



Psi Sigma Siren

The Journal of the UNLV Chapter of Phi Alpha Theta, the
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About Phi Alpha Theta:

Founded in 1921, Phi Alpha Theta (PAT) is the international history honor society. “We are a professional society whose mission is to promote the study of history through the encouragement of research, good teaching, publication, and the exchange of learning and ideas among historians. We seek to bring students, teachers, and writers of history together for intellectual and social exchanges, which promote and assist historical research and publication by our members in a variety of ways.”

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From the Editor:

This semester’s edition of the Psi Sigma Siren includes historical research and writing by graduate and undergraduate students of the History Department at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The following pages contain works from authors Cynthia Cicero, Ashley Guthrie, Emylia Terry, and Kristen Leigh Guthrie, all of whom are outstanding members of Phi Alpha Theta Psi Sigma. I would like to extend a personal thank you to Dr. Marcia Gallo and PAT Psi Sigma member Amanda McAtee, who served as members of the Siren editorial team and worked diligently to promote student scholarship and publication. It is my honor to present the spring 2012 edition of the Psi Sigma Siren online journal.

-Amelia K. Barker

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF WOMEN IN U.S. HISTORY



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Cynthia Cicero

Scholars studying women in United States history typically examine them in relation to gender constraints. While interpretations, perspectives, and viewpoints change with expanding dialogue, the tension between women and their gender role is often central to the discourse. Through this lens, women are chastised or praised depending on their compliance with the normative role. As women moved into the public sphere pursuing social reform or change, historians began classifying them as either feminist or non-feminist.

The following historical works demonstrate how women's gender assignments dominate interpretive history. The first work, *Modern Woman: the Lost Sex*, by Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham, published in 1947, vilifies women for abandoning their ordained role of motherhood while simultaneously criticizing their maternalism. The 1973 publication, *The Woman Question in American History*, is historian Barbara Welter's anthology of essays written between 1950 and the late 1960s examining women relative to the values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Each composition evaluates women through established white, middle-class norms. By 1982, ideas about separate sexual spheres dissipated and historians re-examined women as intelligent beings. Women were judged as feminist or antifeminist. *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* by Rosalind Rosenberg provides an insightful view of how the first women to study social sciences in universities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries successfully questioned conventional sexual biases, but the trend to confine women to feminist lines is apparent. Ruth Rosen's 2000 chronology of the 1960s women's movement, *The World Spilt Open*, praises the Women's Movement for permanently changing the old sexual paradigm but creates a new, single dimension that divides women into pro- and anti-feminist camps, with pro-feminists as the heroes. It might be a different wrapping, but similar to Lundberg and Farnham's diatribe, it does not allow women to exhibit differences.

Modern Woman: The Lost Sex, published at the beginning of the Cold War, attacks feminist thought. The authors contend that women are psychologically disordered to the detriment of society and should be restricted to functioning primarily as mothers and nurturers.



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Women who deviate from or are dissatisfied with this norm are unhappy and become neurotic. In Appendix I, they define a happy person as “one who is on good terms with himself and his environment and whose adjustment to either is not harmful to self or others.”¹ Appendix II relies on *Sex and Personality* by Lewis M. Termin and Catherine Cox Miles to explain masculine and feminine characteristics, assigning aggressive and pugnacious traits to men and sympathetic and nurturing traits to women.²

Copernicus, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution are held as markers creating a societal dysfunction. When Copernicus determined that the sun was the center of the universe, it shattered men’s understanding of themselves as the center of the world. This single disillusion caused men to attempt to regain their sense of worth through science and technology, leading to the Industrial and French revolutions as well as modern urban problems -- such as traffic jams, long lines at movie theaters, skyscrapers, and atomic bombs -- in an attempt to regain uniqueness and immortality. The confluence of these manmade events devalued women and children. When families moved from agricultural to industrial life styles, children became a liability. Men worked outside the home, leaving women and children behind without a purpose. Women were especially affected since the home was their domain and the “social extension of the mother’s womb.”³ The destruction created women’s unhappiness and subsequent neurosis. Unbalanced women, ubiquitous and dangerous, perpetuated a dysfunctional society by passing their neuroses onto their children. Neither capitalism, socialism, nor racism were as destructive as women’s lost roles as mothers and nurturers.

The authors accuse any woman deviating from her alleged vocation of suffering from penis-envy. Increased divorces, reduced birth rates, women who postpone marriage, choose a profession over marriage, or attempt to compete in men’s professions are offered as symptomatic evidence. Feminists, who vocally oppose the domestic ideal and fight for equality and women’s rights, are the most deviant. The authors concur that women professionals and intellectuals, all

¹ Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947): 379.

² Ibid. 381.

³ Ibid. 100.



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spinsters, are emotionally disordered. Penis-envying women even populate women's civic organizations. The authors link women's discontent directly to sexual physiology, and feminists, especially, are accused of hating men and suffering from penis envy.

