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Creating the Thomas McRae Sanatorium for Negroes: Race, Contagion, and Space in Jim Crow Arkansas

Shauna Gibbons

The Thomas McRae Memorial Sanatorium for Negroes, located in Alexander, Arkansas, opened its doors in 1931 as the only resource for the entire state's population of consumptive African Americans. McRae Sanatorium grew in both size and prestige from that point until it closed its doors in 1969. It was touted as one of the best of its kind under the supervision of Dr Hugh A. Browne – and rightfully so. But its “kind” was a facility intended for individuals whom whites in the medical and political establishment viewed not only as second class citizens but as biologically and medically different. Two years before its closing, a 1967 report described McRae Memorial Sanatorium as small, antiquated, and desperately lacking resources.¹ Notably, it made clear the fact that “the observers do not believe that the condition of the institution is the fault of the present administration. This is the result of years of neglect and under-appropriation.”² This negligence began before McRae Sanatorium's doors opened and lasted decades. It grew directly out of Jim Crow, a system that demanded inequality between the races in all areas. The reach of Jim Crow extended into healthcare

¹ Karl H. Pfuetze and J. B. Stocklen, *A Report on Tuberculosis Control in Arkansas with Observations and Recommendation*, Report (Little Rock: Arkansas Tuberculosis Association, 1966), 31.

² *Ibid.*

policy and even into the medical sciences themselves, effectively segregating African Americans from whites in perhaps one of the most fundamental ways, through health.

It is clear that infectious disease, especially one as socially significant as tuberculosis, presented a unique challenge to the governments and medical communities of the Jim Crow South. Arkansas' black population with its high rates of tuberculosis infection, between three to four times greater than that of whites, was seen as a threat to white society. But the knowledge of contagion had to be mitigated with the fact that treatment of the black population required an overhaul of the existing social infrastructure and of decades of racial norms. This, together with a legacy of racialized science, resulted in the creation of the Negro Sanatorium by the state of Arkansas that focused on quarantine rather than treatment. The black community and others committed to the crusade against tuberculosis rallied together to take up the slack left by the state. However, because of the lack of funding and confidence from the state, it would be a long, hard struggle. The sanatorium would never come close to equaling the capacity for treatment of the sanatorium in Booneville, which treated white patients.

The state legislature believed that creating a sanatorium for African Americans was a matter of weighing the cost of creating the facility against the potential to assuage the threat of a contagious population. The cheapest, and to them most logical, compromise between these two desires was to create a space for the quarantine of the population. At its opening in 1931, McRae Sanatorium had a total of 26 beds, three nurses and one doctor, Dr. Hugh A. Browne, which the state intended to care for Arkansas' entire population of blacks with tuberculosis.³ Dr. Browne, a black physician, left his Kansas City practice for an 87% pay cut to carry out the mission-like work of going into the rural South to provide sorely needed medical care for African American patients.⁴ He was chosen by the board of directors as superintendent of the state founded sanatorium, a rare position for an African American doctor. Browne proved to be an invaluable part of McRae Sanatorium's survival during his 31 years of service. Browne's commitment and his willingness to seek out advocates and funding kept the hospital afloat since to the legislature not even appropriation for maintenance was needed,

³ Arkansas Gazette, *Dr. Hugh A. Browne: For Him, a Single Answer*, May 8, 1955.

⁴ Thomas J. Ward Jr., *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 17.

as the chief aim of the sanatorium was not to heal.⁵ McRae, though it would not by any stretch of the imagination be able to contain, much less heal, the entire population, could at least be a place to control indignant black consumptives. Like all other Jim Crow manners of segregation, this medical and biological form of separation cut deep into the lives of all African Americans. The primary focus was isolation from whites, a goal that was made even more imperative with the addition of the element of contagion. This misplaced focus translated into unequal care for southern blacks.

Significance of Racial Biology in the South

A racial understanding of biology played a fundamental role in the lackluster care provided to African Americans with tuberculosis, and its effect on medical treatment of blacks in Arkansas and in the south as a whole cannot be ignored. From Plato's Great Chain of Being to 18th century anthropometrists and 20th century doctors and eugenicists, western scientists, naturalists and philosophers have grappled with the idea of a fundamental biological difference between Africans and Europeans.⁶ In the early 20th century, the socioeconomic situation of black southerners and the poor medical care available to them made them visibly more diseased minority. The concept of African Americans as a "diseased race," became even more disturbing to whites when contagion, specifically tuberculosis, was involved. This was crucial to black health for decades to come. Historian Katherine Ott argues that as America approached the twentieth century, white concern about racial hygiene and white authority diminished. She goes on to say that with the new technologies emerging at the turn of the century, the medical elite and other whites concerned about tuberculosis were prompted to take a "public health approach," thus "temper[ing] their diatribes against African-American degeneracy with recommendations for environmental and sanitary reform."⁷

But as late as 1958, the state authority on tuberculosis declared that "in Arkansas, the work among Negroes has been regarded as extremely

⁵ Arkansas General Assembly, *Act 113 To Establish Arkansas Tuberculosis Sanatorium for Negroes*, Acts of Arkansas, Little Rock, AR, 1923, 63.

⁶ Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 75–142.

⁷ Katherine Ott, *Fevered Lives: Tuberculosis in American Culture since 1870* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 110.

important. The Negro is more susceptible to the disease; and the tubercular people of this segment of our population are a contributing medium in its spread".⁸ The influence of race on medicine was so deeply embedded in the southern system that even the passage of decades could not erase the perception of unique racial biology. It was a part of the Jim Crow system, and thus a fundamental part of social interaction in the South.

Racial issues aside, Koch himself acknowledged that it was no easy task to improve rates of tuberculosis in the poor.⁹ In Arkansas fighting tuberculosis with "environmental and sanitary reform" required not only the renunciation of long held beliefs about race, but also an expensive and expansive overhaul of education and infrastructure as well as the socioeconomic system of the delta in which tenant farming inevitably bred poverty and poor health. The state chose not to do this. There was strong popular resistance to spending on a project seen as a hopeless fight against the natural biology of African Americans, especially if it meant disrupting the socioeconomic hegemony of Jim Crow as it represented the possibility that African Americans could overcome their position of racial inferiority and disease. I argue that in the south, science, instead of providing a guiding light for the civil treatment of blacks through healthcare, was used as a tool to perpetuate and extend the reach of Jim Crow. And ultimately because the white medical and scientific establishment chose to use science as means of differentiation, the Arkansas legislature chose to create an underfunded space for containment of black contagion that reinforced Jim Crow ideals. More importantly, whether this belief was stated directly or not, differential dealing with tuberculosis patients along racial lines in the South had very real consequences. When black health was made a priority, it was because of its potential to harm whites, and as a direct result, quality of treatment suffered as will be shown in the case of McRae Sanatorium. Although there were admittedly those in Arkansas who correlated poverty and societal inaction with tuberculosis' disproportional toll on the black population, the blame would largely be placed on the victims not the systems.

⁸ Fay Williams, *50 years Fighting Tuberculosis in Arkansas* (Little Rock, AR: Arkansas Tuberculosis Association, 1958), 13.

⁹ Robert Koch, "The Combating of Tuberculosis," *Popular Science* (September 1901): 469.

As this paper will argue, the foundation of Arkansas' McRae Sanatorium for Negroes exemplifies how the concept of a contagious race justified a standard of care whose basis was not the well being of the black patient but instead the security and preservation of white society. In their attempt to control the large group of contagious black consumptives the state and medical establishment strove to secure the place of Jim Crow segregation within medicine. Jim Crow manifested in both the spatial and the biological separation of African American patients. This focus on quarantine effectively led to an exacerbation of the already poor condition of medical care for African Americans in the South and ultimately left an entire group of tuberculosis' victims to suffer.

The Legacy of Racial Biology

The racial biology that defined medical care for black Arkansans into the 1960's grew from turn of the century seed and soil science. Before Robert Koch's postulates and the germ theory of disease, scientists believed that many diseases, including tuberculosis, were miasmas or bad air. They believed that miasma, combined with the patient's constitutional and moral deficiencies (soil) caused disease to proliferate in the individual. Koch's revolutionary discovery of the tubercle bacillus in 1882 replaced miasma with infectious germs, called the seed in analogy.¹⁰ Older ideas of disease, however were not replaced and the concept of "soil" still lingered in the scientific understanding of disease. In 1912, in the face of Koch's discovery of the "seed" of tuberculosis, Karl Pearson, a British Galton Professor of Eugenics, made the case for remembering the importance of "soil," a concept he fuses with "the hereditary factor, the environmental factor, and the liability to infection."¹¹ Attention to inborn predispositions drove the process of racializing tuberculosis by connecting contagious disease to an individual's constitution, genetics, and by extension, race. For example, in one study the rate at which married couples shared the same eye color was compared and found to be similar to the rate at which both husband and wife suffered from tuberculosis. Since tuberculosis and

¹⁰ Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1998, 42.

¹¹ Karl Pearson, *Tuberculosis, Heredity and Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 1.

eye color, something that is obviously not contagious, had the same rate of concurrence, Pearson argued that tuberculosis must not be contagious. Instead of simply acknowledging the contagiousness of TB, Professor of Eugenics Pearson, manipulated scientific methodology to support the role of defective soil. He chose to downplay contagion and instead argued that susceptibility to tuberculosis is rooted in genetics and can be sexually selected for. Corrupted science built on false premises led to conclusions tailored to support preconceived ideas about race, disease and its victims.

In a similar manner, white doctors interpreted the high morbidity and mortality of African Americans with tuberculosis, especially in the South, to fit into existing ideas of black biological inferiority and degeneracy. According to medical and eugenics theories of the time, the physical body of blacks deviated significantly from the white standard of health and normalcy and was thought to be less developed and inherently degenerative. Vestiges of 18th century physiognomy played a large role in racializing the biology of tuberculosis. Primitive chests, “the broad open nostril” and a natural predilection for bad hygiene were all cited as innate defects of the race that contributed to their vulnerability to tuberculosis.¹² Dr. Edward Osgood Otis, a leading national authority on tuberculosis likewise demonstrated the scientific façade applied to racial thought in his *The Great White Plague*. He argued that slavery was the healthiest condition for blacks since “the colored race in the United States has at the present time at least four times mortality as the white race, whereas before the Civil War the disease was rare among the colored population.”¹³ Otis and many other whites believed that, because of their less developed bodies, blacks attempting to live in a modern, civilized society without the guidance and protection of slavery fell victim more easily and more often to tuberculosis.¹⁴

The idea that blacks were physically different and defective in comparison to whites became deeply ingrained in the medical community of the South by the turn of the century. This system of belief naturally affected the way doctors, who overwhelmingly were white, treated black patients. Even when using seemingly objective methods, such as finding a lesion on the lung with an x-ray, white doctors interpreted the

¹² Ott, *Fevered Lives*, 104–5.

¹³ Edward O. Otis, *The Great White Plague* (New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1909), 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

findings differently for black patients.¹⁵ Often when presented with a black case of tuberculosis, doctors simply said, as in the case of the young Dr. Browne, that there was nothing to be done and that death could not be avoided. With this in mind, containment of the contagion was the only useful recourse.

Through the interplay of race and medicine, African Americans became a diseased race, and by nature of belonging to their race, they became a threat which became the focus of the state when forming McRae Sanatorium. They earned the role of “the disease reservoir of the South from which [the] supply of diseases is being constantly augmented.”¹⁶ Tuberculosis exaggerated the fear of black sickness as its virile, highly contagious nature differentiated it from other diseases associated with blacks, like syphilis. While the contagion of the syphilitic black clung to the body, revelations about the transmission of tuberculosis and the ability of sputum to remain viable outside of the body and possibly infect others meant that the hazard of the black consumptive lurked everywhere. From sputum tracked into a white home on shoes to the cough of a black washerwoman at work on her white employer’s clothes, this insidious disease had no trouble crossing from black slums into the homes of well to do whites according to anxious reports in popular media. It did not follow the Jim Crow mandate on separation of the races as a white individual did not even have to see a black carrier to contract their disease.

This also meant that to treat a black tuberculosis patient, doctors of the time thought that one would not only have to destroy the disease, but also have to overcome the natural inclination of the black body to succumb to the sickness as well as what the medical community believed was an innate superstitious aversion to medical care and immoral behavior which all provided a fertile soil for the disease to grow. According to Dr. Otis, tuberculosis “does not afflict all races equally.”¹⁷ Thus, white inaction could be justified; blaming black biology seemed to relieve whites of responsibility.¹⁸ Attempting to heal blacks with tuberculosis was to go against the accepted understanding of nature

¹⁵ Herbert R. Edwards, “Trends in Tuberculosis Control Procedures,” *Journal of the Arkansas Medical Society* 42 (1947): 272.

¹⁶ Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*, 220.

¹⁷ Otis, *The Great White Plague*, 19.

¹⁸ Allan M. Brandt, “Racism and Research: The Case of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study,” in *Sickness and Health in America* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 332.

and evolution. Moreover, to really staunch the rate of tuberculosis in this manner called for a medical establishment that put black doctors and facilities on equal footing as their white counterparts be it through integration or extensive collaboration. Policy makers, influenced by the medical understanding of the time, decided that better medical care for blacks would be resources, financial, medical and intellectual, wasted. It would also be a dangerous path to socially mobile black physicians, interracial interaction and the admittance that Jim Crow was a broken system. Instead they concluded that the best that could be done was to quarantine the source, which both protected white lives from the contagion and guarded white society by upholding Jim Crow.

The State of Care for African Americans

By the 1920's, tuberculosis had gone from being the leading cause of death in the United States at the turn of the century to the fourth leading killer of Americans.¹⁹ However, though the total number of deaths dropped, African Americans still died at a rate three times that of whites, a figure that had not changed since the early 1900s. This was true in Arkansas where, in 1928, 156 in every 100,000 African Americans died of tuberculosis, though in some areas, such as Little Rock and Pulaski County, the mortality rate reached as high as four to six times that of whites.²⁰ Blacks in Arkansas therefore became a visibly more consumptive population. And though there was an understanding, particularly among upper class whites, that they could practice sanitation and hygiene which prevented the spread of tuberculosis, no cure existed to treat the disease once contracted. Those methods, antibiotics and chemotherapy, would not arrive until the 1940s. Moreover, no matter what preventative measures a white individual took, he or she could neither see nor control the contagion that thrived in the black population.

In the context of racialized biology and high morbidity Arkansas began planning to build a sanatorium to manage its large population of African Americans suffering from tuberculosis. By 1923, the alarm began to show itself clearly. The Arkansas State Sanatorium in Boon-

¹⁹ The Center for Disease Control, *Leading Causes of Death, 1900–1998*, n.d. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/lead1900_98.pdf.

²⁰ T. H. Alford, *Problems of Negro Health in Arkansas: Preliminary Study Bulletin* (Little Rock, AR: State Department of Education, 1939), 2–4.

ville had been open since 1909, but there was still nowhere for the state's sick blacks to seek long term, comprehensive treatment. Black victims of tuberculosis in Pulaski County relied on the ten beds of the Colored Cottage of the County Hospital, which according to Governor McRae, himself a member of the Arkansas Tuberculosis Association, had the "poorest facilities" and faced obstacles of funding, staffing, and resources.²¹

As the state of black medical care in general was deplorable, there was no place for consumptive blacks to go and very little outreach available. Because of this, problems that affected the entire state were intensified in the black population. Arkansas as a whole struggled with popular disinterest in public health issues and the relative inattention of private doctors to the crusade against tuberculosis.²² African Americans were in a far worse position. It had always been extraordinarily difficult for African Americans to get a medical degree and practice in the Jim Crow South, but from 1932-1942 Arkansas endured the worst decline in black doctors in the United States. The number dropped from the already low 109 doctors to 50, leaving 1 black doctor per 4,913 patients.²³ White doctors sometimes treated black patients, but black health was not a priority. The close interracial contact and the fact that many black patients, especially in rural areas, could not pay for their treatment made providing care to African Americans less appealing to white doctors.²⁴ In the worst cases, white doctors and hospitals refused to see black patients, even in emergency situations. At that point black patients, sometimes suffering trauma from car accidents or gunshot wounds, had to travel miles to a black hospital or doctor.²⁵ Black doctors, especially in Little Rock, provided not only care but also part of the political backbone of the community.²⁶ These things, the black

²¹ Thomas C. McRae, "Governor's Report," *Journal of the State of Arkansas* 45 (1925): 36; Pulaski County Tuberculosis Association, *Minutes, February 11, 1925*, The Butler Center for Arkansas History, Little Rock, 1925.

²² W. B. Grayson and A. M. Washburn, "Tuberculosis Problems in Arkansas," *Southern Medical Journal* 31 (1938): 254-59; Edwards, "Trends in Tuberculosis Control Procedures," 272.

²³ Ward Jr., *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South*, 39.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁵ Mitchell F. Rice and Woodrow Jones Jr., *Public Policy and the Black Hospital: From Slavery to Segregation to Integration* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), 29-31.

²⁶ John Kirk, "Dr. J. M. Robinson, The Arkansas Negro Democratic Association and Black Politics in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1928-1952," *Pulaski County Historical Review* 41, no. 1 (1993): 1-16.

physician's desire to treat black patients as well as their community influence, were vital to the creation and survival of McRae Sanatorium.

Another facet of the problem was a shortage of nurses, particularly those who focused on the African Americans. Trained nurses became an indispensable part of tuberculosis care especially beginning in the 1930's when surgical procedures and technical diagnostics became more widespread. A severe lack of black hospital nurses in the South, especially those that were accredited and trained resulted from the scarce education and internships for black nurses. Black public health nursing, which went into both rural and urban communities, was in a similarly dismal condition.²⁷ This invaluable resource was available to black Arkansans in very small numbers. There was only one Colored County Nurse, a woman called Nurse Freeman, whose position the Pulaski County government created in the summer of 1924 upon prompting by the Pulaski County Tuberculosis Association. Freeman, in her first report to the Association visited twelve communities and discovered ten new cases of tuberculosis. She continued to visit schools, inspect children, and hold clinics and talks, but cited the great difficulty of doing her work, which required a great deal of travel, without a car. Freeman, along with the Colored Cottage Nurse and the Colored City Tuberculosis Nurse, provided the Pulaski County Tuberculosis Association with the only reports on the condition of tuberculosis in blacks until the formation of the Colored Auxiliary Branch of the Tuberculosis Association in 1926.²⁸ By 1939, in every county in Arkansas, whites had at least one, but sometimes as many as four, public health nurses. In contrast, there were only six Colored Public Health Nurses operated in the entire state by 1939.²⁹

Throughout the first decades of the 20th century, the already high morbidity and mortality of blacks with tuberculosis continued to be compounded by the lack of resources and outreach available to them. The white population in general had the means, namely sanitation and education, of preventing the spread of disease within itself. Even poor whites were exposed to educational and clinical outreach by the state and volunteer associations. At the very least, they had beds available to them in the state sanatorium and various hospitals, both private and

²⁷ Estelle M. Riddle, "Sources of Supply of Negro Health Personnel Section C: Nurses," *Journal of Negro Education* 6 (1937): 483-92.

²⁸ Pulaski County Tuberculosis Association, *Minutes, February 10, 1926*, The Butler Center for Arkansas History, Little Rock, 1926.

²⁹ Alford, *Problems of Negro Health in Arkansas: Preliminary Study Bulletin*, 78.

public. The majority of African Americans had none of this. The face of the consumptive began to look more and more like that of the black Arkansan, reinforcing the already ingrained ideas of a unique black biology and of a diseased race and reemphasizing the place of Jim Crow separation in medicine.

