racial double standard long-embraced in the United States. In fact, the scenes emanating from Birmingham no doubt helped propel this shift.⁹ When tied in with Cold War era political concerns that made the alienation of Birmingham vital to United States interests abroad—particularly in contested areas of Africa—Birmingham experienced its own paradigm shift from exemplary American city to stigmatized urban outcast.¹⁰

The city's stigma subsequently proved extraordinarily troubling for its inhabitants, and incredibly difficult to overcome. Through it, one aspect of stigmatization and perceptions of cities to the field of urban history presents itself. Alongside planning, architecture, and political organizations and movements, such perceptions and stigmas influence the trajectory and living conditions of a city. In Birmingham, perceptual ties to the violence of 1963 bred an uncertainty and anxiety over the city's image and the place of historical remembrance relative to that image has continually manifested itself. As a result, city residents have often expressed reticence concerning projects and undertakings that remind one of the city's prominent place in the Civil Rights Movement. The struggles over the construction of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and reticence by

many to rename local landmarks after individuals who played primary roles in the local movement for civil rights illustrate the enduring mark of stigmatization on the local level.

The association between Birmingham and its violently racist past has obviously resulted in a city population that is, at the very least, distrustful of national publicity. Locals' reactions to the arrest and impending media coverage of Mayor Langford in late 2008 revealed this aversion in stunning clarity. Before the media even had an opportunity to equate the arrest with race and Birmingham, locals bemoaned the coverage that was sure to follow. In reality, residents made far more of an issue of the city's past and attempted to insert race into the equation to a degree that far exceeded the efforts of the national media to that same end. In this example, one can see the hypersensitivity and even inferiority complex that has developed in the city as a result of years of stigmatization.¹¹

Shifting cultural contexts have also played a central role in defining the nature of the stigmatized identities attached to San Francisco and Las Vegas. Yet in each of these cases, the situation has lacked the massively abrupt and complete ideological upheaval experienced by Birmingham in regard to racism and the Civil Rights Movement. That is not to say that San Francisco's and Las Vegas's stigmas have not influenced those cities, instead, that influence has simply taken on a different, and more widely varied quality.

The stigma attached to San Francisco's association to homosexuality, has been strong yet not as overwhelmingly damaging as Birmingham's racist stigmatization. One can attributed this to a difference in the nature of the stigmatizing characteristic. Where Birmingham became known for its racism at a time when racist attitudes were becoming unacceptable, San Francisco never became known for homophobia—sexual orientation's

version of racism. Instead, tolerance toward gays came to define the city's identity. This fit nicely with an intellectual tradition of casting the city as something eccentric, exotic, and not quite "American" in its values. Quite simply, homophobia has not become as universally unacceptable as racism. It is, in some traditionalist groups, "the last acceptable prejudice."¹²

The continued, if tempered, acceptability of gay bashing can be seen in the aftermath of Anita Bryant's and John Briggs's crusades to repeal gay rights ordinances in Florida and California. Neither the homophobic entertainer nor the ambitious politician found their careers ruined; neither was socially ostracized in the immediate aftermath of their actions. Further, the Bryant-inspired reaction against gay rights enjoyed popular success nationwide, resulting in the repeal of gay right ordinances in communities from Florida's Dade County to Eugene, Oregon.¹³ While gradual "tolerance"—an unfortunate but unavoidable word in and of itself that implies domination of one group over another—developed in the second half of the twentieth century, a complete paradigm shift concerning attitudes toward homophobia has not yet occurred. For that reason, politicians, pundits, and regular citizens of certain political persuasions still publicly and profitably excoriated "gay" San Francisco.