According to Lundberg and Farnham, the ideal woman is comfortable in her gender role, knows that her place is subordinate to and dependent on men, and does not interpret male behavior or positions in society as privileges. As a mother, she forms a detached but healthy interest in her children's development, bearing as many children as she can. Unstable women prefer small families and mothers are either rejecting, overly solicitous, domineering, or overly affectionate. Any of these faults create dysfunctional children and weak or homosexual sons. Corrective measures include government initiatives and financial incentives to encourage women to return to their ordained roles and remain at home. Married women with a minimum of two children should replace spinster teachers who are so emotionally disturbed that they infect children's minds, and spinsters must either marry or change occupations. Society should elevate the status of home life instilling both men and women with pride in domestic life, and most people should undergo psychotherapy.

Despite charges that professional women are neurotic, not only is one of the authors a woman but much of the book's expert evidence is the result of studies conducted by female professionals. For example, the authors rely on Dr. Eileen Power's research concerning women's privilege or equal treatment in medieval history and Dr. Helene Deutsch as the recognized expert on penis envy.⁴ Apparently women who support the authors' position are well-balanced intellectuals, free from neurosis, despite their careers.

The authors rebut many feminist grievances through a variety of creative arguments. For example, they dismiss complaints about laws permitting wife beating, contending that offenses are infrequent and similar to spanking children. They rebut feminist complaints of unequal property rights by describing how self-serving men such as Justice Edward Coke manipulated English common law to control property and subordinate women. Ignoring the reality of then-

⁴ Ibid. 174.



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current laws, Lundberg and Farnham offer factual inaccuracies to prove that feminists are neurotic. They defend the sexual double standard by asserting that men need to be experienced because they are the “givers” of sex while women are the “receivers.” They discount accusations of honeymoon rape as a product of women’s overactive imagination or lack of sexual experience. There is no consideration that women would know the difference.

Modern Woman: The Lost Sex attributes social problems of juvenile delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse, increased psychological problems in war veterans, and increases in crime directly to women’s rejection of their femininity, ignoring that many of society’s problems emanated from a variety of changes and conditions. Promoting this myth eliminates the need to address any of these problems directly.

Many historians of Cold War culture cite *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* as an example of Cold War propaganda used to encourage women to return to their “natural” gender role of wife and mother, equating the traditional nuclear family with national security and defense of democracy. Rather than returning to domestic roles, however, many women continued to struggle for self-determination, a quest that Barbara Welter reveals in her book.

The Woman Question In American History is Welter’s compilation of essays examining roles of women in American history, emphasizing women’s struggles for legal rights, status, and self-fulfillment. Welter complains that women, a majority of the population, are consistently absent from historical study except to add local color, as in the case of Molly Pitcher and Calamity Jane; to depict exceptional achievements, like Margaret Fuller and Emily Dickinson; or to embody reform, religion, and education. She offers a broader perspective of how history and women shaped each other through the essays in this book. Most of the essays were written between the late 1950s and late 1960s, when Cold War propaganda promoted female domesticity.

The collection spans two hundred years of analysis of how women lived, adapted, and were perceived by others. The authors employ various methodologies, such as chronological, thematic, and interdisciplinary investigations, to add dimension to women’s historical experiences and roles. Paralleling the principles stated in the Declaration of Independence,



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Welter organizes her book into sections of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. Most of the works explore women in the nineteenth century who are judged against the standards of white, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon, middle class, male constructions.

Native American women, African American slave women, and frontier women are examined in the first section with the essayists evaluating women according to male perceptions of basic white, middle-class gender standards. In his article, "American Indian Women," Walter O'Meara echoes opinions of white male trappers who targeted qualities that coincided with their desires. Chippewa women, praised for taking pleasure in performing wifely duties, were deemed suitable mates for white men. Trappers praised women from other tribes for their culinary skills and physical appearance. Glimpses of smiling women led white male traders' to assert that American Indian women were gay and happy all the time. From these accounts, O'Meara pointedly challenges the 1950s suburban housewife's discontent by depicting the American Indian woman as sure of her place in her society without feeling confused or unfulfilled.⁵ In "Black Women in Bondage," E. Franklin Frazier attempts to dispel sentiments that black slave women were not maternal toward their own children and prove that they met white standards of motherhood. Through personal accounts from ex-slaves, ship logs, and plantation records, he demonstrates that slave women met the white dictates of motherhood but the condition of slavery interfered with their ability to express it openly.

Ernest R. Groves displays gender bias by ignoring frontier women's strength and adaptability in his essay, "Frontier Women." While acknowledging that these women were individualists and somewhat rugged, he characterizes the women as passive participants who were fundamentally followers. They did not embrace adventure as men did, but accepted the hazards, consistent with their "natural bent toward domestic experiences."⁶ Groves does not ascribe the masculine trait of courage to women because stories of their bravery were rare. Women who fought and killed alongside their husbands were merely behaving as mothers

⁵ Barbara Welter, ed. *The Woman Question In American History* (Hinsdale: The Dryden Press, 1973): 15, 18.

⁶ *Ibid.* 36.



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protecting their children.⁷ Adhering to the notion that superiority of physical strength is a male trait, he discounts the blurring of gender roles in the frontier and claims women depended on the man's superior strength for survival.