The Politics of Race and Healthcare

The high incidence of untreated and unidentified disease in blacks became a political concern in the 1920s. At this time the state, still reeling from the Elaine Race Riots of 1919, faced a volatile racial atmosphere.³⁰ The already substantial anxiety that surrounded black and white contact in the South had, thanks to the disease, an added element of contagion. Amidst all the tension, talks of a black sanatorium began in the mid 1920s. Spending money on the project would not be easy to sell to the white public or to white government officials who did not feel strongly about its need. But fear motivated its progress as the state authority and the community began to understand the consequences of neglecting a dangerous and infectious group of people. Everyday interactions, even those that fit into the accepted social infrastructure, such as the black washerwoman in the white home, could be infected with disease and death. Contagion was tied up in ideas of interracial contact and Jim Crow. As a result, creating McRae Sanatorium was an intricate political process and naturally the tense racial atmosphere influenced to a great extent the action and inaction of the government. Even for those within the government sympathetic to the cause were hesitant as spending money on black health could be a catalyst for violence.

Under these circumstances, fourteen years after a total of \$80,000 was appropriated for the State Sanatorium in Boonville for whites, the Arkansas Legislature finally responded to the increasingly grim situation for black Arkansas with tuberculosis.³¹ Arkansas' own "reservoir of disease" could no longer be ignored by the political establishment. Mrs. W. T. Dorough of Little Rock, an extremely active member of the Pulaski County Tuberculosis Association, became the liaison between

³⁰ Grif Stockley, *Ruled by Race: Black/White Relations in Arkansas from Slavery to the Present* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2009), 161.

³¹ Arkansas General Assembly, *Act 378 To Provide for...a State Sanatorium for the Treatment of Tuberculosis*, Acts of Arkansas, Little Rock, AR, 1909, 1070-75.

the county association and the Colored Auxiliary of the Tuberculosis Association in 1926.³² Thanks to her persistence, as well as that of the Arkansas Tuberculosis Association the state government finally took action. On February 13, 1923, Arkansas Act 113, drafted by Senator Peter Deisch and signed by Governor Thomas McRae, finally provided a definitive commitment to a Negro Sanatorium by appropriating funds and creating a board of directors in language fully signifying the issues of import.³³ According to the legislature, the act was vital “for the immediate preservation for the public peace, health and safety, and emergency is hereby declared.”³⁴ From the outset, the establishment of the institution was intended to protect the health of whites while preserving the mores of a segregated society. In 1909, when Arkansas Act 378 established the State Sanatorium for the Treatment of Tuberculosis and the death rate for tuberculosis reached its highest point in the 20th century, there was no such language and sense of impending chaos.³⁵ The emergency of tuberculosis justified spending money on African American health as it would have a major benefit to white health.

Governor McRae was a proponent of healthcare and education and a president of the Arkansas Tuberculosis Association after his term as governor. Though sympathetic to the plight of black healthcare and willing to provide aid (which was more than many were willing to do), he still based his actions out of a sense of paternalism and, importantly, the need to protect whites from blacks who without intervention would ignorantly spread the disease. This point cannot be stressed enough. Two years after the passage of Act 113 McRae, in a Governor’s Report calls for an increase in spending on the admittedly “very small building program,” not because blacks continued to die waiting for some kind of treatment, but because “Tuberculosis is far more prevalent among negroes than among whites, and is a menace to whites from

³² Pulaski County Tuberculosis Association, *Minutes*, April 14, 1926, The Butler Center for Arkansas History, Little Rock, 1926; W. T. Dorough, *Personal Account of McRae Sanatorium, 1931–1966*, W.T. Dorough Papers, Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock, 1931–1966.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Arkansas General Assembly, *Act 113 To Establish Arkansas Tuberculosis Sanatorium for Negroes*, 67.

³⁵ Arkansas General Assembly, *Act 378 To Provide for...a State Sanatorium for the Treatment of Tuberculosis*, 1070–75; Anthony M. Lowell, *Tuberculosis: I. Tuberculosis Morbidity and Mortality and Its Control* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 69.

that source.”³⁶ The beneficent intent was directed towards whites, not blacks, and as a result the government resisted appropriations that supported what they saw as the superfluous treatment of blacks. This attitude is manifest in the appropriations made, the lack of effort put into education, the inattention to providing trained medical staff, the dearth of medical equipment and the disinterest in maintenance to the sanatorium. Moreover, state officials without McRae’s paternalism and anti-tuberculosis background had difficulty spending anything on black consumptives, reinforcing the Jim Crow system.



Figure 1: The Nyberg building and an office building of the Arkansas State Tuberculosis Sanatorium in Booneville which was segregated until 1967.³⁷

The McRae administration, despite its ulterior motives, did manage to get more done, at least on paper, for black consumptives than any earlier administration in Arkansas’ history. Yet despite the growing fear of the contagious black population, acquiring and maintaining a useful state facility for the treatment of blacks was a thorny pro-

³⁶ McRae, “Governor’s Report,” 37.

³⁷ Arkansas State Tuberculosis Sanatorium, from *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*. Last Updated 1/5/2012, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2237>.

cess, with hindrances from state officials, doctors, and the public alike. Arguably the most debilitating and chronic problem was the extreme lack of funding and training. More than anything the lack of financial effort on the part of the state mandated the creation of a sanatorium whose primary capacity was for isolation and identification, not actual treatment and care. In 1909 the legislature appropriated \$80,000 to establish a white state sanatorium in Booneville, \$30,000 of which was dedicated to “running expenses and maintenance,” implying a long term commitment to quality of care.³⁸ In contrast, the legislature only appointed \$43,000 to buy a site and build a tuberculosis sanatorium for black patients.³⁹ Conspicuously absent from Act 113 was money set aside for the maintenance and running of the institution. With an average annual rate of inflation of 7.3%, to equal the amount of money spent on the Booneville sanatorium, the legislature would have had to appropriate more than \$138,000 to the black sanatorium.⁴⁰



Figure 2: Dr Browne performing a pneumothorax procedure.⁴¹

McRae Sanatorium had been financially crippled from its inception. White communities, through willing county judges, had a place to send dangerous, indigent black consumptives and a place to encourage other black TB victims to go. However, assuming they could afford to leave their jobs to go to the sanatorium, blacks who willingly sought help at McRae Sanatorium were faced with disturbing shortcomings. In 1931, the year McRae Sanatorium opened, the State Sanatorium in Booneville had around 500

beds, while McRae only had 26 beds and 6 employees, one being a doctor.⁴² This affected the number of people cared for and lowered

³⁸ Arkansas General Assembly, *Act 378 To Provide for...a State Sanatorium for the Treatment of Tuberculosis*, 1071.

³⁹ Arkansas General Assembly, *Act 113 To Establish Arkansas Tuberculosis Sanatorium for Negroes*, 63.

⁴⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics, *CPI Inflation Calculator*, United States Department of Labor, n.d. http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

⁴¹ Williams, *50 years Fighting Tuberculosis in Arkansas*, 24

⁴² Arkansas Democrat Gazette, *Tuberculosis Prognosis Spawns Medical Career*, January, 27 1998, 4E.

the quality of care. Regular treatment courses were compromised through lack of material, personnel, and space. The pneumothorax treatment, a procedure in which the infected lung was deflated in order to “rest” was an extremely common part of tuberculosis care, especially during and after the 1930’s. Beginning in the 1940’s, lobectomy and thoracoplasty, complex surgeries involving the removal of lung lobes and the accompanying removal of rib segments, were standard treatments for certain advanced cases.⁴³ Dr. Browne performed these dangerous and expensive procedures with inadequate facilities and equipment.⁴⁴ Also X-ray machines, which were already hard to come by due to their expense, could not be used without trained staff, which the sanatorium had little of. This hindered the sanatorium’s ability for diagnosis, staging, and some types of treatment.

The Social Dialogue Surrounding Black Health

The hurdles faced by those in support of a sanatorium for African Americans reveal a dialogue between two opposing beliefs held by the elected officials who attempted to grapple with the problem of black contagion. First, there existed a consensus among the medical and political establishment that to expend great amounts of resources on healing the black population was a futile, wasteful effort. The very late, lukewarm financial response to so urgent a problem was a direct result of this attitude. Some authorities, both on a national and state level, cited the role of socioeconomic factors such as poor nutrition, crowded housing and unsanitary living conditions in the inflated morbidity and mortality in black tuberculosis victims.⁴⁵ But in Arkansas, and many other parts of the United States, the blame still fell on the victims and their perceived naturally inferior biology.

In the South of the first half of the 20th century this had disastrous consequences for large scale, state sponsored sanatoriums for African Americans. In the 1920s or the beginning of “the age of the sanatorium” the standard of care was to provide clean air and rest to the consumptive, whose natural resistance provided the most capable, and

⁴³ James H. Forsee, “Lobectomy for Pulmonary Tuberculosis,” *Annals of Surgery* 136 (1952): 828–37.

⁴⁴ Williams, *50 years Fighting Tuberculosis in Arkansas*, 24.

⁴⁵ Elsie Witche, *Tuberculosis and the Negro in Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh, PA: Tuberculosis League of Pittsburgh, 1934), 87.

only, defense against the ravages of tuberculosis.⁴⁶ Accordingly, before technologies like the pneumothorax treatment, x-rays, sulfonamides and chemotherapy, the cornerstone of sanatorium treatment was to provide an environment that allowed the patient's own body to prevail over the disease.



Figure 3: The A. C. Shipp Building of Thomas McRae Memorial Sanatorium for Negroes.⁴⁷

The social nature of tuberculosis gave it the ability to adapt to the racial biology of Jim Crow. Because conventional science and medicine saw African Americans as physically much less able to resist the disease, investing large amounts of money for up to standard sanatoriums was an incredible waste. Providing a caring environment for the black consumptive could not negate the innately weaker biology,

⁴⁶ Thomas Dormandy, *The White Death: A History of Tuberculosis* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 149.

⁴⁷ Exterior View of the A. C. Shipp Building at McRae Sanatorium, UAMS Library Digital Historical Collections, accessed 1/24/2011, <http://libcontentdm.uams.edu>.

or the bad soil, of the black body. The centuries old legacy of racism in biology showed tangible effects in early 20th century Arkansas. In the 1910's, when Erle Chambers, a member of the Arkansas Tuberculosis Association, made an early attempt to obtain funding towards a sanatorium for African Americans, the Arkansas Legislature denied her request, saying that "Negroes will not go to a hospital. When they take tuberculosis they die".⁴⁸ Stereotypes about the black constitution and black behavior, which also implied the influence of biology, resulted in legislative disinterest in treating black tuberculosis. Social scientists and much of the white public thought that African Americans were naturally unsanitary and predisposed to immoral behavior such as drinking and promiscuity that lead to tuberculosis. Also, as implied by the reaction of the state to Ms. Chambers' request, many people in the South believed that they were both distrustful of doctors and ignorant (be it willingly or not) to the contagious nature of tuberculosis and effectiveness of prevention and medical treatment. This view of blacks was not only found in whites. In fact, Dr. Browne himself described blacks as overly suspicious and generally unwilling to cooperate with medical care. This mode of thought carried on late into the twentieth century and continued to justify the lack of investment in treating black tuberculosis.

There were some, particularly within the Anti-Tuberculosis movement, who acknowledged the role of societal constraints and economics in the high morbidity and mortality of blacks. The most effective way to deal with tuberculosis was prevention. Southern African Americans, generally poorer than their white counterparts, lived in cramped, unventilated living spaces without adequate sewage disposal. It was also difficult for them to get sufficient nutrition and rest, making recovery difficult. However, to advocate this as the cause of the inequity in morbidity and mortality was difficult for whites to accept within the framework of Jim Crow. It meant recognizing that there was a critical flaw in the system that not only endangered blacks but the white community as well. To fix this flaw required enormous state involvement and for the inherently unequal Jim Crow hegemony that served to clearly mark out that the acceptable interaction between black and white would have to be discarded.

Even in the view that environment played a part in disease, racial stereotypes tainted the minds of many whites and led to the reluctance

⁴⁸ Arkansas Gazette, *One man tells story of McRae Sanatorium*, July 26, 1959, 2E.

to invest in black health. In *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment*, Jim Jones⁴⁹ contends that it was not often that whites showed consideration for the difficult living condition blacks had under Jim Crow. Instead they reprimanded blacks for disregarding what they saw as basic and easily attainable standards of hygiene. Therefore, the racialization of biology and medicine within the Jim Crow setting allowed those in power to effectively ignore the role of society and economics. By placing the blame on black biology, whites could relieve themselves of responsibility. To try and improve the situation of blacks would be to attempt the impossible, to go against nature. If this was even possible, it was not worth the effort.

The second and seemingly opposing belief held by white officials was the desperate need to eradicate the black pool of infection that threatened to take more white lives. The white anti-tuberculosis associations in Arkansas had been bringing attention to it for years. Doctors and some elected officials, like Governor McRae and Senator Deisch, knew that tuberculosis knew no color line. Because of that the disease in one group of people was everyone's problem. But while the white volunteers and community activists could support a sanatorium for blacks, even if still on the grounds of white health, politicians, almost completely obliged to the white populace, were in a difficult position. The 1920s and 1930s saw a decline in the political power of black capitalists and shifting political loyalties. The Republican Party, traditionally the recipient of black support had been turning "lily white," and Little Rock's black elite began to gravitate towards the Democratic Party through the Arkansas Negro Democratic Association (ANDA) formed in 1928.⁵⁰ Furthermore, race relations reached a low point with the Elaine Race Riot of 1919 and the 1927 lynching of John Carter in Little Rock. Expending money on black care could not only cost politicians their careers, but could potentially put a match to the already volatile racial and political climate of Arkansas in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵¹

The two motivating forces within the state, which were the belief that treating blacks was futile and the fear of a contagious black populace, were accommodated by a plan that espoused and was inclined to-

⁴⁹ James H. Jones, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment* (New York: The Free Press, 1981), 23–5.

⁵⁰ Kirk, "Dr. J. M. Robinson, The Arkansas Negro Democratic Association and Black Politics in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1928–1952," 3–5.

⁵¹ Stockley, *Ruled by Race*.

wards quarantine rather than quality treatment. The state constructed a building for the black consumptive. But without a plan to provide treatment for patients and resources, both material and educational, to the staff, it was not much else than a place of containment.

Contagion and Space in a Jim Crow Society

Allocating a geographical space for the containment of black consumptives would itself prove to be a difficult task. This was not for fear of contagious tuberculosis. Though there was initially resistance within the state government to building the Booneville sanatorium, most was because of uncertainty of the effectiveness of sanatorium care as a whole. When it came down to choosing a location, communities willingly put in bids in hopes to take advantage of the economic boost of the sanatorium.⁵² Enthusiasm for a haven for ill African-Americans was decidedly less feverish. Instead of eagerness, resistance and conflict would arise because an influx of African Americans had the potential to disrupt the social structure and the mandated separation between the races. In the process of making space for black victims of tuberculosis, these two different types of “contagions,” that of disease and that of race, ran together. The added element of contagious disease exacerbated the fear of interaction with African Americans and both generated and justified the resistance to creating a black sanatorium.

The Arkansas legislature, when establishing the parameters for a sanatorium for African Americans, specified that the Board of Trustees should choose an area that “shall appear to them to be more nearly in the center of the negro population.”⁵³ The Board was made up of Senator Peter Deisch, Ms. Erle Chambers, Dr. W.D. Rose, Dr. G.W.S. Ish, Mrs. Elizabeth Jordan and Mr. S.T. Boyd, three of whom were black. In 1924, after consulting with the National Tuberculosis Association, a geologist, and a sanitary engineer, they settled on a spot located outside of Alexander, Arkansas in Saline County. According to Senator Deisch this location was the most accessible to blacks from all over the state. Interestingly, this area was not near the center of the black population. The majority of blacks lived in the rural areas of eastern and

⁵² Arkansas Tuberculosis Sanatorium, *Selecting the Site*, n. d. <http://www.booneville.com/C-TB.htm>.

⁵³ Arkansas General Assembly, *Act 113 To Establish Arkansas Tuberculosis Sanatorium for Negroes*, 64.

southern Arkansas.⁵⁴ Alexander is about sixteen miles southwest of Little Rock, and the area chosen was a few miles from white residences. From the commencement of the project, however, there seemed to be discontentment over the selection of the location and stalling within the government. For example, there was no funding for basic aspects of construction, such as drilling for water. Money had to be raised for this by activists in the African American community.⁵⁵ Even more damaging to the cause was when, right after the legislation approving the sanatorium had passed, the money intended for the project had been spent on “other things” that the government never specified.⁵⁶

White households in Alexander feared the close contact that came with a nearby African American institution. Their desire to maintain total segregation, especially when contagion was a factor, continued to cause problems in the decade before McRae’s opening. These problems escalated during the administration of Governor Tom Terrall, who according to Mrs. Dorough “strongly disapproved of the site”.⁵⁷ In 1925, a few months after taking office, Terrall abolished the Negro Tuberculosis Sanatorium’s Board of Trustees. That is not to say that Governor Terrall had no interest in investing in medicine. On the contrary, Terrall advocated the construction of a medical school building and state charity hospital first proposed by McRae and pushed the formation of a state hospital through the legislature, which then appropriated \$500,000 for construction and \$100,000 for maintenance.⁵⁸ The issue with McRae Sanatorium for Terrall was the unacceptable closeness of African Americans, specifically those with disease, to white homes. The contagious disease emphasized the need to segregate black and white socially, medically, and spatially.

It is not entirely clear what the nature of community resistance to McRae sanatorium was before the Terrall administration, but by the late 1920s it was explicitly apparent that a black sanatorium was not welcome in Alexander. Soon after Act 49 was repealed and the site officially approved, white households from the surrounding community brought a case, *Mitchell v. Deisch*, against the Board of Trustees.

⁵⁴ Michael F. Sylva, “Black Population in Arkansas 1900–1970” (Master’s Thesis, University of Arkansas, 1981), 34.

⁵⁵ Dorough, *Personal Account of McRae Sanatorium, 1931–1966*.

⁵⁶ Arkansas Gazette, *One man tells story of McRae Sanatorium*, 2E.

⁵⁷ Dorough, *Personal Account of McRae Sanatorium, 1931–1966*.

⁵⁸ W. David Baird, *Medical Education in Arkansas 1879–1978* (Memphis, TN: Memphis State University Press, 1979), 138–9.

Though the mayor of Alexander believed that there would be no objection to the sanatorium, after hearing the case, the Saline County Chancery Court issued a restraining order against the Board, citing that the location was not “near the center of the negro population” as Act 113 had stipulated. Those bringing the case against building the sanatorium also voiced concerns about irreparable damage to property value of the neighborhood and even the entire county. Throughout the case report, it is clear that race created this unease. A black institution, particularly one that housed black disease, was not welcome in a majority white neighborhood. To foil its construction, those in opposition both blatantly voiced this concern about race and concealed these anxieties underneath other unsubstantiated problems with construction.

The decision was appealed in 1929 in the Arkansas Supreme Court and the Board prevailed. Senator Deisch had to counter a slew of arguments against building the sanatorium in Alexander. Many arguments, such as that property value would decrease and tainted sewage would seep into wells and drinking water for livestock, did not even hold up against conventional knowledge of the time.⁵⁹ Senator Deisch brought in experts whose testimony confirmed that objective science, as well as experience, gave no credence to the claims. These problems were not presented when selecting a location for the white sanatorium in Booneville. In fact, it was known, both from the experience in Booneville as well as expert testimony from sanitary engineers and Dr. John Stewart, superintendent at Booneville for 15 years, that property value actually increased, and there was no danger to contracting tuberculosis from being in the vicinity of a sanatorium.⁶⁰ Though many reasons were cited as to why the sanatorium would be detrimental to the community, the most powerful reason and the one still voiced by the dissenting opinion was the fact that a black sanatorium had no place in majority white community. What this shows is the powerful desire to keep blacks and whites separate even in the face of contagious disease.

Apparent in this episode is not only a desire to quarantine black consumptives within a building, but to geographically isolate the institution that housed them. Dr. Stewart had to assure the court that when it came to sanatorium care “the same rules applied to negroes as to whites. There is no more danger of contracting a disease from a

⁵⁹ *Mitchell v. Deisch*, 18 S.W.2d 364, (179 Ark., 1929)

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

negro patient than a white patient.”⁶¹ The idea that there was a biological difference in the susceptibility of blacks not only justified the lack of investment in making them well, but it also fed the already strong apprehension of racial intermingling. While segregation defined and limited social interaction between the races, the foundation of the McRae Sanatorium shows that it also became a means of protection from a diseased race.