Ironically, just as the November 2008 presidential election highlighted the nation's turn from acceptance of overt racism, so too was the incomplete journey from acceptable homophobia exemplified. By a vote of 52 percent to 48 percent, Californians approved a proposition that defined marriage as a union between a man and woman. As an end result of a Republican push to garner such amendments on the state and ultimately the national level, this vote overturned a San Francisco ordinance that had allowed the

recognition of gay nuptials since the previous June. Thirty years after John Briggs raised his challenge to the equality of gay Americans, the issue of equal rights for California's gay citizens remained an unresolved and hotly contested political issue.¹⁴

San Francisco has, nevertheless, profited from its association with the Gay Rights Movement and reputation for gay tolerance. The growth, widespread acceptance, and profitability of gay-oriented tourism testify to this. What has stigmatized the city to some has played an important role in making it more attractive to others. The Travel Industry Association did, after all, rank the city as the #1 gay-friendly destination 2006.¹⁵ While that definitely helped secure its share of the \$60 billion per year gay tourism industry, the fact that prevalent concerns still force people to travel to "gay friendly" destinations says much about the incomplete acceptance of homosexuality in America.

Thus, San Francisco straddles a sort of perceptual apex where it precariously balances between the praise and condemnation of the left and right of American culture and politics. As a result of the lessening (although not completely removed) stigma against homosexuality and the incomplete social repudiation of homophobia, San Francisco's mental placement as America's gay Mecca can and is viewed simultaneously as a good and bad thing. For all of those who, like Senator John McCain, throw up air quotes and derisively pitch their voice when speaking the word San Francisco, there are others who are eager to experience its open culture and contribute to its emerging gay tourist industry.¹⁶

As with San Francisco and its perception as a gay Mecca, Las Vegas experienced a mixed bag concerning its dominant stigma and the historical context it occupies.

Gambling, like homosexuality, became more acceptable in the post-World War II United

States. This is in no small part due to and represented by the proliferation of casino gambling across the United States. The fact that residents of a majority of states now have local access to some form of casino gambling has gone far to remove the negative stigma associated with the practice.¹⁷

At the same time, it is important to understand that gambling has always been an important part of the American experience. The very nature of coming to America was a gamble for all who attempted it, as was the process of a very mobile people spreading westward during the first few centuries of settlement on the North American Continent, and that westward tilt of the national population still continues at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Games of chance likewise have followed Americans to every corner of the nation and played an important role in socialization. As the nation became more “civilized” its citizens did not automatically lose their desire to gamble, instead the ultimate prohibition of gambling in “respectable” American areas allowed for the development of gambling in locations outside of mainstream USA. Ultimately, after experiments with across the border gambling in Tijuana, offshore gambling boats in Southern California, and illicit backrooms around the nation, Las Vegas emerged as the nation’s remote repository for its gaming needs.¹⁸ Ironically, the desert identity that Las Vegas boosters sought to shed in the early twentieth century became one of the city’s most valuable assets by mid-century.

Safely situated in the Mohave Desert, separated by canyon, mountain, and arid plain from the rest of the nation, Las Vegas both fit and played the role brilliantly. Yet the ones with the most experience with profiting from vice in the mid century days of Las Vegas gambling often turned out to be the ones unwanted in other, more respectable parts

of the nation. With a profit awaiting in gambling, organized crime certainly did not mind exercising its expertise. Thus, mid-twentieth century Las Vegas developed a dual identity as both the nation's gambling center and as a city ruled by the mob.¹⁹ Over subsequent years, sexual license joined gambling and the mob as a major characteristic Las Vegas's image, as Vegas increasingly played up its risqué do-anything-here persona.²⁰

By the late twentieth century, Las Vegas stood well established in the American habitus as an adult playground or "sin city." This idea became so prevalent that, as with Birmingham and racism, mere mentions of the city in the media often carried the accompanying reference to gambling, sex, or the mob.²¹ While these things proved unacceptable to Americans in their own suburban neighborhoods, they proved perfectly wonderful as escapist pleasures. For that reason, tens of millions of people flocked to taste a little of the forbidden fruit in Vegas each year by the early twenty-first century. Although many boarded their planes back home after a weekend in Vegas with knowing smiles on their faces as to what had happened in Vegas, what stayed in Vegas most often turned out to be their money.²² In reality, they had purchased entertainment and escaped from the mundane.