Robert E. Riegels and Christopher Lasch interpret early feminist and suffragist attitudes as anti-male. In "Patterns of Nineteenth Century Feminism," Riegels attempts to create a profile of the nineteenth-century feminist by examining "feminine" traits of physical appearance, religion and spirituality, as well as attitudes about sex, marriage, and motherhood. In the absence of any conclusive evidence, he reverts to stereotypical conclusions. For example, perplexed at the women's descriptions of men as brutes, he searched for individual acts of brutality. Surprisingly, he is unable to find proof of any discourteous, overbearing, cruel, or violent behavior perpetrated against these women by their husbands. Without proof of mistreatment, he concludes that the only reason for statements of brutality is the women's disdain of sex.⁸ He also decides that the feminists were psychologically troubled, spoiled as children, and motivated by a need for importance and power.

Phyllis McGinley and Kate Millett express different opinions about the value of a liberal arts education for women. In "The Liberally Educated Woman," McGinley, a renowned writer and poet, defends housewives and considers a liberal arts education an enhancement to one's vocation. Arguing that college education is not wasted on the housewife, she points out that men who move into various professions of law, medicine, business, and sciences do not consider their liberal arts studies worthless. Through this assertion, she constructs "housewife" as a professional choice for women. She is undaunted by the reality that housewives, while given praiseworthy lip service, are unpaid and not elevated to the same status as revenue-producing professions.

Women's subordinate position in American society is the crux of Kate Millett's argument in "The Politics of Sex." Written in the late Sixties, Millett, perceives women as trapped in a caste system in which they occupy the bottom rungs. Asserting that male superiority over

⁷ Ibid. 41.

⁸ Ibid. 101.



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women transcends class, she argues that a blue-collar, male truck driver feels superior to an upper-class woman because of his sex.⁹ She further maintains that American society discourages economically independent women and that women's work is either unpaid or low-paid labor, proving it is held to a lesser status. Countering McGinley's praise of liberal arts studies for women, Millett holds that liberal arts programs lost prestige as women's enrollment increased. Schools of business, engineering, science, and technology, on the other hand, gained esteem as male students shifted to these studies. Consequently, liberal arts programs represent little more than a finishing school to prepare an accomplished woman for marriage.¹⁰ Millett's polemic is symbolic of the radical feminism of this period as more women demanded social, economic, and political equality.

The Woman Question in American History is intended to encourage a multi-dimensional study of women in American history but underlying all of the studies is a measurement of women against white, middle-class male standards. From Native American women in the 1600s to women in the twentieth century, the evaluations reflect the dominant male system. Despite their survival and adaptability in the frontier, women are portrayed as subordinate to men and dependent upon them for survival. The anthology does not offer a multi-dimensional view of women because each essay compares women to socially-constructed, confining definitions of womanhood. However, it demonstrates Welter's attempt to expand historical scholarship of women that is carried forward by subsequent historians.

Rosalind Rosenberg finds feminism in the shaping of research methodologies and the findings of women in the social sciences who challenged the sexual classifications of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In her book, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism*, she surveys the experiences of female graduate students who studied the social sciences at the University of Chicago and Columbia University from 1890 to 1920. These universities had the largest enrollment of women in graduate work at the time. Specifically, Rosenberg examines Marion Talbot, Helen Thompson, Leta Stetter Hollingworth, Clelia

⁹ Ibid. 164.

¹⁰ Ibid. 169.



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Duel Mosher, M.D., Jessie Taft, Elsie Clews Parsons, Mary Roberts Smith Coolidge, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead who used sociological, psychological, and anthropological research methods to correct fallacious thinking about sexual differences. Rosenberg limits her analysis solely to their work on gender classifications.

Rosenberg gives Harvard president Dr. Edward Clarke's refusal to admit women -- because their weaker constitution made them unfit for the rigors of higher learning -- as an example of late nineteenth century sexual division. According to intellectual thought at the time, the smaller size and weight of women's brain and the uterus' drain on women's energy proved that women were emotionally and mentally weaker than men.¹¹

Rosenberg demonstrates that the women scholars from the University of Chicago refuted these concepts through methodical study. In 1870, Marion Talbot, while still an undergraduate student at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, surveyed students and showed there was no disparity between physical stamina of men and women. In 1900, Helen Thompson, one of the first women admitted to the University of Chicago's newly created school of social science, developed an I.Q. test to detect mental differences between men and women which she then tabulated using the new German technique of graphing results. This method indicated only slight disparities in gender.¹² Leta Stetter Hollingworth's longitudinal testing proved that women did not become debilitated during menstruation. Clelia Duel Mosher, M.D. conducted one of the first surveys concerning women's sexual attitudes and practices. Elsie Clews Parsons' ethnological studies of Washington D.C. society and American Indians in the Southwest demonstrated that sexual division was socially and culturally created, and that women participated in their subjection. From the evidence gleaned from these tests, Jessie Taft and others concluded that women would only become emancipated by relinquishing traditional ideas of womanhood and transcending gender constraints.

¹¹ Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982): 71-72. These assumptions were intellectual and scientific interpretations of Darwin's theory of sexual divergence and Lamarck's ideas about heredity.

¹² The standard way of expressing results was by averaging testing results.