The intermingling of biology and racial thought in early twentieth century Arkansas resulted in the handling of African Americans with tuberculosis, the deadliest disease of the early twentieth century, by relying on a system inclined towards quarantine, not real treatment. Within the setting of Jim Crow, contagion and its perceived link to race lead to medicine that became an issue of defining space rather than healing. Despite all of the setbacks, Dr. Hugh Browne, with the help of sympathetic white individuals, extremely active black community and the belief brining the crusade against tuberculosis to rural blacks, created out of what he was given an institution that not only treated his patient’s disease, but also helped to educate the black community. He taught his patients about their disease and the best road to recovery, but he also helped them get their high school education and vocational training while at the sanatorium. He even trained black nurses and doctors who would come to work at the Sanatorium. All of this had to be done within the South’s sociopolitical framework and with the space set aside for African Americans and their contagion by state of Arkansas. The white medical and political prioritized not only white health but the Jim Crow system over truly attempting to heal African Americas. Contagious disease and perceptions about a unique black biology enabled Jim Crow to extend into the medical field, creating the segregated, quarantine-based environment in which McRae Sanatorium attempted to function.

⁶¹ *Mitchell v. Deisch*, 18 S.W.2d 364, (179 Ark., 1929)

Escape from the “Floating World”: Kabuki Theater in Conflict with the Bakufu Government of Tokugawa Japan (1600–1868)

Suzanne Schenewerk

Ukiyo 浮世, the “floating world” of the Tokugawa 徳川 era (1600–1868) in Japan, holds a particular fascination that endures to this day. For townfolk and *samurai* 侍 alike, this realm of beauty and entertainment represented an escape from the ordinary, a place where pleasure took priority above all other concerns. However, for the entertainers themselves, this demi-monde was not a temporary refuge from the mundane – quite the opposite. Their occupations conferred them to a strange and, in many ways, unenviable position in society, as caste structure and governmental restrictions isolated performers of the period physically and socially. Although an actor or a courtesan might achieve celebrity and fortune, true respectability was forever beyond reach. These individuals lived within the “floating world” of theaters, tea-houses, and brothels, and saw the disenchanting realities of its operation. They were, in very real ways, confined within its borders. Unlike most outcastes, though, some performers had celebrity and influence to leverage against social and political restriction. In Tokugawa Japan, and particularly in the capital city of Edo itself, the actors of the *kabuki* 歌舞伎 theaters engaged in a cultural tug-of-war with the regulatory authorities of the *bakufu* 幕府, the Shogun’s government, first through a continual testing of performance restrictions, and secondly through

challenges of the official class structure in theater material and social interaction.

It is not difficult to understand why the *bakufu* would consider *kabuki* theater a disreputable form of entertainment. *Noh* 能 was the theater of the *samurai* upper-class, a form characterized by emotional restraint and a codified tradition of subtlety and symbolism.¹ “Gaudy, graphic, and emotionally unrestrained” *kabuki*, on the other hand, was characteristic of the pleasures of townsmen.² Unsurprisingly, the allure of *kabuki* theater (and of the pleasure quarters strongly associated with it) was strong for the *samurai* class, too, and it proved impossible to keep them away.³ Confucian scholar Muro Kyûsô 室鳩巢 (1658–1734) noted: “There are even feudal lords and the district governors who like to enjoy themselves secretly in houses of prostitution, and there are warriors and great men who vie in learning the customs of the theater”.⁴

Although not every *kabuki* performance was sexual in nature, the culture of the form was. The first performances called *kabuki* took place around the year 1600 with the novel performances of skits and farces by female actress-dancers.⁵ Female performers frequently dressed as males (imitating the *kabukimono* 傾奇者, counter-cultural gallants of the day), and occasionally male performers assumed female roles, with the subject material centered around the interaction of prostitutes and their clients.⁶ It is fair to say these farces functioned primarily as a sort of advertisement for the actresses’ “secondary, if not primary, profession of prostitution”.⁷ One seventeenth-century work recorded the lyrics of an early *kabuki* song, which accompanied the dancing of some fifty or sixty people:

¹ Donald H. Shively, “Bakufu versus Kabuki,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 18, nos. 3–4 (1955): 326.

² *Ibid.*

³ Charles J. Dunn, *Everyday Life in Traditional Japan* (Rutland: Charles E Tuttle, 1969), 139.

⁴ Donald H. Shively, “The Social Environment of Tokugawa Kabuki,” in *Studies in Kabuki: Its Acting, Music, and Historical Context*, ed. James R. Brandon, William P. Malm, and Donald H. Shively (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1978), 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6; M. Nishiyama, *Edo Culture: Daily Life and Diversions in Urban Japan, 1600–1868*, trans. Gerald Groemer (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 213.

⁷ Shively, “Bakufu versus Kabuki,” 327.

Be in a frenzy
 In this dreamlike world.
 Even the thunder
 That rumbles and rumbles
 Cannot put you and me
 Asunder.⁸

This lively, abandoned new theater was immediately popular among not just the townsmen but the many military veterans – so popular, in fact, that fights frequently broke out in the theater between patrons because of rivalries over the attentions of actresses and young actors.⁹

Kabuki's reputation as a disruptive influence was quickly established, and the *bakufu* began to crack down. Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 himself, the founder of the military dynasty that ruled in the period, banned such performances from his military base at Suruga 駿河 in 1608. Some time later that year, five ladies of the Imperial court, imitating the manner of *kabuki* actresses, were involved in a scandalous assignation with nine courtiers. The principal parties of the incident were later banished or executed by Ieyasu at the Emperor's request.¹⁰ By 1629, the Tokugawa government had banned all women from the stage. That the ban was reissued in 1630, 1640, 1645, and 1646, indicates the popularity of the performances was such that theater owners and performers were willing to risk punishment for the potential monetary rewards.¹¹

These were just the opening blows in a battle that would last the entire 250 years of the Tokugawa period. The prohibition of *onna kabuki* 女歌舞妓, "women's *kabuki*", did not eliminate *wakashū kabuki* 若衆歌舞伎, "youths' *kabuki*", which focused on the beauty of its young actors. Scenes of homosexual love, then, were performed along with the familiar transvestism and demonstrations of solicitation.¹² As with women's *kabuki*, rivalries over the affections of the young actors led to frequent altercations, and now women, too, could be obsessive devotees of such beautiful youths (although women were perhaps less likely to brawl for their attention.) The *bakufu* banned female imper-

⁸ *Ibid.*, 328.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 329.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 329, 330.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 330.

¹² Shively, "The Social Environment of Tokugawa Kabuki," 9.

sonation on stage in 1642, but relented after two years under the condition that male actors were made visibly masculine and the action on stage would be clear not to confuse the audience on that point.¹³ Homosexual prostitution was outlawed in 1648 (and several times after) to little effect, and in 1652, following an incident where a fight broke out at a party with *kabuki* youths, all *kabuki* theaters were closed.¹⁴

Eventually, after repeated requests and negotiations with the government, *kabuki* performances were permitted again, this time called *yarô kabuki* 野郎歌舞伎, “fellows’ *kabuki*”. Young actors and *onnagata* 女形, female-impersonating actors who lived as women, were required to shave their forelocks to a minimum of one half-inch, ensuring a more masculine look (since the masculine hairstyles of the period all featured a shaved pate), and were periodically inspected to ensure that such regulation was followed.¹⁵ Actors continually tested the limits to which they could circumvent this regulation, covering these shaved spots with kerchiefs, caps, purple silk patches, and eventually wigs, with each being banned at various times and eventually conceded, or at least more discreetly employed.¹⁶ Similarly, actors were responsible for providing their own costumes, and frequently defied sumptuary laws regarding acceptable materials for costuming, choosing richer materials like silk and brocade.¹⁷ In this case, too, the *bakufu* eventually conceded some fabrics that were originally forbidden.¹⁸

It was this continual testing and redefinition of restrictions that produced in *kabuki* the distinctive role of *onnagata*, female impersonators, as gradually elegance and acting skill became of greater importance than physical beauty.¹⁹ *Onnagata* became over time symbols of essential womanhood and elegance rather than merely objects of desire. Their names became used as brand for cosmetics, accessories, and tea. Their influence on fashion and manners was such that, by the eighteenth century, courtesans looked to *onnagata* for examples of ideal fem-

¹³ Shively, “Bakufu versus Kabuki,” 232.

¹⁴ Shively, “The Social Environment of Tokugawa Kabuki,” 9, 55.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶ Shively, “Bakufu versus Kabuki,” 334.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 344; Shively, “The Social Environment of Tokugawa Kabuki,” 44.

¹⁸ Shively, “Bakufu versus Kabuki,” 345.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 336.

inity.²⁰ While “officialdom frowned at such fawning over actors,” it was impossible to prevent.²¹

The government’s tolerance for the theater might seem odd, in light of the concern for the social issues *kabuki* brought about. After all, the restrictions placed by the *bakufu* did not actually eliminate prostitution from the theater; they merely caused it to be carried out more discreetly. Acting, dancing, and prostitution were traditionally all one profession, and the government’s attempts to segregate them were of limited effectiveness.²² For this reason, although the theater districts and brothel districts of the time, like Edo’s *Yoshiwara* pleasure district, were geographically differentiated, they were practically considered of one piece. As one poem put it:

Yoshiwara
Kabuki
The back and front of dice.²³

Confucian-inspired official disapproval of homosexuality and prostitution, too, could only go so far in a culture where such practices were traditionally acceptable, but had the issue been considered sufficiently urgent, more stringent measures might have been carried out.²⁴ It was the understanding of the Tokugawa government, it seems, that prostitution and theater were necessary evils, important for the entertainment of the stupid lower classes. One official guide for the construction of *bakufu* policy stated the official position this way:

Courtesans, dancers, catamites, streetwalkers, and the like always come to the cities and prospering places of the country. Although the conduct of many is corrupted by them, if they are rigorously suppressed, serious crimes will occur daily, and there will be punishments for gambling, drunken frenzies, and lasciviousness.²⁵

Kabuki, then, provided a space for the diversion of the populace from more destructive ends. Rather than establishing a time of carnival (which Andrew Gerstle, drawing from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin,

²⁰ C. Andrew Gerstle, “Flowers of Edo: Eighteenth-Century Kabuki and Its Patrons,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 4, no. 1 (1987): 63.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 61, 63.

²² Shively, “Bakufu versus Kabuki,” 337.

²³ Gerstle, “Flowers of Edo,” 54.

²⁴ Shively, “Bakufu versus Kabuki,” 337.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 336.

describes as a time of social role-reversal that runs counter to the officially prescribed social system) the *bakufu* allowed the existence of a space of carnival.²⁶ It was therefore important to the *bakufu* to keep *kabuki* and *kabuki* actors within the boundaries of that carnival space, and repeated (and predictably ineffective) prohibitions were made against actors going out of the theater district, visiting townfolk, farmers, and government employees, spending the night in the homes of non-actors, dressing as ordinary townsmen, or going out in boats.²⁷ Actors, it seems, were much in demand as party guests, and no matter what orders were issued, hosts continued to invite them, and actors continued to attend. Some restrictions approached the difficulty from another angle, forbidding *samurai* to go see the theater itself. When the government stepped up surveillance on theaters, upper-ranking *samurai* attendance fell, but lower-ranking warriors apparently could still attend quite openly.²⁸ The ladies of the court, and the wives and daughters of lords, apparently still had such a passion to see the stage that they would order their palanquins stopped before the theater and have footmen pull back the curtain so they could catch a glimpse. This, too, was commonplace enough to be outlawed.²⁹ Actors and nobility could still meet in the theater teahouses nearby to socialize or hold discreet assignations, and as such businesses also had legitimate functions they proved impossible to outlaw entirely.³⁰

Trespasses against governmental restriction were, then, commonplace and even expected. The frequency with which laws were reissued, the strictness of their enforcement, and the determination of actors to violate them seem to have all played a part in the establishment of a cultural equilibrium regarding the tolerability of the theater.

Those characteristics of early *kabuki* which were considered to have a corrosive effect on society and morals continued throughout the Tokugawa period, but were kept within certain limits by the intermittent harassing.³¹

As long as *kabuki* did not urgently endanger the public morality, it seems, it could occupy its uneasy place in the balance of society. When

²⁶ C. Andrew Gerstle, "The Culture of the Play: Kabuki and the Production of Text," *Oral Tradition* 20, no. 2 (2005): 193.

²⁷ Shively, "Bakufu versus Kabuki," 340–2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 343.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 343–4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 344.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 336.

major crackdowns on the theater took place after the 1600s, it was usually as part of a greater social reform movement (for example, the Kansai reforms of the 1790s,) when new leadership within the *bakufu* felt the balance of society itself had become flawed.³²

The official class system of Japan, inspired by Confucian thought and established in the seventeenth century, divided society into “four descending ranks: *samurai* (civil/military), farmers, artisans, and merchants”.³³ Some individuals existed outside this class system, however, due to occupation or birth. Courtiers, priests, and intellectuals gained a certain freedom from their exclusion from the hierarchy and might be characterized as outside of it. Actors, prostitutes, and beggars, on the other hand, were decidedly beneath the class system – they were considered *hinin* 非人, non-humans.³⁴ In particular, actors were referred to as *kawaramono* 河原者, river-bank folk, because of associations with the poor who lived upon flooding-prone rivers.³⁵ Some *ka-buki* actors seemed to act in deference to this low nominal status; for instance, the famous Ichikawa Danjūrō II 市川團十郎 (1689–1758) was reported to have eaten from a separate fire when visited by a famous *shamisen* 三味線 player, “showing explicitly that Danjūrō considered himself to be of the outcaste class”.³⁶ But this same deference was not always extended to the *samurai* class, especially as the popularity of *ka-buki* became commonplace throughout all levels of society over time, and the celebrity of individual actors grew. This was even more true in the city of Edo, where *aragoto* 荒事 or “rough style” *ka-buki* originated and flourished.³⁷

The essence of *aragoto ka-buki* is an anti-authoritarian fearlessness. It borrows heavily from the aesthetic of the *kyōkaku* 侠客, the street knight, the out-of-work warrior who became “a self-appointed guardian of the common folk”.³⁸ Ichikawa Danjūrō I (1660–1704), credited with the style’s origination, is recorded in a book of actor’s analects as saying:

When invited to a daimyo’s residence, after saké was served, I was asked to show them *aragoto*. Therefore, to

³² Gerstle, “Flowers of Edo,” 66.

³³ Gerstle, “The Culture of the Play: Kabuki and the Production of Text,” 194.

³⁴ Dunn, *Everyday Life in Traditional Japan*, 137.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

³⁶ Gerstle, “Flowers of Edo,” 54.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁸ Nishiyama, *Edo Culture*, 213.

the chanting of the *noh* play *Kagekiyô*, I stripped to my underclothes and violently smashed the *shôji* and *fusuma* (sliding doors) with my feet. Whereupon, the patrons asked what are you doing? When I replied that this is *aragoto*, the daimyo was delighted and rewarded me well. Even in front of daimyo you must never be afraid, or it won't be *aragoto*.³⁹

In the words of Danjûrô's fourth successor, Danjûrô V (1741–1806),

It is a sign of weakness if [the *aragoto* actor] thinks, "I hope the audience likes and supports me." Instead, he should think, "I can delight the audience simply by appearing! Look what an actor I am!" He should look down on the spectators, as if they were vermin.⁴⁰

There are records to support the idea that the townfolk looked up to such actors as almost superhuman.

In all the world
there's Danjûrô
and a spring morn

wrote one poet – that is, only Danjûrô mattered, above even the Shogun – while others recorded how the first Danjûrô was blessed with a son by the Buddhist guardian diety Fudô-myôô 不動明王, who inspired his acting.⁴¹

Aragoto performance portrayed the actor as brusque, fearless, and inferior to no one, able to conquer even supernatural evil.⁴² This bold authority over the fantastic is typified by the part of hero Gongorô 権五郎 of the famous play *Shibaraku* 暫. With an enormous sword and extravagant costume, Gongorô charges up the *hanamichi* 花道 (theater runway), thundering out "*Shibaraku!*" meaning "Wait a minute!" Before easily dispatching the antagonists, he delivers his identity in a bombastic speech which traditionally concludes with the actor's announce-

³⁹ Gerstle, "Flowers of Edo," 56.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 65; Stephen Addiss, Gerald Groemer, and Thomas Rimer, eds., *Traditional Japanese Arts and Culture: An Illustrated Sourcebook* (University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 223.

⁴¹ Gerstle, "Flowers of Edo," 59, 60.

⁴² Nishiyama, *Edo Culture*, 214.

ment of his name as well.⁴³ *Aragoto* plays showed the defeat of powerful oppressors and the deliverance of the helpless, not by *samurai*, but by heroes who stood up for the people.⁴⁴ In another famous *aragoto* play, *Sukeroku* 助六, the main character delivers an entrance soliloquy declaring himself to be “the savior of the Edo townsmen – who lived beneath the swords of 500,000 *samurai*.”⁴⁵



Kunisada Utagawa (1832): Ichikawa Danjūrō VIII, *Shibaraku*

Kabuki theater also dared, despite government prohibition, to stage plays which the *bakufu* might find to have an undesirable political influence – crimes, famous vendettas, sex scandals, double suicides.⁴⁶ Although repeated orders were issued against the dramatization of current or recent events, or the use of “the names of contemporary persons” (meaning, of course, the politically important), playwrights and actors found ways to portray recent news stories by setting them in the distant past.⁴⁷ For instance, the ban was reissued in 1703 following the incident of the revenge of the 47 *rōnin* 浪人 (masterless *samurai*), so

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁴⁵ Gerstle, “Flowers of Edo,” 60.

⁴⁶ Nishiyama, *Edo Culture*, 222.

⁴⁷ Shively, “Bakufu versus Kabuki,” 352.

dramatizations were recast to take place in the fourteenth century.⁴⁸ A stock convention arose that certain locations were really stand-ins for others, and audiences quickly learned, for instance, that Kamakura was really Edo, the Inase River was really the Sumida River, and so on.⁴⁹ The *bakufu* similarly attempted to outlaw plays about double-suicides by thwarted pairs of lovers, but governmental disapproval did not quell the popularity of the theme. Within a few years, such plays were on stage again.⁵⁰ However, these dramatic subjects were less social criticism than sensationalism, due to the danger of trespassing too far beyond the patience of the censors.⁵¹

It is unsurprising that the theater primarily created for townfolk in a city ruled by *samurai* might glorify heroes of the common people rather than the distressingly present ruling class. It is more surprising, though, that this form of populist theater found such popularity among the ruling class itself. *Samurai* were supposed to have been devotees of *noh* drama, yet it was apparently quite difficult to keep them away from the theater district. The *bakufu* repeatedly issued bans on using bamboo blinds, screens, or curtains to conceal high-ranking patrons, but after a period of lax enforcement, officials and noble ladies would return to watch from a more private, comfortable vantage point.⁵² It was not unheard of for a powerful daimyo to become the patron of a favorite actor. One daimyo, Yanagizawa Nobutoki 柳沢信鴻, had a stage constructed in his home for his personal women's troupe to perform *jôruri* 浄瑠璃 (puppet theater) plays he adapted for *kabuki* himself.⁵³ The *bakufu* official Moriyama Takamori 森山孝盛 complained that in the period between 1740 and 1760 "eldest sons of good *samurai* families and even other sons" began to take *shamisen* lessons and eventually practice amateur *kabuki* plays at home. "High *hatamoto* 旗本 officials mimicking riverbed beggars, aping female impersonators and stage heroes."⁵⁴ With some satisfaction, though, he adds that the Kansei reforms in the 1790s put a stop to all this, and "society returned to normal".⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Shively, "Bakufu versus Kabuki," 352; Nishiyama, *Edo Culture*, 223.

⁴⁹ Shively, "Bakufu versus Kabuki," 352.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 355.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 347.