By the late twentieth century, worries over the impact of the spread of casino gambling made many nervous about Las Vegas's continued existence as the nation's gaming capital.²³ In the early and mid-1990s, some in the city even attempted to recast the destination as a more family friendly before settling back on the more risqué adult playground following the election of Mayor Oscar Goodman and particularly in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.²⁴ Such worries ultimately proved

unwarranted, as Vegas continued to draw record crowds through the first half decade of the twenty-first century. Meanwhile, metropolitan Las Vegas stood as the fastest growing major urban area in the nation, with upward of 7,000 new residents per month moving into Clark County by 2003.²⁵

The key to Las Vegas's success was that its whole was more than simply the sum of its casinos. To view Las Vegas merely as a place people went to gamble was to miss the attitude that is Las Vegas. If rock and roll was once the music of rebellion, then Las Vegas is the rock and roll of American cities. It is a place perceived as standing outside the box of suburban order, of rules, and of suffocating morality. For this reason, Mayor Oscar Goodman was absolutely correct in pushing for a return to the promotion of the city as an adult playground. It is, after all, a place that "provided an outlet for people to live out their fantasies." All the family stuff is "better left to Disneyland."²⁶ Even the free, originally family-oriented pirate show outside of the Strip's Treasure Island Hotel and Casino has recently transitioned into a more risqué spectacle.

Yet how to accommodate the desires and needs of an ever-increasing number of resident families was one of the key issues facing Las Vegas as it raced into the twenty-first century. The city struggled to find a way to be its glitzy and edgy self, while also providing an environment suitable for the quality of life of a vastly-increased suburban population. The enormously successful marketing of "sin city" allowed for the increased tourism and economic opportunity that brought in those multitudes of new suburban residents. This increased population allowed Las Vegans to realistically dream of joining other major US urban areas with the addition of major league professional sports. Yet the ubiquitous nature of the "Sin City" label carried a double edge. As Las Vegas attempted

to live up to its image in order to profit from those to whom this image beckoned, many family-oriented suburbanites found their values and quality of life compromised.

Tensions over this subsequently manifest itself in the battle over the billboard censorship in 2004.²⁷ At the same time, the gambling and anything goes identity has, without question, dissuaded major league sports leagues from locating franchises in the city.²⁸

Further, as economic conditions worsened in late 2008 and early 2009, the Las Vegas metropolitan area (including the Strip) found itself hyper-sensitized to any characterization of the place that might adversely impact tourism. Such was the case when President Barak Obama insinuated that convention trips to Las Vegas wasted federal bailout funds. The local outrage over this, complete with Mayor Goodman demanding an apology for the slight to his city—reveals once again the double edge of a tourism economy based on a stigmatized identity.²⁹ In sum, while cities like Las Vegas and San Francisco have found ways to profit from identities based on characteristics or actions stigmatized by the more conservative segments of the nation's population, the widespread identity strengthened by the continued promotion of these ideas can leave those cities' tourism industries exceptionally vulnerable to the influence of changes in the national historical context.

Apprehension over declining tourism proved particularly strong in the Las Vegas valley during 2008 and 2009, as the global recession brought an end to years of economic boom. Beginning late in 2007, over-inflated housing prices began to fall and continued through mid 2009. Foreclosures rocked communities, as variable interest rate mortgages adjusted and financially upside-down owners could not refinance due to deflated housing prices and loss of employment.³⁰ In the national media, the old standbys of Vegas

characterizations once again appeared in discussions of the economic situation. On September 17, 2008 *New York Times* editorialist Thomas Friedman, for example, could not help but relate the crash of the nation's financial sector with Las Vegas gambling. To him, the financiers resembled reckless patrons gathered around a Vegas blackjack table. They bet wildly and without care until "busted." This, Friedman concluded, was not supposed to happen outside of the distant gambling city. In the future he warned that "we need to make sure that what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas—and doesn't come to Main Street."³¹