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Investigation of sexual classifications subsided by the 1920s which Rosenberg attributes to a number of causes. The Woman Movement fragmented after suffrage,¹³ and a younger, freer generation pursued a wider variety of academic interests and professions. She blames university politics that redirected women to lesser degrees of professional study to reducing the surging female enrollment. Rosenberg notes that as the male student population increased, universities restricted women's admissions into doctoral programs, forcing them to pursue careers as practitioners.

Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism offers a glimpse of the first American women to pursue social sciences. Rosenberg portrays clearly the culture in which they lived and the ingrained, gender biases that severely limited their educational and professional opportunities. Setting women within the intellectual context of their time, Rosenberg describes how they used scientific methods to refute established sexual differences and limitations despite fewer doctoral opportunities and less acceptance into experimental studies. Through the study of sociology, psychology and anthropology, standardized testing, and modern tabulation techniques, these women exposed the myriad forces shaping gender behavior, intelligence, and emotional stability. The author concludes that culture and society impair women psychologically and recommends a full social revolution to spark change. Rosenberg's insightful work and conclusions are incomplete without a consideration of religious influence, yet she contributes a new dimension to women's history upon which future scholarship can expand.

In *The World Split Open*, published in 2000, Ruth Rosen argues that American political culture shaped modern feminism and that the Women's Movement indelibly altered the political landscape.¹⁴ She supports her claim by tracing women's activism from 1950 through the end of the twentieth century, demonstrating the relationship between American culture and the Women's Liberation movement. Two groups of women, the 1950s suburban housewife and the

¹³ Woman Movement is the common term used to identify the early feminists.

¹⁴ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open* (New York: Viking Press, 2000): xiv.



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1960s baby boomer, are credited with fueling the modern movement. Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, awakened suburban housewives who were trapped in rigid gender constraints imposed by Cold War politics. The younger generation of college women, fearful of reliving their mothers' futures and eager to lead the many contemporary protests and political activities, rebelled when men relegated them to subordinate, passive work during the Civil Rights Movement. In fact, she asserts that the modern Women's Movement emanated from the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s as women developed organizational skills and learned to use propaganda. Community work, such as organizing poor women to obtain food stamps under the National Welfare Rights Movement, fostered a sense of sisterhood.¹⁵

Rosen differentiates ideologies between the older generation of feminists, who, seeking equality through legislative change, formed the National Organization for Women, and the Baby Boomer generation who created the more radical Women's Liberation Movement, but she does not define feminism. Instead, she claims any activity to promote women's interests as feminist. As such, she discounts conflicts over sexuality, sexual orientation, class differences, and race and ethnic divisions as components that allowed the Movement to expand and ultimately become rooted in mainstream consciousness.

The glaring flaws in her analysis are her omission of historical events that demonstrate ongoing efforts to elevate women's political position and her tendency to divide women into feminists and anti-feminists. When examining the interplay between modern culture and women's liberation, she leaps from suffrage to the Sixties, implying that the modern movement grew from a vacuum. She explains the backlash from right-wing conservatives by separating women into opposing camps, ignoring degrees of feminist support. She is correct in portraying the Movement as a watershed moment in women's history.

Like all transformative historical events, the Women's Movement built on past progress, but Rosen's chronology omits thirty years of noteworthy events in jumping from the introduction of the Equal Rights Amendment to Congress in 1923 to the first naming of a hurricane after a

¹⁵ Ibid. 111.



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woman in 1953.¹⁶ Absent are such milestones as Margaret Sanger's birth control movement; Franklin D. Roosevelt's appointment of Frances Perkins as Secretary of Labor, the first woman ever to serve in a presidential cabinet; and the rise of Mary McLeod Bethune as a race relations advisor to the White House. She also ignores the Women's Joint Congressional Committee's campaign to secure independent citizenship for women and the backlash of the spider web chart that was instrumental in dismantling the coalition. By excluding these events, she overlooks the continuum of women's quest for equality.

Issues of sexuality, abortion, and pornography appear in the book as newly discovered causes as well. For example, she praises *The Politics of Race* by Diana Russell as a pioneering work exposing the subject of marital rape. Yet, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* devotes several pages to trivializing claims of marital rape, suggesting that this was a problem to previous generations of women.¹⁷

Rosen draws an "either-or" scenario of support characterizing conservative women and others opposing the Equal Rights Amendment and radical changes as anti-feminist, and supporters of any portion of the feminist agenda as pro-feminist, leaving no room for a range of opinions. For example, in proving that feminism entered the mainstream, she cites Middle American towns where women organized anti-violence rallies and "Catholic grandmothers for abortion" who spoke out.¹⁸ Rosen equates support of individual issues with support of the entire feminist platform.

Rosen concludes by challenging the new generation of women to carry the torch and build on what occurred so far by correctly stating that progress builds on the past. Although she overlooks some of that progress in women's history, her book is an important chronicle of women's fight for equality and it should encourage women and men to safeguard these achievements. Despite leapfrogging from suffrage to the modern movement without acknowledging continued progress, and her binary division of feminist and anti-feminist camps,

¹⁶ Ibid. xvii.

¹⁷ Lundberg and Farnham, 283-288.

¹⁸ Rosen, 268.