⁵³ Gerstle, "Flowers of Edo," 65.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

It was unavoidable, though, that the celebrity of certain *kabuki* actors would afford them rights and privileges otherwise unavailable to those of their outcaste status, especially since the government could not quell the public's fascination with the personalities of the stage. Records exist of actor visits to daimyo residences in the mid-1700s; by the early nineteenth century "the women attendants of the lords' mansions and even the Shogun's castle were sent openly to learn *kabuki* dances so they could perform them for their lords".⁵⁶

Try as they might, by the end of the Tokugawa period, the officials of the Shogun's government had lost the war to restrict *kabuki*. The public was certainly not on their side, although it was ostensibly for the public that attempts to control the theater were carried out. As Donald Shively summarizes the situation in his 1955 article "Bakufu Versus Kabuki":

The officials were subjected not only to the pleas and petitions of the theater managers, but were constantly faced with non-observance of the laws in varying degrees of flagrancy, not only by the managers, but by the actors, playwrights, and even the audience... The appeal of *kabuki* could not be checked.⁵⁷

Actors may not have openly mingled with Imperial court, or led a class-inspired uprising against the shogunate, but they asserted themselves as significant social players well beyond the apparent restrictions of their class. The demands of the market and the power of celebrity were too great for their influence on Tokugawa culture to be prevented. In the same way, it is difficult to imagine along what lines *kabuki* would have developed if unrestrained by governmental edicts on its every aspect, as "continued supervision made for more emphasis, for lack of choice, on art".⁵⁸ It is nicely ironic that, just as the images of the dream-like *ukiyo* have endured to the present, the *bakufu* that spent so much effort interfering with *kabuki* is partially responsible for the conventions of the form today.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 68; Shively, "Bakufu versus Kabuki," 348.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 354.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 356.

Erotic Dream and Governmental Nightmare: Use and Censorship of Pillow Books in Edo Culture and the Influence of the “Floating World”

Emily Chase

The “floating world” of *Yoshiwara* 吉原, the pleasure district of Edo, capital city of Japan during the Edo period (1600–1868), was a fantasy itself, one that fired the imaginations of the many artists who took it as their subject. Like the licensed red-light district of the capital, which contained both theater and many brothels, the art of the “floating world” was often erotic in nature. This eroticism ranged from the subtly arousing to the pornographic. It is the latter, known as *shunga* 春画 (translated literally as “spring pictures”, but commonly called pillow books in the west) which is especially intriguing. These pictures, which were both tightly restricted by the government and prolifically produced, which were used by the wealthy and the middle class alike, and which are tied closely to the erotic fantasy of the “floating world” can perhaps provide a lens for how sexuality was viewed in the “city of bachelors,” Edo.

Shunga are erotic works of art, primarily woodblocks, produced mostly during the Edo period. Although these pictures featured a variety of people as their subjects – young and old, married couples and courtesans – all draw heavily on the idea of erotic fantasy so intrinsically rooted in Edo’s “floating world.” These works depict various people performing different sexual acts, including heterosexual liaisons, group sex, homosexual couplings, male and female masturbation

with and without sex toys and, occasionally, bestiality. They are quite graphic in nature, with the emphasis almost always on the grossly oversized genitals of the participants, whose bodies are often contorted to show these organs more clearly.

Shunga works are interesting in part because, unlike pornography in the west, they were often produced by artists who were also prestigious producers of non-erotic art. For example, Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾北斎 (1760–1849), an artist now famed worldwide for his beautiful print “The Great Wave off Kanagawa,” created several *shunga* works which amounted to nearly ten percent of his output.¹ These include a work titled “The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife,” which shows a woman in ecstasy as one octopus fondles her mouth and breast while a larger octopus performs cunnilingus on her, as well as an album of twelve woodblock *shunga* prints known as “The Adonis Plant.” The latter, which shows couples in various sexual positions, is unusual because of how many of the prints have the participants depicted as close to, or as, fully nude. More typically, *shunga* prints use clothing as a framing device to help set off the oversized genitals and draw attention to them.

The fact that the government viewed these works as being disruptive to society, or as being amoral, meant that the shogunate² periodically cracked down on the production and distribution of these works. As a result, many artists did not sign these works as they did others. Instead, they often used different methods to mark their prints, including writing their names in code, using pen names, or cleverly hiding their names in the scene by including the objects whose names made up their own. Artists sometimes used this technique to get around other government restrictions on art, such as when a law against painting labeled portraits of famous courtesans was enacted. Here, too, artists made rebuses out of objects in the scene to specify which woman was being portrayed, such as showing the courtesan Hanazuma with cherry blossoms (*hana* 花) and a lightning bolt (*zuma* 妻).³

As the previous example shows, the government interest in censorship of art was not purely restricted to the highly erotic *shunga* works. However, the fluctuation between strict and more lax policies on how

¹ Chris Uhlenbeck et al., *Japanese Erotic Fantasies: Sexual Imagery of the Edo Period* (Amsterdam: Hotei, 2005), 23.

² The feudal regime ruled by the military shoguns.

³ Simon Screech, *Sex and the Floating World. Erotic Images in Japan 1700-1820* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 26.

much eroticism was acceptable caused both the artists and the publishers to be wary of placing their marks on the *shunga* books. Publishing houses, for example, would not place their colophon on the inside of many a *shunga* book in order to escape prosecution if a government crackdown on erotic work of this type did occur.

Government restriction on these books was on one of many laws in a similar vein. As a military government, the “shogunate (*bakufu*) enacted sumptuary laws in an attempt to curb excessive consumption of non-essential luxury goods, to restore moral order, and to thwart any criticism of it”.⁴ These laws included everything from bans on servants wearing silk clothing, rules about reporting or commenting on current events in writing, and rules about behavior in the pleasure district itself.

It is intriguing that these works were so prolifically produced despite the fluctuating pressure from the government. One reason is simply that the old adage is true: sex does sell. Another is that, as wood-block prints rather than paintings, these works could be readily reproduced. Quality varied greatly from the most expensive, finely carved and colored prints to the cheapest prints, which were more roughly carved and would be pulled continuously from the same block even as it wore down and the image was degraded. There were even libraries which allowed individuals to borrow newly released *shunga*, a practice which allowed publishers to popularize their new stock.⁵ This meant that these prints could be made accessible to a wider audience, as long as the government cooperated.

When the shogunate collapsed in 1868, however, the censorship of erotic imagery became significantly stricter, and the production of these prints dropped dramatically. In fact, these images were heavily censored by the Japanese government until 1986, and they are still censored to some extent today. The long hold of censorship restrictions on the *shunga* books has meant that studying them has only recently been an option.

The purpose of these erotic books and scrolls is debated by scholars. The books were sometimes used as a sort of ward against fire, as it was believed that placing a *shunga* on top of one’s valuables would protect them from fire.⁶ Other uses included the placing of a *shunga* inside

⁴ Uhlenbeck et al., *Japanese Erotic Fantasies*, 16–7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶ Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 34.

the helmet of a warrior, supposedly to help protect him in battle. It is also possible that these texts were sometimes given to the daughters of feudal lords, daimyos, and other high ranking individuals before their marriages to help the carefully raised young women learn about sexual behaviors. However, due to the distorted positions presented in these images, it seems unlikely that one could apply very many of the things presented in *shunga* books to real-life sexual encounters. The following two Edo period *senryū* 川柳⁷ exemplify this. The first goes,

The stupid couple
try doing it as in *shunga*
and sprain their hands.

The second,

Going all out
to copy *shunga*
they get muscle spasms.⁸

Another, more likely reason for these books is presented by Timon Screech in *Sex in the Floating World*. According to Screech, *shunga* books were primarily made for one reason: as pornography meant to be used for self-pleasuring.⁹ Although this may seem obvious considering the use of similar images as pornography in the west, this thesis is not common among those who study *shunga*. This is because many scholars look at *shunga* as art pieces only, rather than as pornography, despite their overtly sexual content. Screech, on the other hand, takes his argument in a completely opposite direction, denying that these works might have been used educationally at all or even that they might also have been used by couples during sexual play, a point which Sepp Linhart sees as a weakness in his review of Screech's book. According to Linhart, "We have to consider the veneration of sexual organs, the cult of fertility, sexual stimulation of couples, and even political resistance to the regime, when we attempt a more integrative interpretation of the meaning of *shunga*."¹⁰ His argument seems logical, as it

⁷ Three line satirical poems, usually on the subject of human nature.

⁸ Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 38.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰ Sepp Linhart, "Review of *Sex and the Floating World. Erotic Images in Japan 1700–1820* by Timon Screech," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third series, 10, no. 3 (2000): 434.

seems unlikely that an art form which has so many variations would have only one use.

Even if these books were created for purely pornographic purposes at first, the traditions of protection from fire and in battle must have at some point become factual as well through popular usage. And Screech's claim that "once real sex was initiated, pictures would seem to become rapidly superfluous, with painted genitals losing appeal when live ones were at hand" seems like a weak argument for their use being only for solo masturbation and never for couples.¹¹ Some of the pictures, although not many, do portray couples looking at a *shunga* together.

The need for pornography as a masturbatory aid is quite obvious when one looks at the social dynamic that existed in the city of Edo during the period. Because of the shogun's system of alternate attendance, the population in the city was very strangely distributed. This system forced the daimyos to travel back and forth from their own territories to the capital city on alternating years. Each lord would travel with an entourage which varied in size, but could quite often be exceedingly large – as in the case of the Sendai lord, whose entourage in 1675 was recorded to be made up of 3,480 people.¹² A large proportion of these attendants were samurai and other men, nearly all of whom were either unmarried or had been forced to leave their wives behind in their own provinces. As a result, the ratio of men to women in the capital city could sometimes be as uneven as 170 men to every 100 women. Added to this was the lack of social and familial systems in place to help these young men – including those who were and were not members of the military – to find wives while in the city.¹³ The fact that a masturbatory aid of the time which was made of rolled cloth to resemble a human form was called an "Edo form" is telling. The courtesans and prostitutes of the pleasure districts were of course an option, but often an expensive one. For example, one had to visit most courtesans three times before sex could be considered, and a fee was charged with each visit. In fact, the social rules of behavior within the pleasure district of *Yoshiwara* were incredibly complex, and it is probably true that many of these men did not have the resources to participate in them. Thus,

¹¹ Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 36–7.

¹² Constantine N. Vaporis, *Tour of Duty: Samurai, Military Service in Edo and the Culture of Early Modern Japan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 74.

¹³ Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 13.

self-pleasuring was probably often the only option for sexual release. In this, the *shunga* books provided the valuable social function of helping to relieve sexual tension.

Surprisingly, the use of *shunga* by the courtesans of the pleasure quarters was non-existent. This was because, as Screech so aptly puts it, “it would have eroded the myth so carefully fostered in the quarters that they were locales of ethereal elegance.”¹⁴ It appears as though these women, whose lives and professions were the subject of so much of *shunga* wanted nothing to do with *shunga*, not just in terms of personal erotic use, but also in terms of artists’ use of the women as the characters in these works. There were several reasons for this, the main one being the mythos of elegance, as mentioned above. Another was the simple fact that courtesans were not expected to enjoy sex; indeed, they were not supposed to orgasm during intercourse with a client. This was for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it was to keep the courtesans and prostitutes, who had to couple with many men within the span of a day, from getting worn out by their sexual activity. Secondly, it was an attempt to keep them from forming attachments with particular clients and taking lovers, a behavior which was apparently both forbidden and common.¹⁵ The dream of the pleasure quarter, however, as a sexual place was strong, and so despite the women of the quarters’ resistance to and rejection of the media, many *shunga* show prostitutes having intercourse with their forbidden lovers. Of course, there are also many *shunga* which depict prostitutes and courtesans with their clients.

Another facet of *shunga* which is tied in with the “floating world” is the appearance of homosexuality in these works. While the majority of these prints focus on heterosexual encounters, male-male sex also appears in *shunga*. Gay sexuality was acceptable, but only in certain circumstances, both in and out of art. In the Edo era, in writing and in art at least, gay sexual activity was most commonly between an older and a younger man. The younger man took the role of the penetrated, and the older as the penetrator. The older man might also serve as a sort of mentor to the younger man, and also probably had sexual encounters with women as well. Once a young man became an adult in the society, his role as the penetrated would no longer be acceptable, and he would

¹⁴ Screech, *Sex and the Floating World*, 37.

¹⁵ Cecilia S. Seigle, “The Decorousness of the Yoshiwara: A Rejection of Shunga,” in Uhlenbeck et al., *Japanese Erotic Fantasies*, 35–8.

be expected to take up the role of penetrator with other partners.¹⁶ Male prostitutes also existed, and sometimes dressed in the clothing and hairstyles of women. This is in some ways related to the *kabuki* theater, which because of government restriction became a theater of all male performers. Male actors who played female roles, known as *onnagata*, were often also prostitutes. The *kabuki* theater, along with other forms of theater, took place mainly in the *Yoshiwara*, as the government had moved the theaters there. As a result the ideas of prostitution and theater became tightly intertwined in Edo, just as they were in many parts of the west. It is probable that male prostitutes rejected the use of these books just as female prostitutes did, for similar reasons. Scenes of sexual activity between two women are rare in *shunga*, but they do occur occasionally.

Another possible reason for the rejection of *shunga* within the *Yoshiwara* district is the simple fact that *shunga* portrays a fantasy of sexual relationships, and it is a fantasy which is derived from the false veneer of pleasure covering the harsh realities of life within the “floating world.” The differences between the dream of the pleasure district and the truth of it would probably never be so apparent to a woman of that world then when looking at *shunga*. Many of the female sex-workers in the Edo pleasure district were really little better than slaves. Women, often forced by circumstance to become prostitutes (as it was one of the few professions open to women), would sign contracts which basically turned over ownership of their bodies to the brothel owners for a specific amount of time. As time passed, however, they would accrue “debt” to the owners, and so their contracts would be extended so that they could “work it off.” Infractions which caused them to earn this debt included failing to get enough clients on certain days on which their prices doubled. If they failed to fill their quotas, they had to make up the difference out of their own pockets. This meant that many women were unwillingly trapped in prostitution, and within the many rules of that world. For example, prostitutes could not leave the pleasure quarter, and, as mentioned previously, were not allowed to take lovers.¹⁷

The connection between the fantasy of the pleasure district and the fantasy of the *shunga* is undeniable, but, in a strange way, they are

¹⁶ Ellis Tinios, “The Representation of Male-Male Sex in Japanese Erotic Books,” in Uhlenbeck et al., *Japanese Erotic Fantasies*, 31–3.

¹⁷ Seigle, “Japanese Erotic Fantasies,” 45.

inversions of one another. The “floating world” is, on the surface, a world of refined pleasure and elegance, with the eroticism of the activity that takes place there hidden below the surface of social ritual and appearance. *Shunga*, on the other hand, is primarily erotic, focused on the physical act of sex, but with strong influences of the elegance of the pleasure district apparent in the fashionable clothing and hairstyles presented, as well as the idealized body types and surroundings of those engaged in sexual activities. This inversion allowed individuals to carry away with them the facets of the “floating world” for which one had to pay in order to access, and which were only available within the confines of the district.

The impossible poses of the participants in the scrolls and prints illustrate the fantasy of *shunga* perhaps more effectively than any other facet of them. The bodies of the people in nearly every print are contorted and twisted as if boneless in order to allow the act of intercourse (as shown by the genitals of the participants) as clearly as possible. Sometimes it is difficult to tell where one member’s body ends and another’s begins. It is occasionally difficult to tell the gender of the participants from anything other than their exposed genitals or their hairstyles. This is due to the fact that many of the figures shown are at least partly clothed, usually from the waist up.

Voyeurism is an important aspect of *shunga* eroticism. In many prints, a couple engaged in intercourse is watched by another, whose presence they may or may not be aware of. These voyeuristic individuals are as diverse as the love-makers themselves. For example, in one print by artist Kitagawa Utamarō 喜多川歌麿 (1753–1806), a boatman with an erection peers down from the roof of his boat, spying on a couple engaged in intercourse in a pleasure boat.¹⁸ In another print, by Suzuki Harunobu 鈴木春信 (1725–1770), a *shinzō* 新造¹⁹ watches through a shop curtain a couple having intercourse.²⁰ This aspect of voyeurism is present for two reasons. The first is that very little privacy was available in Edo, both inside and outside the pleasure district. In cheaper brothels, only the most expensive prostitutes would have even a sliding door between their entertaining room and the next.²¹ Even in houses, there would be very little privacy, and almost no noise control due

¹⁸ Uhlenbeck et al., *Japanese Erotic Fantasies*, 141, Image 45c.

¹⁹ A lower ranking teenage courtesan who was also an attendant to a higher ranking courtesan.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 96, Image 20.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

to the thinness of the paper doors. As a result, it is probable that overhearing or even seeing others having sex might be a part of life. Furthermore, a good number of these scenes also take place in public places like tea or bath houses, or even outside, on the street. This, although it may have sometimes been reality, is more likely more about the fantasy of quick sex and the thrill of the possibility of being caught.

The other reason that voyeurism is often shown is probably tied to the use of these books as pornography. An individual using *shunga* in self-pleasuring, or even with a partner, is himself engaging in an act of voyeurism through the frame of the picture. He, like the voyeurs in these prints, is watching others engaged in sexual activity and is deriving sexual pleasure from the act of watching.

Shunga is a product which was created to fulfill the needs of everyday life in Edo. At the same time, it is affected deeply by the fantasy world of *Yoshiwara*, a realm set apart from the everyday. These books allowed people to access the dream of the pleasure world while residing in their own reality. Despite the government's fear of the ramifications of such erotic works, they continued to thrive, just as did the pleasure district. Then, just as now, sex sells and it sells well. This fact, exacerbated by the unusually high ratio of men to women in Edo, is just part of the reason why *shunga* art was so essential to life in the capital city during the Edo period. Most importantly, *shunga*, much like the "floating world," served as a way to escape from the strict stratification and dullness of everyday urban life in Edo into a landscape of erotic fantasy.

An Assessment of Transformations in American and Canadian Women Homesteaders in the Mid-Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Century Wests

Rachel Albinson

*The experience of the past had taught us much.
We felt our hearts stronger and richer for its
lessons, and we all look back on that memorable
time as something we would not willingly have
missed out of our lives, for we learned that one
may be reduced to great straits, may have few or
no external comforts, and yet be very happy, with
that satisfying, independent happiness which
outward circumstances cannot affect.*

Charlotte Ouisconsin Van Cleve

The above quotation from Charlotte Van Cleve's journal alludes to the idea that women in America who had made the journey west experienced significant changes in their lives and individual selves. A pioneer herself during the mid-nineteenth century, Charlotte was originally a military daughter who came with her family to the west. Later in life she travelled and homesteaded in several states before permanently settling down with a military man at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, where

she had originally gone with her family.¹ Her story, which will occasionally be referenced throughout the essay, provides adequate evidence of the stark contrast of American women's lives on the east coast compared to the frontier lands. Charlotte was certainly not the only pioneer, yet the quote used above from her journal seems to speak for the majority of American women in the west as she perfectly describes how women were able to step outside of their traditional roles as ladies and develop themselves on their own terms. This personal growth, however, was not quite as evident in the women who travelled to the Canadian west.

Every woman's western experience was not the same, regardless of whether they were from the United States or Canada. Therefore, the various physical, social and psychological transformations of each woman who made the journey west cannot be grouped into one generalization. Yet a great deal can be said for the amount of women who did and did not experience such significant changes during the rough journey westward, changes that are determined by the differences in each woman's attitude and behavior prior to and after their arrival in the western regions of North America. Based on interpretations of multiple journals and diaries of women who travelled into the North American wests during the mid to late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it can be determined that the west brought about a more open-minded and autonomous American woman, compared to Canadian women who seemed to lack significant change in any form. By making this distinction, historians are given the opportunity to rethink woman's place within the larger realm of western histories and possibly even reshape the timeline of the women's rights movement.