The Universality of Urban Stigmatization

When ordinary people, reporters, or various opinion setters reference racism in regard to Birmingham, sin in regard to Las Vegas, or homosexuality in regard to San Francisco, they are not simply labeling residents of those cities as a result of the locals' characteristics or actions. The use of such stereotypes goes beyond the actions of current residents to the history of the place that those people occupy. When seen as a characteristic of place, the media, opinion setters, or members of the general public easily transfer the stigma to the person that lives there. For example when a mayor of Las Vegas has to explain that she is not a stripper simply because she is female and lives in a certain place, one can see the projection of perceptual place-related values to the people who happen to reside within its limits.³² And when a statement is quoted with a wink, and a nod because it was made in San Francisco, this transference of geographical assumptions to unrelated items is as glaring as the Summer sun in the midday Las Vegas sky.³³

This projection of assumed place characteristics to its people is nothing new in the world. Concerning urban areas, it is as old and widespread as civilization itself. To find its origins in England, for example, one must look before the renaissance, before the dark ages, before the Romans, perhaps, according to historian Raymond Williams, even before the Celtic age.³⁴ Likewise, in China, Japan, and India, scholarship has revealed an extensive proclivity toward tension between rural and urban areas underwritten by the development of stereotypes and stigmas projected to the inhabitants of each by the inhabitants of the other. In the United States, urbanites might regard country folk as backward rubes, hillbillies, or even lazy and inbred. In China or India in the mid to late twentieth century, one could find a distrust of urban areas by rural dwellers at least equal to or perhaps greater than that in the United States at anytime in its history. This stemmed largely from high and as of yet unmet expectations that western style urbanization would improve quality of life and a prevalent view of the manufacturing oriented city as a remnant of the colonial order. Further, in both China and India, the notion of good most often took a rural focus. The farmer or small villager for example, had historically been associated with a purity lacking in the urban dweller and particularly the merchant. These individuals, according to many traditions, had forsaken living in concert with nature in favor of its exploitation.³⁵

A stop in South Africa also reveals the existence of urban versus rural tension and the stereotypes and stigmas projected from that tension onto the people. In a land shaped by both English and Dutch colonial policy, South Africans inherited the English preference for the pastoral, as did the Americans to a great degree. As in the United States, the city and urbanite also symbolized the citadel of progress, at least until the era of Apartheid.

During this time, white South African nationalists—primarily of Dutch heritage—turned away from the idea that the urbanite represented progress and refinement. Instead, many Afrikaners came to equate such cities as Johannesburg with threatening black masses and equally threatening native-born intellectuals of English heritage. In response to the “barbaric” cities and their disconcerting residents, many of the Afrikaners placed their only hope of progress and refinement in the ideal of the farmer’s or rancher’s isolation on the land.³⁶

In the three preceding and brief examples, one can see a trend of rural and urban dwellers choosing to distrust, stereotype, and stigmatize each other because of where they reside. This process is clearly an example of Erving Goffman’s tribal stigmatization at work. Those prone to dealing in such stereotypes are projecting stigmatization upon an entire group of people merely based on the perceived characteristics of a place. In such instances as Birmingham, Las Vegas, and San Francisco, the tribal stigma became stronger as experiences within the last few generations confirmed the assumption of deviance. Thus, an already strong stigma grew even more difficult to overcome. At its root, this process contributes as much as anything to the long-term stigmatization of Birmingham, Las Vegas, and San Francisco that this study has attempted to examine. By the twenty-first century, these ideas or historically based predilections reside deep in what Bourdieu’s characterized as the “habitus” of our society.³⁷ That large segments of the American population sought out San Francisco and Las Vegas, thus allowing the cities to profit from their perceptual deviance, while other segments continue to shun them, suggests only an incomplete shift in American attitudes toward their stigmatizing characteristics.