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Rosen articulates the significance of the Women's Movement. She artfully weaves the political climate that enabled a full-fledged revolution to flourish and encompasses a wide spectrum of women from different sexual orientations, class, education, and race and ethnicity. Rosen makes her case that the Women's Movement permanently changed mainstream America by presenting convincing evidence of activism in Middle American towns.

The historical literature reviewed herein represents a dialogue about women's struggles to be recognized as individuals with strengths and weaknesses instead of as a collection of constructed traits. The progression of scholarship smashed the myths that prevented women from reaching their potential. Now, however, women are placed in a new straightjacket of feminist versus anti-feminist behavior. Academics exploring class, religion, ethnicity, and labor continue to judge women against an expected behavior. However, women are dynamic individuals who should be viewed in terms of their accomplishments in whatever realm they happen to function, past or present.



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“Their Oldest Dreams”: Imaginations of 1920s America

Ashley Guthrie

Novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote of Charles Lindbergh and his flight: “In the spring of ‘27 ... a young Minnesotan who seemed to have nothing to do with his generation did a heroic thing, and for a moment people... thought of their oldest dreams.” The pervasive impact of such events reveals the prevalence of themes such as competition, individualism, sensationalism, and generationalism, which have come to define 1920s history. The trajectory of 1920s historiography, however, has been reimagined as multidimensional, both politically and culturally. Works by Sinclair Lewis, Frederick Lewis Allen, William E. Leuchtenburg and Roderick Nash reflect this political pattern.

Sinclair Lewis’ “Babbitty”

Sinclair Lewis’ *Babbitt*, first published in 1922, reflects not only the conflicts of the coming decade but also the radical political ideas of its author.¹ In this social satire, Lewis -- as novelist, intellectual and socialist -- criticizes mainstream conservatism for its repression of the liberal counterculture. He focuses excessive energy on the waning morals of the period, with emphasis on intellectual history and loss of family values, as demonstrated through Mr. Babbitt’s “average” experience. However, diverse social themes are absent; this is perhaps attributable to the novel’s date of publication early in the decade.

Lewis’ main character, Babbitt, is a forty-six year old real estate broker who finds himself mired in a world that is obsessed with material gain, success, and industrial progress. He rebels against mainstream conservatism and channels his frustrations toward burgeoning liberalism via intellectualism and sexual liberation. Babbitt is confused, wading through the uncertain waters of the “lost generation,” ruminating upon revolutionary rhetoric. Lewis establishes a causal relationship between Babbitt’s sexual liberation and his ascension into

¹ Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* (New York: Signet Classics, 2007).



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radical liberalism, such as his growing support for reform, in particular unionizing. This perhaps strays too far from the realities of the period. Lewis contributes to the historiography a compelling bildungsroman that sensationalizes the realities of 1920s American life, especially concerning conservative disillusionment, but his exaggerated themes, stock characters, and settings contribute to a broader conservative versus liberal Manichean fallacy which offers us reality only in glimpses.

Lewis describes the fictional city, Zenith, a rich, intrusive character in its own right, before Babbitt. His description celebrates Zenith's aspiring towers of industrial progress and unwavering pragmatism. However, Zenith's appearances proved as intangible as Babbitt's other fantasies. The city's modernity, optimistic and inspiring, seemed to snuff out those of her conservative counterparts—those of the stubborn small town. For Babbitt this alluring city “home” proves as tumultuous and rife with grief as his actual one in suburbia.

Floral Heights represents Lewis's perspective on typical American suburbia—dull, common and ridden with anxiety. Too affected by the nuances of industrial progress, each member of the community obsesses over personal wealth and home improvement. Babbitt's home reflects the anxiety of personal success; the narrator surmises, “it was the neat garage of a successful businessman in Zenith-- that is, it was perfection, and made him also perfect.”² In this conservative society, Babbitt's neutered personal and political convictions are force-fed by the media and his neighbors. But these obsessions of his confining community did little to assuage Babbitt's hunger for physical and intellectual liberation from convention as well as from his surroundings. However, Babbitt's conservative principles are reflected in his overburdened materialism, obligations to family, religion, capital and industrial—not social—progress. All this changes when he realizes his erotic desires are unsatisfied. Lewis thematically pairs marital infidelity with liberalism and pits them against family and conservatism. When Babbitt finds a mistress, he spirals into her world of radical liberalism, within which even she manages to

² Ibid. 8.



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maintain the status quo. Babbitt's insurmountable disappointment is ultimately thwarted by religion—an ideology that submits to no others—when his wife falls ill.

Lewis's text is saturated with social attitudes but little conflict apart from Babbitt's personal life. He contributes notions of disillusionment, intrusive radicalism, sexual revolution, the growth of the youth generation and waning conservatism and morals, which prevail within the historiography of the period.

Frederick Lewis Allen's "Yesterday"

The popularity of journalist and historian Frederick Lewis Allen's *Only Yesterday* has persisted since its publication in 1931, despite the appearance of arguably better histories which have proven more comprehensive, detailed and historically poignant.³ Nonetheless historians value Allen's contributions to 'jazz age' social history. His work departs from other histories in its disproportionate analysis of popular culture. However, the work's timeline suffers from the decade construct which locks the twenties in a vacuum.