Before the stories of women in the west can be interpreted, there must be an understanding of the settlement of each west so that a setting can be created for women's various changes. The American west, which started on the western banks of the Mississippi River and spread to the shores of the Pacific Ocean, offering a variety of landscapes and unique features, became the defining characteristic of the United States during the nineteenth century. Most people thought of the west as a land of opportunity where a new life could be built and the past could be put behind. It represented what America stood for as an equal

¹ Charlotte O. C. Van Cleve, *Three Score Years and Ten: Life Long Memories of Fort Snelling Minnesota, and Other Parts of the West* (Minneapolis, MN: Printing House of Harrison & Smith, 1888).

opportunity country where anybody could climb the status ladder. Several instances increased the attraction of the west, such as the expeditions of Lewis and Clark in the early 1800s and the idea of Manifest Destiny in 1845. Lewis and Clark “erased much of the prevailing geographical ignorance,” convincing those who previously were intimidated by the journey across such a diverse landscape that it was not impossible.² On the other hand, Manifest Destiny provided Americans with a purpose to grow because it created the idea that Americans’ fate was to expand, especially in order to prevent other nations from getting the land first.³ The most obvious attraction to the west was the Homestead Act of 1862 which promised 160 acres to male heads of households for a small fee and a promise of improving the land.⁴ With this new act, many were able to afford great amounts of land that had previously only been affordable for the wealthy. As people began the move westward, they found that their suspicions had been correct and that indeed the journey was not easy. Death, disease, storms, and Indian conflicts were not uncommon. This experience, plus the absolute isolation once the pioneers reached their place of settlement, forced many to make immense adaptations to their new environments. This lack of resources and harsh conditions would ultimately be what transformed many American women.

For Canadians, the western territories did not define their national identity. Rather Canada’s national character was determined by the industrial centers that were spread throughout the country. However, the west, stretching from Manitoba to British Columbia, was still crucial to Canada’s development because of the rich natural resources and farm land located there. Many in Canada were called to the west by the Land Act of 1872 which paralleled that of the United States by “promis[ing] any person who [was] the head of a family, or [had] attained the age of twenty-one years” a 160 acre tract of land for a small fee.⁵ As in the United States, this provided many with an affordable option which before had not been open to them. But this opportunity also allowed Canada to prevent the Americans from encroaching on land

² Robert W. Richmond and Robert W. Mardock, *A Nation Moving West; Readings in the History of the American Frontier* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 132.

³ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁵ Robert England, *The Colonization of Western Canada: a Study of Contemporary Land Settlement, 1896-1934* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1936), 54.

they believed they were entitled to. Despite these aspirations, the lands west of the eastern Canadian coast were considerably rougher than those in the United States. The many lakes and rivers were one such barrier because it forced the pioneers to either delay their journey or ford the rivers, which could be deadly or even fatal. Author Robert England supports this view, claiming “the Canadian route was more strenuous and [therefore] less used.”⁶ When Canadian pioneers did make the first steps west, they went mostly by the Canadian Pacific Railroad to find opportunity. These pioneers also went west in an attempt to expand the British Empire. Canada had yet to break its ties with Britain causing many to remain faithful to the country’s values and institutions, which at the time encompassed aggressive international expansion.⁷ The differences between the settlements of the two western areas played significant roles in the transformations of women’s characters during their pioneering experiences.

The study of women’s history in the North American wests has failed to reach a broad enough spectrum to consider all aspects of how the western experience affected women. The current studies of women in the American west, for the most part, revise the idea that women were forced to go west and did not enjoy their experiences there. For instance, Sandra Myres, author of *Westering Women*, quotes previous historians’ thoughts which claimed that women were “sensitive and emotional... unable to adjust to the frontier way of life...”⁸ Myres speaks for the majority of current western women historians when she determines that these prior histories fail to take into account the lives of women. When western histories were first written, they were based on men’s points of view. Women were only mentioned by chance and even then they were cast in insignificant roles. After extensive and thorough research of American women’s diaries and journals, Myres determines that rather than women who were “always controlled... always confined,” these women became “hardy and self sufficient women [who had] stepped out of woman’s place with few regrets.”⁹ What makes Myres’ work significant is that she has contributed to the ever growing collection of historians that have recently developed women’s history of the west. However, she fails to make herself incredibly signi-

⁶ England, *The Colonization of Western Canada*, 55.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁸ Sandra L. Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2, 270.

ficant because it seems as though all historians on this topic agree that women were not reluctant pioneers but rather women who determined their own place in society. Susan Armitage's article "Women and the New Western History" matches this idea by stating that if we fail to look at western history as a gendered history then we "perpetuate the stereotype of...women as reluctant pioneers, unable to adapt to the rough-and-ready masculine West."¹⁰ Each historian who emphasizes this idea helps to build the case that western women's history needs to be rewritten.

Histories of western Canadian women are so few in number that it becomes difficult to gather a significant amount of research to make developments upon current findings. Although author Elizabeth Thompson's book *The Pioneer Woman* is about the Canadian pioneer woman as a character type in fiction, she sheds light on one view point of Canadian women pioneers. Thompson claims the Canadian frontier forced "women...to learn new domestic skills and to redefine their feminine role within the family unit and within the society around them."¹¹ Thompson makes an interesting point which seems to align itself with findings on American women's western experiences. However, research of primary sources would seem to prove otherwise. Even though Thompson's stance seems like a face value judgment rather than one thoroughly researched, it provides other researchers a starting point on which to make their own conclusions. Another view point of western Canadian women is that they were there to help increase their husband's profits and to provide information to future homesteaders and pioneers. Authors Carol Fairbanks and Sara Brooks Sundberg use the term "helpmate" to describe these women, claiming they "[do] not determine their own individual destiny."¹² This historiographic view implies that the Canadian west did not provide an environment in which women's independence could flourish. Rather the west was an area for women's roles to grow within the family but not outside of it. This perspective seems more consistent with what the journals and diaries of Canadian women's experiences actually reveal.

¹⁰ Susan Armitage, "Women and the New Western History," *Organization of American Historians; Magazine of History* 9 (1994): 24-5.

¹¹ Elizabeth Thompson, *The Pioneer Woman: A Canadian Character Type* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 4.

¹² Carol Fairbanks and Sara B. Sundberg, *Farm Women on the Prairie Frontier: A Sourcebook for Canada and the United States* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1983), 71-2.

The historiographies of women's experiences in the North American wests lack in another aspect as well. Rather than compare "women's lives and experiences on different sides of" the American and Canadian borders, historians have consistently, with the exception of a few, chosen to examine each country and their women individually.¹³ Each source discusses the experiences of women in their respective country and the changes that evolved from those experiences, but the women under review never interact. By looking at the women's histories in comparison, a broader perspective can be given and the history of one country can be understood within the context of cross border relations as a whole. As Sheila McManus asserts, women's history "has always been about crossing lines and resisting earlier historiographical categories..."¹⁴ Yet, the study of the women's west has failed, for the most part, to cross actual country lines until recently. Even when recent women's historians have crossed those border lines of the United States and Canada, the consideration of how the western experience transformed women themselves, rather than just their overall lives, was strikingly absent from the research.

American and Canadian women around the beginning of the nineteenth century were held to relatively similar societal standards, despite individual differences in religion, ethnicity, and class. For example, these diverse women in both nations were expected to be incredibly traditional. They were to act in accordance with what some would call "the cardinal virtues of 'true womanhood'."¹⁵ These qualities included the exuberance of chastity, religion, and inferiority to their male counterparts. The primary aspect of this nineteenth-century female character is best described by author Edwin Eells who claims women of the early nineteenth century were to be "refined young women."¹⁶ Eells use of the word "refined" indicates that in public women were to use appropriate manners, speak infrequently yet eloquently, and never step outside the boundaries of the class into which they were placed. Reaching outside of these limitations, especially in public, was rarely seen or

¹³ Sheila McManus, "Unsettled Pasts, Unsettled Borders," in *One Step Over the Line: Toward a History of Women in the North American Wests* (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2008, 2008), 42.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁵ Jameson Armitage, *The Women's West* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 146.

¹⁶ Edwin Eells, "Heroes and Heroines of the Long Ago," *The Washington Historical Quarterly* 2 (1098): 135.

heard. Women, more or less, knew their place in society. The second aspect of this “womanhood” was that American and Canadian women were restricted to the belief that “under [the husband’s] wing, protection, and cover, [the woman] performs everything.”¹⁷ On top of maintaining a polished attitude, women were expected to keep a polished home and family life. The majority of their time was to be spent in the domestic sphere taking care of their children and husband. Having a family that appeared well ordered and successful meant that the woman was doing her job. On some occasions, women had hired maids do the work for them; however, their lives were still expected to be private so as to give all attention to the husband and his work and successes. Women would not continue to follow these expectations for long, however, once they began stepping into the unknown of the west. The west would aid American and Canadian women of all backgrounds in experiencing fundamental changes regarding their personal ambition, organizational skills, and sentiments toward Indians, as well as their lady-like disposition, religion, innovative abilities, and independent qualities.

Those women who chose to migrate to the American west during the mid-nineteenth century transformed their self purpose from one of servitude to personal ambition. Prior to making the adventure, women had little expectation other than to remain housewives who were dedicated to their men and families. However, moving west broadened American women’s ideas of the potential they had to make something else out of themselves, not out of necessity but by a less gender stereotyped society and more time away from males to discover their own worth and personality. What made the transition easier for women from strictly housewife to ambitious western pioneer was that “women had already absorbed long traditions of work and responsibility before they came west...”¹⁸ These women were not thrown into their newly ambitious lives; they just needed the perfect conditions in which their true natures could unfold. For instance, Elvina Fellows, during her time in Oregon around the 1850s, remarked how her mother “would go to the ships that came and get washing to do... Then she started a boarding house... on Second Street.”¹⁹ Despite the fact that

¹⁷ Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience*, 214.

¹⁸ Anne B. Webb, “Minnesota Women Homesteaders: 1863–1889,” *Journal of Social History* 23 (1989): 123.

¹⁹ Fred Lockley, *Conversations with Pioneer Women* (Eugene, OR: Rainy Day Press, 1981), 65.

Elvina's father had died on the trip to the western coast and her mother had no money to support her and her eight siblings, her mother did not turn back east. Instead she pursued the journey westward rather than relying on friends and family back home to take care of her and her family. This shows true transformation because Elvina's mother was no longer acting out of others' needs and requests but instead was ambitiously pursuing her own goals, in the public view nonetheless. This example speaks for many women during this settlement period, as many women lost their husbands and then proceeded to take over homes and lands rather than giving up on previous family ambitions.

The ambition that Canadian women displayed during this period in the west was centered on the domestic sphere, not areas outside of their comfort zones which had been established in the east. For example, Mrs Cecil Hall, in the diary of her time in Manitoba, recalls that she and her female travel mate had become "quite ambitious... [with] curries, rissoles" and many other cooking specialties.²⁰ Of the entire time that Mrs Hall spent in Manitoba, this was the only instance in which ambition could be detected. Throughout the rest of her diary, the only other hints of ambition are when she speaks about travelling to the United States on a brief trip and helping out around the farm when asked by her brother. Her brother was the one that asked her to complete these tasks however; she was not the one that initiated the activities. In addition, even though she presents herself as eager and ambitious to complete these trips and chores she would always come back with statements such as "We happily don't want much outside attraction" or "We hardly ever go two miles beyond the farm."²¹ Her aspirations seemed to be more of a front rather than true changes within herself. Furthermore, Harriet Neville, a pioneer woman who moved from Ontario to Assiniboia in 1882, displayed a similar lack of ambition. Harriet's journal mainly consisted of descriptions of her daily housewife duties and recollections of her small trips to town for groceries. Her journal can be summed up when she remarks, "The children and I were in the house as usual, father out in the field."²² Harriet never strayed far from the farm and those experiences she considered to be ambitious remained within the confines of the family farm. This

²⁰ Mary G. C. Hall, *A Lady's Life on a Farm in Manitoba* (London: W. H. Allen & Co, 1884), 80.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

²² Harriet J. Neville, "Pioneering in the Northwest Territories," *Canada* 2 (1975): 47.

behavior was no different than what would have been expected of her or any other women back in Ontario.

The ability and striving to organize community activities separated American and Canadian pioneer women. Even though eastern cities had begun to provide an environment in which women increasingly wished to expand their rights, the homesteading experience in America provided an atmosphere in which women's sense of empowerment and experience could flourish with little resistance. Men seemed too busy working the fields or were non-existent to begin with to make much difference. Historian Sandra Myres sets up the past practices of women by stating that "women lacked [significant] experience in organizing and directing activities outside the home" before going west.²³ Prior opportunities in the beginning of the nineteenth century seemed only open to a few to organize, whereas the west opened organization to all women. This change can be seen in Charlotte Van Cleve's journal from her time at Fort Snelling in Minnesota during the mid-1800s. Charlotte wrote that her mother and Mrs Colonel Snelling created "the first Sunday School organized in [the] Northwestern region."²⁴ It seemed as if religion provided the most opportunities for women to use their new organizational drive; it provided abundant opportunities to do so. Most women going west were Protestant and due to the lack of civilization in the west, opening churches was one of the top priorities. Men certainly did not have the time to do such a big task, so women were able to slowly grow churches from their small Sunday Schools. Furthermore, women also used organizational skill in the west to execute endeavors that would have been frowned upon in the east. Vittwia Mickelson was able to plan, organize, and complete a trip to reunite a young woman with her confederate soldier husband. She "secured a skiff" and went "down the river for St. Louis" and "made [her] way home" from there.²⁵ Although the organization itself seems small in scale, the act was one that would not have been accepted in the past. Two women travelling alone, especially in Confederate territory, would have been unheard of, but the idea that Vittwia organized the mission in spite of this proves that she was anxious to display her new skill.

²³ Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience*, 208.

²⁴ Van Cleve, *Three Score Years and Ten*, 38–40.

²⁵ Lockley, *Conversations with Pioneer Women*, 18.

Through their journal and diary entries, Canadian women displayed a lack of eagerness for organizational opportunities, especially in comparison with American women. This could potentially be because most of these women still considered themselves a part of the British Empire. During the 1800s, women were still held to an extremely conservative vision of subordination to the men in their lives. Any thought of ordered activity outside household chores and that which did not promote men's lives were greatly looked down upon. This lack of organizational drive can best be demonstrated through the use of Harriet Neville's dairy during her time in the Northwest Territories. At first it would appear that she had a drive to start and maintain an orderly school when she writes that "we started a regular school... In my kitchen we kept regular school hours..."²⁶ This quote and the context in which Harriet places the situation make her out to be a woman like those in the American west. However, under closer examination Harriet continuously uses the term "we", implying that she alone was not creating and organizing this school. Rather her husband and father were there creating the school by her side and helping to provide some or most of the materials. If Harriet had truly been transformed then she would have taken most of the initiative upon herself rather than relying on her male figures for help, as did eastern women. Furthermore, an earlier quote from her diary would back this claim as she states, "I was to have nothing to do with the tree but find a Santa Claus and prepare the children. That was not much was it?"²⁷ Harriet showed no desire to help organize the church play or anything else that was outside the home, other than what was expected of her. This traditional behavior was clearly different from that displayed by American western women.

An understanding of how the American and Canadian governments dealt with and portrayed Indians in the west, sets the stage for another stark difference between the transformations of American and Canadian women during the mid-nineteenth century. In America, the government saw Native Americans as a hindrance to their national growth that needed to be removed immediately. In order for the United States to rid their lands of this nuisance they adopted a policy that

²⁶ Neville, "Pioneering in the Northwest Territories," 30.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

“emphasized adaptation rather than cultural inheritance.”²⁸ The government had little to no interest in preserving or adopting the traditions and cultures of the Native Americans so that the values of the Anglos would prevail instead. In order to implement this policy of adaptation, the American government used military force to run the Indians off of their lands. This forceful stance used by the government to gain lands in the west caused multiple conflicts between Americans and Indians, earning the western portion of the country the title of the “Wild West.”²⁹ In comparison, the Canadian government viewed Indians, or First Nations as they were called in Canada, as groups of people who could be dealt with peaceably and had the potential to influence settlers. As historian William H. Katerberg stated, the Canadian government’s intentions were to have the “early settlers...borrow from the cultural traits of the Indians.”³⁰ The government did not see Indians as a threat to the nation or its development and therefore refrained from using any type of force against them. Instead to settle disputes, Canada used more kindly methods such as treaties to compromise with the Indians. This humane treatment of Indians earned the Canadian west the title of the “Mild West,” as historian William Katerberg called it.³¹ The ways in which the government in each country treated Indians influenced how typical citizens looked upon Indians. Whether the above depictions of the different western areas are correct or skewed seems irrelevant due to the fact that citizens adopted these views wholeheartedly. Before travelling out into the wilds for themselves, Americans assumed that Native Americans were unruly and Canadians assumed First Nations were peaceful.

White women’s relations with Indians during their western movements are another point of contrast which can be used to compare the changes American and Canadian women faced. One of the reasons that many people claimed women could not survive in the American west was because they thought the violent Native Americans were too dangerous for women to be around. Women themselves prior to their travels and upon their first arrivals in the west expressed extreme fears of Native Americans. Isabella Stone, while travelling with her family on

²⁸ William H. Katerberg, “A Northern Vision: Frontiers and the West in Canadian and American Imagination,” *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 33, no. 4 (2003): 548.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 545.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 549.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 545.

the Oregon Trail, remarked that “we had no feeling of security for our own lives, not knowing how soon we and the other settlers might be the next victims.”³² When the United States first began, and even before that, Native Americans caused problems for the American people. As these problems became increasingly prevalent, men and women began viewing the Natives as malicious and inferior peoples who should be feared. These views were not too far off the mark from reality in places where Indian violence remained active. Isabella Stone’s remark most likely represented such encounters. However, when settlers, especially women, began to cooperate and show interest in the lives and cultures of Natives, women’s attitudes towards these peoples changed drastically. As Charlotte Van Cleve at Fort Snelling stated, “We always treated the Indians well, dealing fairly with them as with white men, and they looked upon us as their friends.”³³ Van Cleve had actually heard many stories and spoken with survivors of violent Indian encounters and yet she still held this gracious attitude towards the Natives. When Charlotte opened her mind and doors to the Indians, she also opened up herself to understanding the ways and lives of the Indians rather than making assumptions. This extreme change in disposition of women going west would never be seen within women in the east due to few Native encounters, and men and rumors continued to skew women’s views of reality.

Canadian women experienced little to no change in their behavior or attitude due to Canada’s expectations of relations with Indians in the west. As a whole, Canadian “settlers who arrived in the... territories brought with them a tradition of respect for ‘Queen’s Law’ and a deference to authority.”³⁴ This respect and deference was related to Indian affairs because many extended these sentiments towards Indians and believed that even if Indians were to become a threat, the Northwest Mounted Police were there for their protection. This allowed the Canadian west to become less hostile than the American west, providing fewer chances for Indian resentment to creep up in the first place. Whether this policy and attitude was actually followed through can be questioned, but the idea behind it was what seemed to influence Canadian women’s attitudes towards Indians during the settlement period.

³² Fairbanks and Sundberg, *Farm Women on the Prairie Frontier: A Sourcebook for Canada and the United States*, 46.

³³ Van Cleve, *Three Score Years and Ten*, 157.

³⁴ John H. Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, *Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 49.

Harriet Johnson Neville's experiences seem to adequately sum up the feelings towards Indians of Canadian women during their western travels. Harriet stated, "we were not [afraid] and had many times given food and milk for their papooses..." and also spoke of times in which her children would interact with the children of the tribes.³⁵ These women through their diaries never seemed to express any sort of hostility towards the First Nations. This type of sentiment would indicate that women were following the policy of treating these peoples with respect rather than disgust. Furthermore, another reason in which women seemed to express no behavioral change in regard to Indian relations was because they felt confident in the Northwest Mounted Police to protect them. Mrs Cecil Hall who travelled to Manitoba claimed that there was no need to "dread of [Indians], as they are peaceable inclined and kept in check by the mounted police..."³⁶ The Mounted Police were considered to be of utmost respect and honor, so discounting their abilities would have been unheard of. With the policy of respect and the Northwest Mounted Police there to protect the settlers, it would seem hard for there to be any transformation within these western Canadian women from their original attitudes.