Birmingham, San Francisco, and Las Vegas: Conclusions

If a sensational event should occur that seemingly supports the negative perception of a city, the resulting stigmatization finds a strong foundation upon which to rest. Conversely, the same may be said of a sensationally good event that shows the city to be a center of progress. The degree and staying power of the stereotype that follows is tempered by contemporary historical context relative to the specific event or trait that city should be lucky or unlucky enough to be the setting for. Birmingham, for example, was fortuitous enough to ride the wave of a society intrigued by industrialization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In contrast, this progressive reputation fell victim in the 1950s and 1960s to a tragically violent dedication to tradition by some locals. Such attachment to segregation stood in total opposition to shifting cultural ideas of the time concerning racial discrimination; These were ideas held by both blacks and whites at the local and national level.³⁸

Residents of San Francisco and Las Vegas, while every bit as much connected to preconceived notions about urban living, never experienced the dramatic event in concert with a complete reversal in societal attitudes that accompanied Birmingham's transition from utopian to dystopian. In San Francisco, although violent criminals killed a gay civil rights leader and other citizens during the 1970s, there was no crackdown on the scale of Bull Connor's or bomb blasts like the ones that destroyed the 16th Street Baptist Church and numerous homes and other churches around the city.³⁹ Even if there had been, one has to question whether this would have tainted the city to the degree that Birmingham was identifiably marked by its manifestations of violent racism. Until the world views homophobia as a taboo equal to racism, San Francisco will continue to experience

ridicule by some on the right as a gay Mecca and liberal stronghold. Thus, at least in the eyes of a significant portion of the nation, San Francisco's gay Mecca image continues to constitute a stigma.

Support for this contention resides even in the profitable aspect of San Francisco's gay Mecca tourist identity. The very existence of what is termed "gay" tourism reveals how far the nation has to go in order to see gay and lesbian people as equal citizens. On the one hand, while it is commendable that homosexual Americans can go to San Francisco in a form of pilgrimage or identity tourism to celebrate an important historical setting in their fight for equal rights, it is the fact that many go there and other places in search of greater acceptance that is troubling. It should not be the necessity for people, in early twenty-first century America, to travel to a certain place in order to feel comfortable about openly displaying their own orientation. Thus, the very existence of a "gay tourism" industry in San Francisco reveals a continuing stigmatization of homosexuals in the rest of society and contributes to the stigmatization of San Francisco.

If Birmingham has been the city most devastated by its stigma, then Las Vegas has surely prospered to an equal degree. This city has taken its deviant reputation and transformed it into a ridiculous demographic growth rate and prosperity. Granted, the shifting historical context has, as with San Francisco and homosexuality, alleviated the degree of stigmatization felt by Las Vegans in regard to vice. While undeniably more widely accepted in modern American culture than in the early to mid-twentieth century, the characteristics that make Las Vegas special have not reached the standard of an American "norm." If they had, there would be no need for Las Vegas. In this regard, it

is necessary for Las Vegas that the stigmas of gambling, promiscuity, and the mob past retain a degree of resonance.

In a sense, going to Las Vegas is like venturing into a foreign moral landscape, where one can temporarily forget the inhibitions of home. This is the genius of modern Vegas promotion. Las Vegas does not take a stigmatized action and tell people that there is nothing wrong with it. To convince people of that would mean the end of the city's prosperity. Instead, it takes this stigmatized activity and tells people, yes it's wrong, but it's ok if you want to do it here. Further, no one else will ever know.

Stigmatized cities such as Birmingham, San Francisco, and Las Vegas continue to exist and share many commonalities. Each stigmatization, rooted in preconceived notions about the dual good and evil nature of urban areas, depends heavily upon the historical context that the city inhabits. This explains the variations in their respective stigmatization processes. Yet, just as each stigmatization is a product of a specific time and circumstance, it is also, in the end, a projection of place. In each of these instances, a geographically small area has defined national and even international perceptions of the entire metropolitan area for decades. In this manner, less than a city block of area in Birmingham, one neighborhood of San Francisco, and two corridors in Las Vegas continue to influence millions of lives each year. Such is the power of place-oriented stigmatization.

Endnotes

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³ For excellent coverage of George Wallace's political career see: Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); *George Wallace: Setting the Woods on Fire* Produced and Directed by Daniel McCabe and Paul Streckler, (New York: PBS Home Video, 2000). Quotations taken from George Wallace, "Inaugural Address 1963," transcript, in author's possession; Claude Sitton, "Gov. Wallace Vows to Defy Injunction and Block Negroes," *New York Times*, 2 June 1963; see also "North Denounced by Gov. Wallace," *New York Times*, 15 January 1963.

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