Allen sets his history upon the pivot of World War I, reflecting upon this moment as the catalyst for a decade of frantic social and political change only to end his study of the decade arbitrarily with a scathing criticism of the Bull Market crash. Allen's major contribution, which was to establish the decade as a focus of historical study, proved a problematic, fallacy-ridden, enterprise. Perhaps as problematic is his contention that the 1920s experienced unprecedented radicalism in the form of several social and cultural revolutions. Indeed, in his effort to "tell, and in some measure to interpret" the story of the nineteen-twenties, Allen characterizes the era as "distinct," contextualized by the "eleven years between the end of the war with Germany (November 11, 1918) and the stock-market panic which culminated on November 13, 1929."⁴ However, he fails to connect the events of the twenties to precedents set by earlier years and to the long-gestating conflicts of American history. Finally, Allen's sources—a selection of journal and newspaper articles—weaken his social analysis. Allen's preface justifies his "informal

³ Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties* (New York: Harper and Brother Publishers, 1931).

⁴ *Ibid.* xiii.



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history” by loosely acknowledging his journalistic tendency to connect with public consciousness—what would later be named mass media culture. However, Allen’s reliance on secondary materials, sensationalized themes, and events of the moment limit his overall argument.

Allen emphasizes qualitative ideas such as ‘normalcy,’ anxiety and influence. In particular, he contributes descriptions of Red Scare social anxiety, the influence of the Sacco-Vanzetti case, the waning “manners and morals” of the youth generation, wartime fears, feminine issues (under-represented in his account), the sexual revolution, and sensationalized political scandals. Allen expounds on the cultural pervasiveness of events such as Calvin Coolidge’s “golden age,” the emergence of Darwinism and the theory of evolution, the growing and shrinking strains of liberalism and intellectualism, the conflicts of conservative “norms,” and the influence of H.L. Menken and “Babbitry.” Allen carefully analyses the influence of disillusionment; the impact of temperance, prohibition and gangsterism; the Florida hurricane; a total economic collapse caused by over-speculation; Ku Klux Klanism and xenophobia. Each of these influential themes pervades his narrative, which was inspired in the immediate aftermath of Black Tuesday, October 29, 1929. It is at this historical precipice that Allen claims that “the Post-war Decade” has closed and “an era has ended.”⁵

In addition, Allen’s political beliefs mar his text. He sympathetically characterizes President Woodrow Wilson as a fallen hero of American politics and world diplomacy, a victim of mob politics and poor timing, and a casualty of a dying liberal dogmatism. Rather than presenting the many flaws of Wilson’s domestic and foreign policies, Allen excuses them and pits himself decidedly against his conservative readers. Allen’s insecurities surface not only within the book’s title and preface but also throughout the text, revealing a “pattern which at least masquerades as history.”⁶

Allen’s book survives due to his adroit exploitation of popular themes, strengthened by a colorful style and interesting narrative. So little removed from the events of the twenties, Allen

⁵ *Ibid.* 338.

⁶ *Ibid.* xiv.



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weaves a pattern reflecting his own curiosities and those of a presumably narrow slice of a two-dimensional public. For this reason, Allen's selective evidence and journalistic exaggeration remains transparent, as does his complete disregard for class, poverty, political power, fledgling groups and social movements. These omissions illuminate Allen's fascination with a narrowly defined popular culture. Finally, considering the absence of any coverage of diverse regional cultures outside of the Northeast urban corridors, one must question the value of Allen's work. While he asserts that his thesis will "bring together the innumerable threads of the story so as to reveal the fundamental trends" in 1920s American life and thought,⁷ the text fundamentally lacks these "innumerable threads."⁸

Allen's analysis of 1920s American history pales in comparison to other more comprehensive analyses. Historian William E. Leuchtenburg's account of the decade contrasts with Allen's in its approach and content, contributing significantly to 1920s historiography.

William E. Leuchtenburg on Conformity and Anxiety

Leuchtenburg's *The Perils of Prosperity* avoids a mere social history approach to the 1920s and instead frames the decade as an age of conformity marked by rural and urban conflict and the growing influence of secularism and conservatism.⁹ However, Leuchtenburg remains comparably objective in his approach. His text depicts the era as one of change, anxiety and paradox. For example, his focus on the consequences of American business practices balances well with his criticisms of liberal ideologues throughout the age. Leuchtenburg takes into account the prosperity rendered by urbanization and the social consciousness that caused Americans to reflect upon such disturbing trends as the Ku Klux Klan's revival and concomitant racism. However, he offers an extremely moderate representation of the decade, while acknowledging, but not celebrating, liberal victories and deemphasizing the decade's upheavals.

His choice to begin his narrative in 1914, rather than at the end of the Great War, is useful. Leuchtenburg departs from previous works by using the war to frame the era. Although

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).