As formerly mentioned, the expectations of women in America and Canada during the mid to late nineteenth century were incredibly high. Yet women in America did not seem to want to live up to this standard of "true womanhood" of refined chaste women when they encountered the west.³⁷ Instead, American women began to dress more practically with little regard for their appearance and participated in unwomanly activities around the farm. For instance, Mrs Van Cleve in her journals of Fort Snelling, Minnesota, described a typical pioneer woman who "being without any culture...[or] refining influences" had become "loosely and carelessly dressed, with no regard to the fashions of the day."³⁸ Women on the frontiers had more important matters than to dress up for men and visitors so as to seem more respectable. There were animals and children to take care of and fields to be planted and harvested. Domestic upkeep was no longer the sole responsibility of women on the western frontiers. Their sights had to be broadened to the entire farm and community if they wished to keep

³⁵ Neville, "Pioneering in the Northwest Territories," 36.

³⁶ Hall, *A Lady's Life on a Farm in Manitoba*, 106.

³⁷ Armitage, *The Women's West*.

³⁸ Van Cleve, *Three Score Years and Ten*, 82.

any semblance of civilization, leaving little time for the prettier things in life which they had welcomed back east. This quote strengthens the case for loss of femininity because the woman was from a military camp where civilized society was more prevalent than in the middle of the prairies and forests. This loss of femininity through dress and appearance also involved the wearing of “bloomers... to work more efficiently.”³⁹ Furthermore, women back east had been and were still expected to remain inside their domestic sphere. Women in the west, nevertheless, transformed themselves within areas outside of this expected stereotype. Elinore Stewart, living in Wyoming, was one such woman who stepped outside of the conventional work that was given to women by simply mowing the farm.⁴⁰ Outside of the western territories, this would have been unheard of and delegated to men or servants. But in the west, where it seemed as though woman’s position was ambiguous and flexible, it was acknowledged.

In comparison with American pioneer women, Canadian pioneer women experienced no significant change in regards to stepping outside of their role as ladies. As historian Jean Barman claims, Canadian women who homesteaded during the settlement period “found comfort in adhering to larger structures rather than rebelling against them.”⁴¹ Canadian pioneer women seemed to be content to remain reserved and within the roles that society expected for them. Homesteading women could possibly have been using this reservation as a tactic to console themselves with a small piece of home, even if it hindered their growth. Harriet Johnson Neville’s diary is a prime example of this lack of transformation as she fails to mention any particular time in which she acted un-lady like or stepped outside of her social boundaries. The silence of her diary actually speaks more than words themselves. The fact that Harriet does not speak of stepping outside of her typical roles as a lady most likely alludes to the idea that she never did and never wished to. Instead, the majority of her diary talks about her domestic chores.⁴² Even if she had wished to break out of her lady role,

³⁹ Fairbanks and Sundberg, *Farm Women on the Prairie Frontier: A Sourcebook for Canada and the United States*, 51.

⁴⁰ Elinore P. Stewart, *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 17.

⁴¹ Jean Barman, “Writing Women into the History of the North American Wests, One Woman at a Time,” in *One Step Over the Line: Toward a History of Women in the North American Wests* (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2008, 2008), 115.

⁴² Neville, “Pioneering in the Northwest Territories.”

her diary, which is the most private possession, would have been the place to do it. However, even though the majority of women seemed to behave in this way, there were exceptions. Mrs Cecil Hall, a woman who briefly helped her brother homestead in Manitoba, claimed that during her stay she and her lady friend “completely sunk the lady and [became] sort of maids-of-all-work.”⁴³ Even though Mrs Hall most likely did not completely shun her lady like ways since she was only out on the homestead for less than a year, her comment cannot be ignored. She represents the few women on the Canadian frontier who did not mind exploring new ways of life and conforming themselves to the new environments which they encountered. Not all women looked at the frontier as a continuation of their old lives, some Canadian women saw the land as a new opportunity for themselves; there were just not that many to count.

Despite the many differences between Canadian and American women, neither group was able to set aside their religious sentiments as they went west. For American women, it seemed that the primary motivation for maintaining their relationship with God was “they were willing to seek adventure, but they also longed for the familiar – the church spire, and the reassurance that God was in heaven...”⁴⁴ These American women were branching out of their comfort zones in many ways causing uncomfortable feelings. Knowing that something from their previous way of life was remaining consistent provided these women with the solace that life did not have to completely change and they always had a rock to fall back on. God also afforded these women the ability to know that He would always protect them and subtly guide them in their newly self-determined choices and attitudes. Elinore Pruitt Stewart exemplified this continued religious spirit when she stated, “when you get among such grandeur you get to feel how little you are and how foolish is human endeavor, except that which reunites use with the mighty force called God.”⁴⁵ Elinore displays this religiosity throughout her letters as a way to give meaning to the new ventures, as well as the old, that she seeks. Her religious beliefs give her the sense that she is living her life to fullest extent because that is what God wanted for her, despite what others may tell her about her “foolish” dreams. Furthermore, Mrs Van Cleve and her family “rested in [their]

⁴³ Hall, *A Lady's Life on a Farm in Manitoba*, 33.

⁴⁴ Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience*, 252.

⁴⁵ Stewart, *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*, 30.

Heavenly Father's love and care" allowing them to "[pass] safely and trustingly over."⁴⁶ Not only did women during these times use God as a justification for their wants to reach outside the home, but they also continued to rely on His power in order to make sure that they made the dangerous trip safely. At many points during their travels, women and men were leery of whether the trip was even possible. But by relying on their faith, they were ensured that they could do anything if they remained faithful to Him.

Canadian women's religious connections remained just as firm as American women's did. Yet Canadian women seemed to have been continuously connected to the church and their faith as more of an obligation rather than an actual spiritual connection and ambition that they felt within themselves. Harriet Johnson Neville's experiences in Assiniboia during the late 1880s are representative of the majority of Canadian women's religious sentiments during this time. When she and her family would visit towns with pre-established churches, they "all went to church in the morning, S. School in afternoon and evening church..."⁴⁷ And when the family was in their remote homestead, they "on Sundays [would] read books, [study] something from the Bible, and had music."⁴⁸ Religion in the Canadian frontier for women appeared to be more of something the family was to do as a whole at a specified time every week. There was no individual expression about religion; instead it was a ritualized action in which women were expected to conform. In Canadian women's dairies, quite different from what you would have seen in American women's, there was no mention of God as the protector or guide through their troubles. Rather, religion had become a duty for them, most likely carried over from Britain. The British saw the Canadian west as a place where they could expand their "faith in Empire that [had grown] up," allowing them to spread their long held beliefs in the Church of England and their protestant beliefs.⁴⁹ Besides using religion to express duty to their nation, religion was also enforced by male figures in family to show that they were cultured and moral. Harriet Neville wrote that her "father and father-in-law never forgot the hour of family prayer" and religion was expected to be "at the head of... daily family life."⁵⁰ This demon-

⁴⁶ Van Cleve, *Three Score Years and Ten*, 132.

⁴⁷ Neville, "Pioneering in the Northwest Territories," 17.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁹ England, *The Colonization of Western Canada*, 69.

⁵⁰ Neville, "Pioneering in the Northwest Territories," 31.

stration of devotion to religion through male figureheads was quite different from how western American religion became shaped. Women were the ones to enforce religion through churches and religious organizations. What at a glance appears to be a similarity between the two groups of women actually proves that each nation's western women were experiencing their new lives in quite unrelated manners.

American and Canadian women developed a sense of inventiveness during their journeys westward. However, as the issue of religion showed, each group of women developed this inventiveness in different ways and for different reasons. An excerpt from Elinore Pruitt Stewart's personal letters best exemplifies the foundation for American pioneer women's development of innovation. Elinore and other women were making the annual trek to the fruit market when they were caught in a brutal wind forcing them to "[make a] bed in an angle of a sheer wall of rock where [they] would be protected against the wind."⁵¹ By building the temporary protection, the women were able to shield themselves, thus revealing that American women were developing the ability to take care of themselves. Coming from a sheltered life in which others most likely did the bulk of the work for them, these brash encounters with forces outside the domestic sphere pushed women to think on their feet. Women could no longer hide behind others to fight life's battles for them in the unforgiving western conditions. Another frontier woman who speaks of this trend in character transformation is Elvina Fellows. During her trials and tribulations on the Oregon Trail in the nineteenth century she wrote that, after her father died, her "Mother had the men take the wagon bed of one... to make a coffin."⁵² It is quite doubtful that her mother would have known how to use a wagon in such a way prior to the journey to Oregon. However, as her mother was placed in a precarious position, she had nothing else to do but make a decision on the spot in order for her husband to have a semi-decent funeral. Women were no longer taking the backseat to men when it came to making decisions as their new surroundings more than encouraged them to become creative to survive. As author Sandra Myres would say, American women "learned to 'make-do' and... [devise] various means to overcome."⁵³

⁵¹ Stewart, *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*, 26.

⁵² Lockley, *Conversations with Pioneer Women*, 64.

⁵³ Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience*, 263.

Even though Canadian pioneer women displayed innovative capabilities, their capabilities seemed to be constricted within the domestic sphere. For instance, Harriet Johnson Neville during her time in the Northwest Territories “became quite an expert at catching mice in [her] hands under a corner of [her] apron.”⁵⁴ Canadian women very rarely seemed to leave their homesteads, most likely due to their adherence to the expectations of women during that period. By remaining homely and refined, women were deprived of the developmental opportunities outside the home which had been presented to the American women. Rather than accruing new sets of skills which would help them learn to take care of themselves in the larger world, they continued to develop skills that would help them domestically such as keeping their family safe, healthy, and content. However, even though these women were not as outgoing as the American women were and their creative talents were confined to the home, they were still experiencing growth. In Mrs Hall’s diary of her time in Manitoba she remarks that “one does not realize how clever one is until our genius is put to the test in an establishment like this.”⁵⁵ These Canadian frontier women had come from the east where they had lived within homes in which little problems would have crossed their paths. Life consisted of routine chores such as laundry, dishes, and feeding the family. Life in the west, however, provided an unpredictable home environment with brand new challenges. Harriet Neville’s journals speak of these new challenges as she describes how she “made a false leg and foot with pieces of whalebone, wire, and kid glove” for a hen who had survived the harsh winter with only one leg.⁵⁶ As this quote implies, unforgiving weather conditions were a big challenge for women as they had not experienced them back east to quite this extreme. The quote also demonstrates that women now had the new task of farm and animal care as well. Despite these adaptations, Canadian women were growing within the same role as housewife which they had held for years, leading to the conclusion that they were not experiencing growth to the same extent as American women were.

A final point of contrast that separates American and Canadian women in the west is the development of independence. Past histories, including those opposed by author Sandra Myres, argue that American

⁵⁴ Neville, “Pioneering in the Northwest Territories,” 27.

⁵⁵ Hall, *A Lady’s Life on a Farm in Manitoba*, 86.

⁵⁶ Neville, “Pioneering in the Northwest Territories,” 29.

women did not “[use] the frontier as a means of liberating themselves from... behaviors” which they had exhibited previously.⁵⁷ Rather, women remained in their domestic roles while in the west and did not stray far from expectations. Women never transformed into independent creatures because they were already too entrenched in their ways. However, journals and diaries from American women in the west during this settlement period seem to prove otherwise. Vittwia Mickelson, already established as a woman capable of organization skills, helps to establish the argument that women in the American west gained a greater sense of independence. In the 1860s, Vittwia was passing through Colorado with her sickly brother when she “landed a position as cashier at the Southern Hotel at Trinidad.”⁵⁸ Because her brother was unable to provide for the two of them, Vittwia had to rely on herself financially so that she and her brother could live comfortably. She was responsible for finding ways in which to support them and she made no complaints about it. Her independence shone through as she solely was able to decide how to spend the money which she received. This independent nature can also be seen through the journals of Elinore Pruitt Stewart in her letters from Wyoming. She wrote to her family members, “I am at liberty to go where I please when there is no one to cook for.”⁵⁹ Even though she had obligations in the home still, she had more freedom to roam about. This quote hints that Elinore was no longer quite as subordinate to her husband as she once had been and was given the opportunity to make decisions for herself. Elinore also seemed more eager to explore other places outside of the home, unlike women back east who seemed content with their unchanging surroundings. Western women were not content to remain in one place, but rather they had the urge to break from traditional roles and make their own way in life.

When Canadian women moved west they remained content under the care and control of the male figures in their lives. Instead of searching for new experiences, these women were satisfied to continue taking care of their families and chores while their men made the decisions for them. Harriet Neville best represents this assertion when she pointedly asks her daughter, “What woman could come... without a man

⁵⁷ Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience*, 239.

⁵⁸ Lockley, *Conversations with Pioneer Women*, 21.

⁵⁹ Stewart, *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*, 66.

with her?"⁶⁰ Neville's remark regarding a young woman traveler suggests that she thought women were incapable of travelling alone without the guide of a male by their side. Her statement seems justified considering her life up to that point had been predominantly run by men who provided for her and shielded her from the outside world. Society had expected nothing more from her, and other women around her also searched for nothing more, even as she moved west. With no motivation or support, she lacked the will to strive for a higher purpose. A previous point used to emphasize the lack of ambition that Canadian women displayed also helps to further the point on independence. Mrs Hall, while in Manitoba, related that she and her female friend "hardly ever [went] two miles beyond the farm... [because] the men work us pretty hard."⁶¹ Mrs Hall was so stuck within the past routines of domestic responsibility that she exhibited little resentment to the fact that men were determining their lives. Despite this assertion of a lack of independence, historian Jean Barman asserts that Canadian women were independent but chose to let their husbands take precedence nonetheless. Barman is quoted as saying that "In line with the gender expectations of the day, Emma took care to buttress her husband's authority rather than give any indication that she might be challenging" him.⁶² Even if women were hiding their true actions behind words in their journals, Barman's quote still serves to emphasize the point that Canadian women continued to rely on men. If Canadian women were truly independent they would not fear taking credit for their notable deeds. The idea of true womanhood, which asserted that a woman should remain inferior to her husband, seemed to carry over well into the Canadian west.

The experiences and changing roles of American women in the west during the mid to late nineteenth century reveal that the United States was more accepting of change, especially new gender roles. The emergence of the modern American woman also showed through these changes: one that was independent and capable of thinking for herself. However, the lack of transformation within Canadian women proves that Canada was stuck in their national commitment to Britain, which came with the ideal of true womanhood and respect for the Queen's Law. Even though the western provinces of Canada were still relatively

⁶⁰ Neville, "Pioneering in the Northwest Territories," 43.

⁶¹ Hall, *A Lady's Life on a Farm in Manitoba*, 74.

⁶² Barman, "Writing Women into History," 106.

young, it would be quite some time before women would branch out from behind their deference to men and domestic obligations. America was ready for change while Canada was lagging behind, still trying to find her voice and position within the larger world around her.

The Métis and the Manifest Destiny of the Canadian Northwest

Donald Holler

Why shall we not combine [with British North America] to extend an American Union to the Arctic [C]ircle?

Prominent nineteenth-century American annexationist James W. Taylor

Perhaps the most striking thing about Canada is that it is not part of the United States.

Canadian historian J.B. Brebner

These quotes highlight the sometimes contentious nature of nineteenth-century Canadian-American relations along their Forty-Ninth Parallel border. As the United States, hoping to pursue “Manifest Destiny,” attempted to expand until North America truly was the “American” continent, the newly formed Dominion of Canada, ever fearful of its expanding neighbor to the south, tried to cobble together a trans-continental nation and forge its own unique identity and destiny. These two competing impulses came to a head in the long neglected Métis Red River Rebellion of 1869–1870 which sealed the future of the North American continent.

Research examining the Red River Rebellion largely ceased in the mid-1960s (and is nearly non-existent by Americans), with the cementation of two widely held views on the events that accept the official narratives of the Canadian and American governments. Canadian historiography, represented by Alvin C. Gluek, maintains that the first Ca-

nadian Prime Minister, Sir John Alexander Macdonald, “was too skillful an opponent for his American adversaries,”¹ outmaneuvering his American counterparts and ending the conflict with a masterpiece of diplomacy. Many historians have argued that Macdonald was the Canadian version of George Washington, the “father” of Canada. Macdonald and his National Policy kept the Dominion of Canada together, as it called for a Canadian transcontinental railroad, tariffs to protect domestic industries, and incentives to western settlement, modeled after the American Homestead Act.

On the other hand, the “American” historiography outlines a United States “short-of-war” approach to annexing the Red River Settlement that represented only a half-hearted attempt at annexation. These historians argue that had the United States fully pursued annexation, Red River would have easily been brought into the American fold.² Surprisingly, neither of the two dominant historiographies credits the rebelling Métis or their leader, Louis Riel, with much influence in their own rebellion or with achieving the demands for which they campaigned. Gluek comes closest, writing that “whenever Riel flirted with American expansionists, he probably did so only to gain security for his people and provincial status for Red River,”³ but then immediately follows with descriptions of Macdonald’s diplomatic thrashing of the Americans. However, further research produces evidence that the Métis used the specter of an American annexation of Red River to force cultural protections and provincial status from the reluctant Macdonald in Ottawa.

The importance of the Red River Rebellion rests on the unique physical and cultural geography of the area. The 116,000 square-mile Red River Colony, also known as Selkirk’s Settlement, was founded in the Red River Valley in 1812 by Thomas Douglas, Fifth Earl of Selkirk.⁴ The Red River Valley is a narrow triangle that lies with its apex at Lake Traverse [on the modern day Minnesota-South Dakota border], and

¹ Alvin Charles Gluek, “The Riel Rebellion and Canadian-American Relations,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 36, no. 3 (1955): 199–200.

² *Ibid.*, 199; Ruth Hafter, “The Riel Rebellion and Manifest Destiny,” *Dalhousie Review* 45 (1965): 451–52.

³ Alvin C. Gluek, *Minnesota and the Manifest Destiny of the Canadian Northwest: A Study in Canadian-American Relations* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 263.

⁴ Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 63.

its base runs along Lake Winnipeg's [Manitoba] south shore.⁵ The Red River Colony, isolated from the rest of Canada by hundreds of miles of

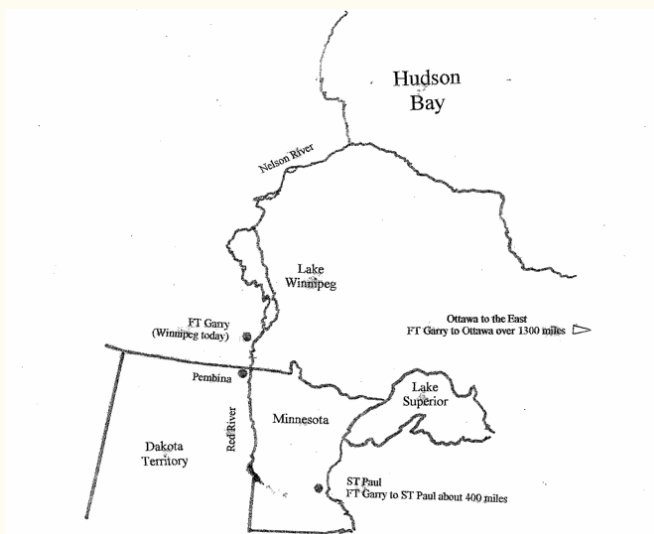


Figure 1: Locations and Centers of Activity of the Red River Rebellion.
(Sketch by the author)

rocky Canadian Shield and thick forest, was linked to the rest of the Dominion through Hudson Bay, far to the north.⁶ However, the Red River and its surrounding valley, stretching northward from its source in present day North Dakota to Lake Winnipeg, provided the easiest route into the Canadian Northwest, “a broad flat corridor more than 300 miles long.”⁷ By 1817, the settlement had expanded southward deep into present day North Dakota. The colony was effectively halved the following year after the United States and Great Britain established the Forty-Ninth Parallel as the border from Minnesota’s Lake of the Woods to the Rocky Mountains.⁸ Despite the severing of political ties, the now separated parts of the Selkirk Settlement retained strong economic links that attracted the attention of businessmen and the transportation interests in St. Paul, Minnesota.