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he fails to effectively argue either case his book contributes to the scholarly literature. He builds upon earlier eras regarding the events and attitudes of the American public during the twenties. In addition, a real strength of Leuchtenburg's book is its focus on cultures and events within America's western, mid-western and southern regions -- outside of northeastern urban centers and popular media -- which sheds light on the diverse realities of American life. The organization of *The Perils of Prosperity* reflects his chronological approach and also his attention to the subjects depicted by previous historians. The text acts as a comprehensive overview, not a detailed account of the decade, which exposes the author's intent: to introduce positive attitudes toward conservative policies and actions. In this sense, Leuchtenburg fails to offer any new critical events for study but expands the scope of the decade, taking into account various perspectives. He redefines the movements identified by other historians: for example, he characterizes American involvement in the Great War as "Innocents Abroad."¹⁰ He defines the Red Scare not as motivated by Republican politics but by social interest and argues that this period of intense governmental repression fell out of favor as quickly as it became popular. He asserts that the American public preferred neither liberalism nor conservatism and merely reacted to long held, yet mounting, fears of big government. The chapter, "Tired Radicals," offers Leuchtenburg's nuanced yet revised account of the rise and fall of progressivism, which he attributes to Progressives' inability to evolve with changing times and attitudes.¹¹

Leuchtenburg's account of waning 1920s morality appears in "The Revolution of Morals," which reveals his divided focus, first upon the changing dominance of religion and family, then upon women's liberation in the workplace, changing gender roles, and new social attitudes depicted in popular entertainment. A secularized America emphasized sexual anxieties, made apparent by the popularity of Freud's psycho-sexual analysis of human behavior. Herein Leuchtenburg exploits the approach perfected by Allen—with profound attention to public mind and behavior as seen through magazines, tabloids and other media modes. Leuchtenburg presents

¹⁰ Ibid. 30.

¹¹ Ibid. 120.



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the 1920s moral revolution as secular progress rather than as moral apocalypse for American Protestants and millennialists.

His attitude toward President Herbert Hoover is perhaps the most surprising; he defends Hoover, arguing that his attempts to aid farmers (Agricultural Marketing Act), regulate production (the Grain Stabilization Corporation), and to moderate home loans (Federal Home Loan Act) should redeem him in widespread public opinion. Leuchtenburg argues that Hoover's political legacy should take into account his liberal policies; he argues that the president's poor legacy unfairly demonstrates public disdain for his conservative character during a time of radical liberalism. However, it is unclear whether these meager attempts balance with Hoover's contempt for the lower class, which is manifest in his refusal to sign any public works relief bills for the benefit of the impoverished and unemployed.

Leuchtenburg offers the perspective of a post-war intellectual on the aftermath of WWI, connecting post war affluence with the booming economy of the early years and ultimately with the ebbing economy that would contribute to the tumultuous socio-economic atmosphere of the decade. He connects America's affluent years with her ascension into world economic leadership and argues that federal and private investments fomented economic—not solely political—allegiances that resulted in U.S. inclusion in war. While recognizing the core causes of economic decline, he artfully shapes his text into one that extols corporate freedoms, yet chastises corporate gambling and failed federal regulations which intensified economic dependencies on the stock market, swollen by 1928. He emphasizes the role of rural America in social and economic conflict, unlike Allen. Leuchtenburg chronicles the transition from a diminishing agrarian economy into an urban industrial—corporate centered—economy. This conflict expressed symptoms in various forms: nativism, temperance, prohibition, and politics. However, his greatest failing comes in his argument regarding the Ku Klux Klan and racial violence; he deemphasizes the scars of racially motivated violence. Unlike Allen and Nash, who focus much attention on the significance of such characters as Charles Lindbergh and Henry Ford, Leuchtenburg does not focus unprecedented attention on any one politician or iconic individual.



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In fact, he spends little time on each subject and, with great pace, escorts his reader throughout the decade.

Leuchtenburg questions the vices of American capitalism, made evident by the bust of the great Bull Market, while celebrating the economic benefits of unbridled laissez faire economics. He describes America's changing morals and its new realities: "a strong state, the dominance of the metropolis, secularization and the breakdown of religious sanctions, the loss of the authority of the family, industrial consolidation, international power politics, and mass culture."¹² These new realities buttress his narrative which revises the notion of 1920s exceptionalism; he argues that earlier political, diplomatic and social changes climaxed, but did not begin, during these years.

Roderick Nash's Glacial Decade

Environmental historian Roderick Nash takes this idea and compounds it with bolder conservative perspectives on the public majority. "It was in the hope of questioning the lost generation-roaring twenties-jazz age stereotype that I wrote *The Nervous Generation* in 1970," Nash wrote in 1990.¹³ He refuses stereotypes in reinterpreting 1920s history, both out of personal interest in "glacial change," as an intellectual mired in the tumultuous social changes of the late sixties and early seventies, and in debunking historical fallacies of persistent radical and liberal historiography. His chapters are presented in the style of disjointed essays and focus not on chronological history, as Leuchtenburg's had, but on disproving Allen's myths. His four main chapters are arguments against the decade fallacy and for glacial change, against the bizarre and for the average. He takes on "the myth[s] of the lost generation, the roaring twenties, the jazz age" which represents minority, not majority, experiences during the 1920s.¹⁴ Furthermore, Nash argues that "popular thought in these years was remarkably conservative," lashing out against the liberalized perspectives of past historians. Rather than doing justice to the complexities of mass cultural movements, Nash relegates them to mere pages in a chapter overburdened by frivolous

¹² Ibid. 157.