⁵ Gluek, *Minnesota*, viii.

⁶ Hafter, “The Riel Rebellion and Manifest Destiny,” 449.

⁷ Gluek, *Minnesota*, viii.

⁸ Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 65.

The majority of those who lived in the Red River Colony were Métis, or “mixed blood,” Francophone, Roman Catholic offspring of French *coureur des bois* and *voyageur* fathers and native mothers, mostly Chippewa, Cree, and Assiniboine.⁹ The Métis had European features but an olive complexion and were nearly uniformly black-haired and dark-eyed. By the 1870s, greater numbers of Anglo-traders had made their way to Red River, giving rise to the “country born” English-speaking Métis.¹⁰ The Métis, whether French descended or country born, were renowned for their hardiness and stamina. As such, the Métis provided the economic backbone of the colony, being actively involved in the fur trade, buffalo hunting, and the transport of trade goods.¹¹ The Métis also farmed small plots of land fronted on the rivers, without any title to the land which became an issue when the Canadian government assumed control of the territory.¹² While the Métis dominated the early economy of Red River, they did so in the service of the monopoly enjoyed by the Hudson’s Bay Company until large numbers of American traders appeared just south of the Forty-Ninth Parallel as early as the 1820s.

In 1844, American Fur Company trader, Norman W. Kittson established the first significant American trading presence in the Red River region. Kittson’s trading post at Pembina marks the first active attempt by American interests to crack the Hudson’s Bay Company monopoly over the northern fur trade and by extension to try and bring Red River into the American orbit. Kittson could not compete directly with Hudson’s Bay so he pursued those traders largely ignored by them - small independent traders, especially the Métis. Kittson contracted with the independent traders to smuggle furs to Pembina in exchange for cash, something that the Hudson’s Bay Company never used for payment. The Métis primarily traded in buffalo robes and pemmican, a concentrated mixture of fat and protein that was a food staple of the prairie. The Hudson’s Bay Company, which focused on beaver pelts, largely ignored these items. However, Kittson was more than willing to pay cash for the Métis products. The American Fur Company post at Pembina became so popular among the Métis that Kittson eventually moved the

⁹ Robinson, *History of North Dakota*; Brenda Macdougall, *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2010), 43.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹² Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 69.

post to the large Métis settlement at St. Joseph (present day Walhalla, North Dakota). The Hudson's Bay Company eventually realized the extent of the American threat and acted to undercut their burgeoning competition. The Company could offer one product that the Americans legally could not, rum. By 1854, Kittson could no longer compete with the British rum suppliers and left the fur trade. However, Kittson had been able to crack the door open to Red River and established Americans as the preferred Métis trade partners.



Figure 2: *Red River carts and (Métis) drivers.*¹³

Despite the American inability to directly confront the Hudson's Bay Company dominance of the fur trade, they could exploit their tremendous geographic advantage to compete in other ways. The Métis began to increasingly look south to the much more easily accessible American markets and by 1855 they made annual trips along the Red River cart trails to St. Paul in order to trade furs and pemmican for merchandise.¹⁴ The Red River carts were a unique Métis invention. These carts were constructed completely of wood and animal hides. Even the wheel rims were fashioned from buffalo skin. The ox drawn carts proved to be the ideal form of transportation across the flat prairie. Initially established as routes to transport seed and supplies to the Red River Colony, the Red River Trails quickly became major trade routes

¹³ Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society, Item #28555.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 74–5.

into and out of the Canadian Northwest. The original Hudson's Bay routes entailed ships sailing into Hudson Bay, which is frozen over nearly half the year, and unloading cargo into numerous canoes and York boats at York Factory. This cargo was then sailed or rowed up the Nelson River to Lake Winnipeg, south across the lake, into the Red River, and unloaded at Fort Garry (present day Winnipeg, Manitoba).¹⁵



Figure 3: *Old Fort Garry*.¹⁶

The advantages of the southern stretches of the Red River and the Red River Trails as shipping routes eventually became apparent even to the Hudson's Bay Company. It cost \$155 a ton to ship goods from York Factory to Fort Garry, but only \$94-110 a ton from St. Paul. In the winter of 1857-1858, the Hudson's Bay Company contracted with various St. Paul businessmen to transport all of their goods to Fort Garry. The company had all but abandoned its own northern route from its namesake bay. Norman Kittson was one of these businessmen. His steamship *International* plied the Red River until 1871 carrying only a cargo of Hudson's Bay Company freight. When rebellion broke out in 1869-70, the value of trade between the Métis and St. Paul exceeded \$1,000,000 annually.¹⁷ It became apparent to all in the region that the

¹⁵ U.S. Department of the Treasury. *Commercial Relations with British America: Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury in Answer to a Resolution of the House of Representatives... Calling for Information in Regard to Commercial Relations with British America*, by James W. Taylor. 39th Cong., 1st sess., House Executive Document 365. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1866), 24.

¹⁶ Reproduced with the permission of the Library and Archives of Canada.

¹⁷ Gluek, "The Riel Rebellion," 202.

people of Red River appreciated their American connections more than their British ones.¹⁸ The Americans hoped to capitalize on this as American businessmen and merchants believed they had been able to “liberate” the commerce of Red River from the Hudson’s Bay Company, arguably the most powerful entity in British North America. They viewed this as an opportunity to take control of these lands from the new and relatively weak government in Ottawa.

Trade was not the only thing that drew Minnesota businessmen to the Red River region. The dream of a northern transcontinental railroad was just as powerful and far reaching. In 1857, the legislature of Minnesota authorized the construction of a railway line from St. Paul to St. Vincent, Minnesota, on the banks of the Red River, directly across from Pembina, and just south of the Forty-Ninth Parallel.¹⁹ It is very likely that the business interests of St. Paul intended to push the proposed railway into Red River, thereby further tying British North America to the United States and preempting Canadian attempts. The promise of the so-called Saint Paul and Pacific Railroad eventually formed the basis of, Norman Kittson protégé and the future Empire Builder, James Jerome Hill’s Great Northern Railway across the tier of northern American states.

The years immediately preceding the outbreak of open revolt provided both the impetus for Métis action and some further hope to American expansionists that central Canada would be theirs. Shortly after formation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867, Great Britain began the process of transferring the possessions of the Hudson’s Bay Company, including Rupert’s Land which contained the Red River Colony, to the new government.²⁰ This began a series of events that discredited the fledgling Canadian government among the Métis.

In July of 1868, the Red River Colony suffered swarms of locusts and widespread crop failures. The people of Minnesota quickly responded by forming the “Red River Relief Committee” that purchased and sent supplies to the region. The Minnesota State Legislature quickly passed a bill that provided relief funds, while the Canadian govern-

¹⁸ Legislature of Minnesota, *Northwest British America, and Its Relations to the State of Minnesota: a Report Communicated to the Legislature of Minnesota by Governor Ramsey, March 2nd, and Ordered to Be Printed*, by James W. Taylor (St. Paul, MN: Newson, Moore, Foster, 1860), 5.

¹⁹ Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 124.

²⁰ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, Toronto, ON (University of Toronto Press, 1987), 116.

ment funded a road building “relief project” under the supervision of Minister of Public Works, William McDougall. The Métis soon came to view McDougall with great scorn because of the dubious nature of the Dawson Road effort.²¹ The Dawson Road was an existing project meant to facilitate the direct immigration of Canadians from Ontario and as part of a proposed route to the Pacific.²² The Métis quickly recognized that an influx of Anglo-Canadians would shift the “religious and linguistic balance” of their colony where French-speaking Catholics outnumbered Anglo-Protestants 10 to 1. They did not wish to surrender any of their regional dominance or risk that the balance would ever be irrevocably altered against them.²³ An even poorer move on Macdonald’s part was to begin surveying Red River before Canada officially took control of the Canadian Northwest. Macdonald sent a survey party, supervised by McDougall, to Red River with the mission to mark out sections and townships for the expected influx of Canadian immigrants. The Métis became understandably fearful of this development. Nearly all of them lacked any clear title to the land they and their families had farmed for generations. Worst of all, the Canadians intended to set up square land plots that were incompatible with the Métis’ long and narrow river lots.²⁴ By 1868, settlers from Ontario began filtering into Red River and staking out squatter’s claims on Métis land. This seemingly confirmed the Métis’ fears of “an army of white immigrants and settlers,”²⁵ coming to transform forever the cultural and political landscape of Red River.

During this same period, the United States was experiencing rapid westward growth and expansion. Aided by expanding railroad networks criss-crossing the nation, ever growing numbers of settlers from the coasts and beyond America’s shores streamed into the lands between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. Unorganized territories became “civilized” overnight and rapidly attained statehood. On the other hand, Canada experienced a much slower and fitful westward growth. The very forests that attracted the fur traders and the mineral rich Canadian Shield region that provided valuable

²¹ Gluek, *Minnesota*, 248.

²² *Ibid.*, 249-51.

²³ Thomas Flanagan, *Louis ‘David’ Riel: Prophet of the New World* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 17; Harold C. Knox, “Consul Taylor of Red River,” *The Beaver* (1949): 17.

²⁴ Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 69.

²⁵ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, 112.

ores impeded the movement of goods and people from the Atlantic Coast to the Pacific Coast and vice-versa. The problem became so acute that many worried that isolated Canadian territories would join the far more easily accessible United States. Canadian journalist and author Agnes C. Laut relayed those fears in the early 20th Century by introducing a theory that the Canadian leadership feared losing the Red River region to the United States based on what had happened in Oregon some twenty-five years earlier. When the Hudson's Bay Company had reduced its presence in the Oregon country, the United States had quickly filled the void, rushed in and taken possession.²⁶ Laut includes statements from the Toronto Board of Trade in 1859 that the Red River Settlement was being driven to one of two destinies: either it must be permitted to join the other Canadian colonies, or it will be absorbed by a provisional American government such as captured Oregon. Laut also wrote of contemporary rumors about a big fund of perhaps a million dollars among the Minnesota traders to be used to swing the Red River Settlement into the American Union. Laut further notes that rumors about the source of this fund even spread to include the supposed involvement of the Fenians.²⁷ The Fenians, a group of Irish radicals sworn to strike at England for its treatment of Ireland, actually launched several half-hearted attempts to invade some parts of Eastern Canada in 1866 and 1870, with the stated purpose to hold Canada hostage. They therefore hoped to be in a position to blackmail the United Kingdom into granting Ireland its independence. The example of Oregon and these other fears served to heighten Canadian concerns over the future of the western country. This situation prompted Macdonald to formulate the National Policy in order to stave off the dissolution of the Dominion.

Meanwhile in St. Paul and the halls of Congress, Americans looked to Red River as the next logical step in continental expansion and as the key to gaining all of British North America. The actions of federal officials belie the half-hearted American annexation myth. Minnesota's entrepreneurs and political leaders stood at the forefront of the issue. They believed that geography and commercial ties all but assured their American control of the Canadian Northwest. However, they had to

²⁶ Agnes C. Laut, *The Conquest of the Great Northwest: Being the Story of the Adventures of England Known as the Hudson's Bay Company* (London: Outing Publishing Company, 1908), 387.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 402.

put any concrete action on hold during the 1850s and '60s due to the "free-soil" debates, the American Civil War, and the Sioux Wars.²⁸ During this time, James W. Taylor, America's foremost expert on Red River was commissioned by Minnesota's fiercely expansionist governor Alexander Ramsey to produce a series of reports on the colony. His first report dealt with Minnesota's relations with the Canadian Northwest. In excerpts from the Canadian newspaper the *Nor'Wester*, Taylor provides evidence that the territory considered American annexation. The editors of the *Nor'Wester* noted that the progress of their American neighbors to the south in opening up, settling, and organizing new territories was something wonderful. They labeled the British and Canadian government attitudes about the Canadian Northwest as indifferent. The paper challenged the Eastern Canadian leadership to demonstrate interest and intent or they predicted a quick change of destiny by voting to join Minnesota or Dakota.²⁹ Taylor's report goes on to point out that British troops no longer remained at Fort Garry in Red River.³⁰ This particular point explains the later Grant Administration's short-of-war policy. It seems very likely that the United States was unwilling to commit troops to take Red River, not because the U.S. was afraid to, but because it believed it unnecessary. American understanding of the situation seemed to indicate that if the Stars and Stripes were raised atop Government House at Fort Garry, the colony was theirs. Taylor also proposed that a newspaper should be published in Red River, "in favor of [American] annexation."³¹ This proposition was later implemented during the rebellion.

Taylor's next effort was a compendium of his reports in abstract form in 1862. Taylor argues in these correspondences about the suitability of southern British North America for a transcontinental railroad. Taylor, like the St. Paul based railroaders, believed that "through its [British North America's] Prairies is to be found the shortest and best *railroad* route to the Pacific." Taylor includes a map in his reports containing two proposed routes for railroads from St. Paul to the Pacific, both passing through Red River.³² One of these routes appears

²⁸ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, 110.

²⁹ Legislature of Minnesota, *Northwest British America, and Its Relations*, 6–7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Relations Between the United States and Northwest British America*, by James W. Taylor, vol. 37th Cong., 3rd sess., House Executive Document (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1862), 5.

to be the logical extension of the Saint Paul and Pacific north from St. Vincent. Much like his idea for a pro-American annexationist paper, it would appear that the Americans fully intended to implement this concept. In April of 1870, in the midst of the dispute between the Métis and Ottawa, a route exploration party from the Northern Pacific Railway turned up in Red River.³³

Taylor's final report on British North America went to the United States Senate in 1866, likely sponsored by the now Senator Ramsey. This document, under the guise of a Treasury report on the commercial relations between the United States and Canada, provided a blueprint for annexing Canada. Taylor made a case for annexation by highlighting the similarities between the agricultural potential of Red River and the northern states and the already deep economic ties between the two nations.³⁴ Under the section entitled "Union of the United States and British Canada," Taylor goes so far as to describe the borders of the future Canadian "states" and their representation in the House of Representatives. British North America would be divided into four states: Nova Scotia (including Prince Edward Island), New Brunswick, Canada East (Quebec and Newfoundland) and Canada West (Ontario). Three territories would also be organized: Selkirk (Red River), Saskatchewan, and Columbia. Canada West would have twelve representatives, Canada East eleven, New Brunswick two and Nova Scotia four.³⁵ Taylor's plan for the annexation of Canada was exceedingly thorough as it included several different contingencies in the event that parts of British North America choose not to throw in their lot with the United States. Tellingly, Taylor did not include a scenario where the Red River settlement would not choose to join the Union.³⁶ Taylor and the U.S. government therefore believed it a foregone conclusion that Red River would become American. The United States government believed that the Canadian Northwest and thereby Canada was theirs for the taking and that it was their "duty—of interposing by an overture to the people

³³ William L. Morton, ed., *Alexander Begg's Red River Journal, and Other Papers Relative to the Red River Resistance of 1869–1870* (Toronto ON: Champlain Society, 1956), 519–21.

³⁴ U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Commercial Relations with British America: Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury in Answer to a Resolution of the House of Representatives... Calling for Information in Regard to Commercial Relations with British America*, by James W. Taylor, vol. 39th Cong., 1st sess., House Executive Document 365 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1866).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 32–3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

of the English colonies on this continent...to unite their fortunes with the people and government of the United States."³⁷ There was even a plan on hand for doing so; all America had to do was wait until the time was right. The time and energy put into such endeavors would seem to contradict the characterization of the United State as having had no serious interest in annexing Red River.

In 1869, the sale of Rupert's Land to Canada was finalized and it seemed as if the issue of control over the region was settled and American beliefs that Red River naturally would join the Republic moot. However, throughout the prolonged negotiations with the Hudson's Bay Company, the transfer of sovereignty was not discussed in any great detail and the treatment of existing inhabitants was not considered. The Métis were not guaranteed anything since the Canadian government did not recognize the agreements entered between them and the Hudson's Bay Company.³⁸ The Métis, who had served as councilors, magistrates, and customs collectors for the Hudson's Bay Company, no longer held recognized native rights, land ownership, or any voice in government under the new Canadian administration.³⁹ In a letter responding to a Canadian investigation into the causes of the Red River Rebellion, Anglican Bishop Robert Machray stated, "the French Half-breeds [would] not stand the new state of things to be developed by a considerable Emigration—at any rate unless they can raise some breakwater."⁴⁰ The final indignity was the appointment of William McDougall as Lieutenant Governor of Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory. This was perhaps Prime Minister Macdonald's greatest mistake. McDougall was anathema to the Métis; he had been in charge of the unpopular Dawson Road project and was held responsible for the Red River survey debacle.⁴¹ In response, the Métis leaders established the National Committee of the Métis of Red River and sent a letter to McDougall on October 31, 1869, warning him not to enter the Red River Colony without their permission.

When McDougall attempted to enter Red River from Pembina, Dakota Territory on the first of November, he was met by an armed party of Métis barring his way. They escorted him back to the American side

³⁷ U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Commercial Relations with British America*, 32.

³⁸ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, 116; Marcel Giraud, *The Métis in the Canadian West* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 267–8.

³⁹ Gluek, *Minnesota*, 253.

⁴⁰ Morton, *Alexander Begg's Red River Journal*, 506.

⁴¹ Gluek, *Minnesota*, 252.

of the border. McDougall never reattempted to enter Red River and ultimately never took up his post.⁴² The following day, the Métis seized Fort Garry without bloodshed and the Red River Rebellion had begun. The Métis controlled all of the Red River Colony and had isolated it from the rest of the world. This prompted the Métis leader, Louis Riel, to declare, “the Invaders of our rights being now expelled.”⁴³ To the Canadians, this posed a threat to their dreams of a bi-coastal nation. To the Americans, it represented their best chance at a Canadian land grab. In response, President Grant and his Secretary of State Hamilton Fish set parts of Taylor’s plan into motion. As Gluek points out, the rebellion was America’s “trump card...by which if rightly played, every vestige of British power may be swept from the western half of the continent.”⁴⁴

President Grant appointed James W. Taylor as a “Special Agent of the State Department,” shortly after the outbreak of the rebellion to report on the events.⁴⁵ Taylor was not the only American agent in the region. Inside the colony itself, Oscar Malmros, another Ramsey protégé, served as the American Consul. American H.M. Robinson was a prominent merchant and figure within Red River. In Pembina, Enos Stutman, a man of influence in the region, also served as an agent of the United States Treasury.⁴⁶ They all played prominent roles in America’s annexationist scheme. Malmros, Robinson, and Stutman acted as advisors and as a “brain trust” to the Métis leader, Louis Riel, while Taylor dutifully reported the progress of American annexation.⁴⁷ However, just as the rebellion may have been the United States’ “trump card,” the Americans were the Métis’ “ace-in-the-hole.” Negotiations quickly broke down with McDougall and a provisional government, made up of French and country born Métis as well as Anglo residents, was formed to negotiate directly with the Canadian government.

The Métis presented their demands or “Bill of Rights” (believed to have been written by Stutman) on the first of December. This document demanded such basic rights as: the right to elect their own legislature; right to their land; that government business and courts of

⁴² *Ibid.*, 257.

⁴³ George F. G. Stanley, ed., *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel* (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 1985), 22.

⁴⁴ Gluek, “The Riel Rebellion,” 202.

⁴⁵ Knox, “Consul Taylor of Red River,” 16.

⁴⁶ Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 119; Gluek, *Minnesota*, 265.

⁴⁷ Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 119; Gluek, *Minnesota*, 264–5.

law be conducted in both English and French and that they be provided representation in Ottawa.⁴⁸ The Canadian government was not immediately receptive and the next phase of the rebellion marked the Métis deception of both the United States and Canada. On December 8, the newly founded *New Nation* newspaper published the *Declaration of the People of Rupert's Land and the North West*, stating in part that “a people when it has no Government is free to adopt one form of Government in preference to another to give or to refuse allegiance to that which is proposed.”⁵⁰ The tone of the declaration was similar enough to Thomas Jefferson’s “Declaration of Independence” that the Americans felt heartened and the Canadians were outraged.⁵¹ Shortly afterward, Canadian journalist Alexander Begg, then living in Red River, wrote in his detailed journal of the rebellion that “it appears to be the intention of Riel to declare independence – be recognized by the United States and afterwards be admitted into the Union as a Territory.”⁵² Such an outcome would likely start a chain of events that would result in the dissolution of the Dominion and its absorption into the United States as laid out by Taylor. This outcome was unthinkable to the Canadians, causing them to return to serious negotiations with the Métis.

The *New Nation* itself is a perfect example of the Métis duplicity. The paper intended to function as Taylor had outlined in his government report to the Senate but was used by the Métis for their own ends.

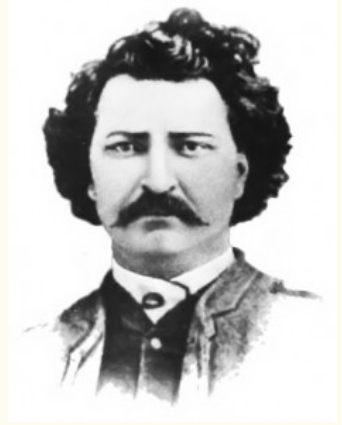


Figure 4: Louis Riel, leader of the Métis.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 119; U.S. Congress Senate, *Message of the President of the United States Communicating, in Compliance with a Resolution of the Senate of December 8, 1869, Information Relating to the Presence of the Honorable William McDougall at Pembina, in Dakota Territory, and the Opposition by the Inhabitants of Selkirk Settlement to His Assumption of the Office of Governor of the Northwest Territory*, vol. 41st Cong., 2nd sess., Sen. Doc. 33 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1870), 26–7.

⁴⁹ Reproduced with the permission of the Library and Archives of Canada.

⁵⁰ Stanley, *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel*, 42–4.

⁵¹ Gluek, *Minnesota*, 260–1.

⁵² Morton, *Alexander Begg's Red River Journal*, 240.

H.M. Robinson was the financier behind it and Malmros and Stutman were likely the main contributors of the paper's content.⁵³ Riel maintained editorial control of the paper and allowed it to voice its pro-American annexation views as long as it served Métis goals. W.L. Morton, the editor of Alexander Begg's journal noted that Riel realized that the annexationist policy of the *New Nation* actually served his own policy of negotiating with Canada, by creating concern and alarm,⁵⁴ a sentiment that historians have seemingly overlooked. The Americans were not just behind-the-scenes actors. Malmros ran the pro-American annexation movement out of his offices and he, along with Robinson and Stutman, were often seen with Riel.⁵⁵ The influence that the Americans seemed to have over the Métis was noted in Begg's journal leading him to ask "whether they have had it from the beginning [?]"⁵⁶

The Métis' cultivated threat of American annexation was a very hollow one, yet it was convincing enough to fool the Americans, the Canadians, and surprisingly most historians. It seems hard to imagine that the Francophone, Catholic, "half-breeds" would have considered the United States a better guarantor of their cultural rights. Historian Ruth Hafter makes a strong case for this by pointing out that although the U.S. Constitution provides for freedom of religion, it explicitly rules out the special status and protections the Métis were hoping to secure. On the other hand, Quebec had received such guarantees in 1774 when it became a part of British North America. Moreover, the few thousand Métis in Red River would never be able to convince the American government to make French an official language, where again Quebec provided precedent.⁵⁷ Even if the United States had been willing to make religious and language concessions to the Métis, the American policy toward Native Americans would have proven a far greater threat to the Métis than anything else.⁵⁸ The Métis living on the American side of the border at Pembina and St. Joseph in Dakota were viewed with pity by their Canadian brethren due to the ravages of alcohol and other "American influences."⁵⁹ More importantly, the Métis never blatantly proposed American annexation, but instead

⁵³ Gluek, *Minnesota*, 265.

⁵⁴ Morton, *Alexander Begg's Red River Journal*, 85.

⁵⁵ Gluek, *Minnesota*, 264.

⁵⁶ Morton, *Alexander Begg's Red River Journal*, 240.

⁵⁷ Hafter, "The Riel Rebellion and Manifest Destiny," 449.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 450.

⁵⁹ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, 263–4.

stated that they wished to negotiate their entrance into the Dominion with provincial status and guarantees of their rights. Throughout the rebellion, the Métis and their leaders made plain their loyalty to the British Crown.⁶⁰

The American annexation movement ended as soon as it outlasted its usefulness to Riel and the Provisional Government. In March 1870, the American operated *New Nation* had published a piece critical of Catholic Bishop Alexandre-Antonin Taché who had recently returned from Rome to help settle the dispute between the Métis and the Canadians. Riel ordered Robinson, “Don’t you issue the *New Nation* of the day without I see it, if you please. It is always important to be very right.” Robinson was forced to give up the paper and the *New Nation* never again advocated for American annexation.⁶¹ The Americans had served their purpose as the Canadian position seemed to be softening. Three delegates were soon sent to Ottawa to negotiate Red River’s entrance into the Dominion of Canada. The Métis could not risk the United States jeopardizing the negotiations. The Americans did themselves no favors when the State Department accidentally released unedited reports regarding Consul Malmros’s intimate involvement in the rebellion. These reports echoed the observation that Alexander Begg had made early in the rebellion, believing that Malmros was “mixing himself up with the French party much more than seems necessary in his position.”⁶² Robinson took up Malmros’ duties, but he too was soon forced out of Red River. Taylor, who spent the rebellion in the background, assumed the position and remained there until his death in 1893.⁶³ The Americans had overconfidently played their hand.

Riel’s one misstep, and a major one, during the rebellion was the execution of the pro-Canadian Thomas Scott. Despite the positive progress in the ongoing negotiations with Macdonald’s government and the widespread support given to the provisional government, Riel was still concerned that Métis demands would not be satisfied. In an effort to prove that the Métis were serious and that the provisional government was a legitimate entity, Riel ordered the trial of Scott on the grounds that he was plotting against the provisional government. The charges against Scott were legitimate. A member of a militia formed to

⁶⁰ Stanley, *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel*, 20–1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 64; Morton, *Alexander Begg’s Red River Journal*, 339–41, 346, 349.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 240.

⁶³ Gluek, *Minnesota*, 268–9; Knox, “Consul Taylor of Red River,” 16.

overthrow the Red River provisional government, Scott had escaped confinement and violated the terms of his parole by seeking more recruits for the fledgling Canadian cause. At his trial, Scott was found guilty of insulting the president [Riel], defying the authority of the provisional government, and fighting with his guards. He was sentenced to death. Scott was executed by a firing squad on March 4, 1870. Until then, the Red River Rebellion had been a bloodless and largely peaceful event. Riel's actions with Scott complicated the end stages of the rebellion and resulted in his eventual downfall as a leader.

The events that took place during the final round of negotiations further undermine the accepted Canadian historiography surrounding the Red River Rebellion. Macdonald's attitude and that of the Anglo-Canadian public towards the Métis, and Riel in particular, was one of gross underestimation. Gluek admits as much in his writings, stating that Macdonald did not take the uprising seriously in the beginning. However, Gluek is quick to defend the prime minister saying that once he fully appreciated the situation, "he moved quickly to accommodate the [M]étis."⁶⁴ If Macdonald was a diplomatic genius, he should not have so grossly underestimated his opponents. Furthermore, Gluek's contention that Macdonald was quick to accommodate the Métis is undermined by the course of events. The grievances of the Métis dated back to the formation of the Dominion in 1867, and the active phase of the rebellion began in November of 1869 and had not been resolved nearly seven months later. Gluek claims that Macdonald's diplomatic skills allowed him to reject some Métis proposals and negotiate others.⁶⁵ However, Gluek does not mention which demands Macdonald rejected outright and it seems that Ottawa merely "translated [Métis demands] into statute form."⁶⁶ Credit must be given to the Métis negotiators who maximized their gains in terms of cultural protection and political status.

The Métis strategy had paid off. On May 12, 1870, the Manitoba Act was passed creating the province of Manitoba out of the Red River Colony. The act granted religious and language rights, laws in both French and English, and the use of either English or French in the Legislature of Manitoba and any courts established by either Canada or the

⁶⁴ Gluek, *Minnesota*, 287–8; John McDougall, *In the Days of the Red River Rebellion* (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 1983), 118.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Province.⁶⁷ These provisions were the very stipulations that the Métis had sought since before the rebellion began. The seemingly total victory of the Métis was tempered by the final established boundaries. Macdonald and the Canadian government managed to convince Métis to accept a province comprised of a mere 100 square miles, out of the original 1.5 million square miles of the former Hudson's Bay Company possession.⁶⁸ For many years, Manitoba was derisively referred to as the "Postage Stamp Province" until it was progressively enlarged over the ensuing decades. One unresolved issue of the negotiations drastically altered the outcome of the rebellion and severely damaged the legacy of Macdonald: amnesty for the Métis.

During the course of the negotiations, the chief Métis representative, Abbé Joseph-Noël Ritchot, sought to secure amnesty for the leaders of the rebellion and for members of the Red River provisional government. The official Canadian stance was that the Métis had not committed treason in the course of the rebellion, including the Scott execution, and therefore they would not be punished. However, Canadian negotiator George-Étienne Cartier would only provide vague verbal assurances of amnesty for Louis Riel.⁶⁹ Riel's unclear status would not have been such an issue if Ottawa had not dispatched Colonel Garnet Wolseley on a "mission of peace" with a combined force of over a thousand British regular troops and Ontario militia.⁷⁰

Garnet Wolseley was no obscure British Colonel and his selection to lead the expedition to Red River highlights the severity of the crisis as seen from Ottawa. His previous assignments and subsequent career earned him a reputation as one of Great Britain's foremost Victorian soldiers. His overseas service record reads like a roll call of the Empire: Crimea, India, Burma, Canada, Egypt, Sudan, and South Africa. He had served on the British Army staff in Canada since 1861 and been detailed as an official British observer of the American Civil War. There, he had an audience with Confederate President Jefferson Davis and spent time personally interviewing and observing each of the South's principal commanders: Robert E. Lee, James Longstreet, and Stonewall Jackson.⁷¹ The Red River Expedition was his first independent com-

⁶⁷ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, 125–6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁶⁹ Flanagan, *Louis 'David' Riel: Prophet of the New World*, 30.

⁷⁰ McDougall, *In the Days of the Red River Rebellion*, 122.

⁷¹ Garnet Wolseley, *The Story of a Soldier's Life* (Westminster: A. Constable & Co, 1903), 117–44.

mand and his organization and leadership were impressive. His force traversed 600 miles from the north shore of Lake Superior to Fort Garry through primeval forest, almost entirely by boat, through a system of rivers, lakes and land portages. They were completely self-sufficient, carrying all essential supplies, to include four field cannon. The trip took 40 days and was lauded as a great feat of logistics, if not tactics.⁷² This expedition highlighted the tenuous nature of the link between Ottawa and Red River. Garnet Wolseley eventually became the Commander-in-Chief of the entire British Army and retired in 1900 as Field-Marshal Viscount Wolseley. He published a set of memoirs, “The Story of a Soldier’s Life” and was the subject of several biographies including “The Model Major General” by Joseph Lehmann. Both of these works include substantial material on the Red River Expedition and Sir Garnet’s observations and thoughts on Riel, the Rebellion, and the Canadian government’s actions.

The Wolseley Expedition was sent to Red River in the midst of negotiations “so as to keep [the Riel faction] passive,” in the words of Anglican missionary John MacDougall.⁷³ In reality, Riel was merely staying in his leadership role until Canadian authority could be established in Red River. That was in the personage of Adams George Archibald, McDougall’s newly named replacement. Riel clearly believed that the rebellion was over; he disbanded the Métis forces in early July. Around this time, Riel became aware of the approach of Wolseley’s armed force making its way to Red River. Fearing that the vague status of his amnesty might leave him exposed at the arrival of the Canadians, he felt it necessary to flee Canada for the United States. Both Riel and Macdonald were lucky that he did so. Macdonald was unable to keep Cartier’s promise and Wolseley’s expedition was on anything but an errand of peace. The Ontario militia was set on avenging the “Martyr” Scott. Wolseley himself had written to his wife that he would not be kind to Riel and would like to see him hang from the tallest tree in the settlement. His views on that subject did not waver over the next thirty years. In his memoirs, Wolseley laments that Riel and his followers had not physically opposed him. Had he been able to capture Riel while he

⁷² Michael Barthorp and Douglas N. Anderson, *Queen Victoria’s Commanders*, Oxford (Osprey, 2000), 48–50.

⁷³ McDougall, *In the Days of the Red River Rebellion*, 122.

was in arms against the sovereign; he could have hung him immediately.⁷⁴

Wolseley had little respect for Riel or his followers. He describes Riel as “the foremost man amongst noisy idlers searching for an easy livelihood” and one who saw for himself “the occupation of demagogue that tempts the idle fellow of sharp wits.”⁷⁵ Wolseley also wrote that “the report of the rifles by which this murder [Scott’s execution] was perpetrated was the death knell of the ridiculous little republic the French party had set up at Fort Garry.”⁷⁶ The expedition arrived in the colony on August 24, over three months after the Métis had successfully achieved provincial status and their concessions from Ottawa. Despite this fact, many Canadian historians mark the arrival of Wolseley as the end of the rebellion. Perhaps they put too much credence in his bombastic recollection that the Métis “castle of cards” collapsed with the hoisting of the Union Jack atop Government House once more.⁷⁷ A new but rather tense political situation had been established.

The presence of a British Army Colonel and a substantial force of British regulars in territory soon to be officially part of the fledgling Dominion of Canada was challenging. Wolseley had no civil authority and would not allow his British troops to be converted into policemen. He noted that he was not even permitted to pursue or apprehend Riel once he had fled the colony. A compromise was struck that placed the remaining Hudson’s Bay Company employees in charge of civil affairs with the Canadian Militia providing enforcement.⁷⁸ For the Métis, things did not go well. The Ontario militia attacked residents of the colony with impunity and established *de facto* martial law. There were also reprisals against the Métis and other separatists by those Red River colonists that had not supported or believed in the rebellion and had been caught up and perhaps suffered from it.⁷⁹ Had Riel not fled to the large Métis settlement at St. Joseph in Dakota Territory shortly before the troop arrived, the situation could have been much worse. His presence and likely capture would have launched a much more violent

⁷⁴ Wolseley, *The Story of a Soldier’s Life*, 220.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 169–70.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁷⁸ Joseph H. Lehmann, *The Model Major-General: A Biography of Field-Marshal Lord Wolseley* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), 154.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 152–4.

struggle between the Métis and Anglo-Canadians. Macdonald's inability, or worse unwillingness, to secure amnesty for Riel or to ensure that Wolseley and his men acted with restraint, does serious damage to his diplomatic legacy.



Figure 5: John Macdonald, first Prime Minister of Canada.⁸⁰

Wolseley himself, the professional and career soldier, felt compelled to make several pointed observations about the political scene in Ottawa before and during the early stages of the rebellion. He recalled that “a little judicious management on the part of the Ottawa Ministry might at first have settled matters amicably and have thwarted those that fomented this rebellion.”⁸¹ Wolseley's biographer Lehmann goes a bit further stating that the land transfer from the Hudson's Bay Company to the Dominion of Canada “was bungled by tactless politicians.”⁸² Interestingly, Wolseley excuses Prime Minister Macdonald from most of the blame, claim-

ing that Macdonald was ill for much of 1870 (gall stones). According to Wolseley, the management of the Red River Rebellion devolved upon Sir George-Étienne Cartier. Wolseley terms him a clever and honest French Canadian, but overly influenced by the powerful French Catholic clergy who were able to “sway” his management and actions surrounding the Rebellion.⁸³ Wolseley decried the appointment of William MacDougall as the original governor of Red River and the Northwest Territories. Not only did the Métis hate MacDougall, Wolseley describes his choice as “not a happy one, and made solely in the interests of politics.” He describes MacDougall as a cold blooded man, lacking in geniality or any sympathy in dealing with people.⁸⁴ Of course, these are Wolseley's personal opinions, but they do call into question Gluek's stated claims about Macdonald and the Canadians routing their American counterparts in this game of international politics. A

⁸⁰ Reproduced with the permission of the Library and Archives of Canada.

⁸¹ Wolseley, *The Story of a Soldier's Life*, 171.

⁸² Lehmann, *The Model Major-General*, 134.

⁸³ Wolseley, *The Story of a Soldier's Life*, 171.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 173.

final thought from Wolseley was on the specter of Finian involvement with the Red River Rebellion. He notes that Riel's secretary was an Irishman (he uses the term Finian) named O'Donoghue and the rebel flag, sewn by French nuns from a Red River convent, featured both the fleur-de-lis (French) and a shamrock (Irish).⁸⁵ Had the flag design been yet another calculated move by Riel to further bother and confound the Canadian leadership?

The Métis victory proved to be a fleeting one. The expected waves of Anglo-Canadian immigrants did indeed flood into Red River. Despite the enshrinement of cultural protections for the Métis, their position was eroded over the years. The cultural protections they enjoyed were largely reversed following the Manitoba Schools Question in the late nineteenth century. Today, Manitoba has lost nearly all its French heritage and the Métis are largely absent from their ancestral homeland. Many Métis headed west into present day Saskatchewan in an attempt to escape Anglo-Canadian encroachment and cultural domination. Unfortunately, Canadian expansion continued and Métis resistance during the 1885 North-West Rebellion in present day Saskatchewan failed to recreate the success of the Red River Rebellion. Worse yet, Riel had recently returned from exile in the United States at the request of the Provisional Government of Saskatchewan. He was arrested and tried on treason charges very similar to those brought against Thomas Scott, fifteen years earlier. On November 16, 1885, Louis Riel was executed by hanging. The Métis had lost their charismatic leader.

The evidence and analysis make it clear that the Métis used American interest in annexing the Red River Colony to extract better terms and provincial status from the infant Canadian state. However, Canadian scholars have not embraced or publicized this theory. Perhaps the Canadians, for whom "Rupert's Land held out visions of fertile farmland and commercial fortunes...the promise of a glorious sea-to-sea nationhood,"⁸⁶ are reluctant to cede that the political actions of the French-speaking papists of the prairie, are just as responsible for their future as Prime Minister Macdonald. For if Rupert's Land, in the center of the Canadian landmass, had gone to the United States, there would likely be no successful National Policy and there is a real possibility that the Dominion of Canada would have disintegrated.⁸⁷ Amer-

⁸⁵ Lehmann, *The Model Major-General*, 135.

⁸⁶ Gluek, *Minnesota*, 227.

⁸⁷ Hafter, "The Riel Rebellion and Manifest Destiny," 452.

ican scholars, who have largely ignored the rebellion, are likely reluctant to consider the case as it contradicts the myth of the American West. On the Canadian prairie, America's vaunted and seemingly unstoppable spirit of Manifest Destiny was not only checked, but used against it by a mixed-race people.

The Red River Rebellion is a remarkable chapter of America and Canada's shared history that warrants far more research than has been devoted to it over the years. The power and importance of the rebellion lies in the way it contradicts and upends the conventional narratives of the settling of the two nations' respective Wests. Despite what was decided in the national capitals it was the actions and responses of the Métis that shaped and informed the implementation of national policies at a time of seemingly unstoppable Anglo settlement and displacement of other native populaces across the continent. The Red River Rebellion and events of the era run counter to the current American apathy towards and ignorance of Canada. American history is marked by active scheming and even occasional outright conflict in attempting to acquire its northern neighbor. In this case, American dominance was thwarted by the native populace of the Canadian West. The Red River Rebellion and the way it has been remembered and forgotten, represents the very nature of Canadian-American relations: remembered solely as a triumph of superior "Canadianess" over an overly aggressive United States, and hardly even thought of in America.

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