¹³ Roderick Nash, *The Nervous Generation: American Thought, 1917-1930* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1990), v.

¹⁴ Ibid.



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cultural intrigue. His inclusion of intellectual history and his acknowledgement of major conservative strains in mass culture contribute to the historiography.

He departs from other historians of the period by taking inventory of historical scholarship on the twenties to justify his attention to conservative perspectives. Emphasizing the evolution and conflicts of American ‘thought,’ Nash ruminates upon dissenting opinion, not as revolutionary but as “glacial” change.¹⁵ It is on a voyage for consensus that so often historians find themselves led astray. As Nash argues, “When an unprecedented idea or mode of behavior appeared, it did not destroy older forms,” but they “existed alongside each other in a condition historians of thought call ambivalence;” therefore, “to say, then, that ideas change is really only to say that the proportion of new to old shifts—one loses a little ground while the other makes a little gain.”¹⁶ Nash has stumbled upon a new revisionary historical philosophy—one that argues that cultural energies are not created or destroyed but rechanneled, presenting new dominance, not new culture. For this reason, American thought, both political and social, shifts, but does not fundamentally change. He describes what historians of social and popular culture identify as cultural conflict—mainstream versus dissident subculture—as repositioning or translation rather than transformation. Dominance of these strains waxes and wanes throughout time and subverts American intellectual, political, social and popular identity. The trouble with these shifts is historians’ persistence in defining decades by them. His essay, “Reputation,” a historiographical account of the era, criticizes the *Popularizers*, journalists and fiction writers, and the *Professionals*, academic scholars.

Nash commends journalist-turned-historian Frederick Lewis Allen as a “pioneer in American social and intellectual history” but criticizes him for depicting “the end of World War I” as a “radically new era in the history of American thought” and “seizing on the decade’s most glamorous aspects and generalizing from a few headlines to ‘the American people.’”¹⁷ He portrays Allen as a “mythmaker,” and rebukes his characterization of the 1920s as an

¹⁵ Ibid. vi.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid. 8.



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“interregnum,” separating the horrific war in Europe from the catastrophic Great Depression.¹⁸ Nash asserts, “the spirit or mood of a decade, or of any era, is not monolithic but a many-faceted complex of often contradictory ideas and actions.”¹⁹ He argues that the much-discussed disillusionment of a “lost generation” perhaps never occurred; rather, “probably the great majority, did not feel lost at all” and “like a powerful dye in a tub of water, the glamorous escapades and daring ideas of a few had colored historical understanding of the multitude.”²⁰ Nash insists that other historians, including William Leuchtenburg, “are reminiscent of *Only Yesterday*” and reinforce Allen’s “lost generation” while arguing that the “war and the 1920s killed progressivism.”²¹ But historiography began to shift away from these stereotypes, with literary critics and historians edging farther away from the “lost generation” and with an aggressive propensity to avoid generalization of “all-Americans.” However, Allen’s narrative has remained popular even among academics.

In his section titled *Intellectuals: A Lost Generation?*, Nash establishes the crux of his argument concerning the rise and demise of the “lost generation” stereotype. He contends that it was not mainstream Americans who found themselves “lost” but a subculture of liberal intellectuals. The persistence of intellectuals’ attitudes, well-recorded in academic scholarship during the period, led historians’ to generalize about the disillusionment of mass culture and the American people, who bore far greater conservative ideas. Nash’s discussion of “War” depicts intellectuals as skeptical of war while supporting war efforts in the interests of patriotic duty. For this issue, even liberals proved conservative. They agreed that war, as Wilson said, would “make the world safe for democracy” and channeled intellectual, Progressive attitudes in defense of the war.²² This gave rise to what Nash calls intellectuals’ “hysterical superpatriotism” and a surge of liberal propaganda.²³ But Nash argues that intellectuals, such as President Woodrow Wilson—

¹⁸ Ibid. 6.

¹⁹ Ibid. vi.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. 26.

²² Ibid. 35.

²³ Ibid. 36.



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the only US president with a Ph.D. and distinguished academic career—and Randolph Bourne championed diplomacy despite the growing support for the war led by many intellectuals. Bourne, long considered a member of the “lost,” was “less lost than he was disappointed and determined to restore vital, new idols to American thought.”²⁴ Nash asserts that the significance of these thinkers was not their disillusionment with World War I, but their refusal to “abandon [themselves] to cynicism and despair.”²⁵ Liberal intellectuals had struggled with, and refused to admit, defeat. Nash therefore rejects the popular assumption that war caused intellectual disillusion; rather, internationalism, world stability, and the loss of America’s domestic frontier arose as causes for intellectual fodder, for the shrinking liberal agenda, and account for American’s resultant anxiety. The war caused disappointment but also hope for establishing a better world order and “reconstruction of a better American could begin.”²⁶ In his descriptions of “Man,” the rise of science, the study of man through psychology and resultant considerations of human character, Nash does not depart from earlier histories. But in considering “Democracy” he contributes thorough discussion of intellectuals’ loss of faith in America’s version of democracy in favor of one more functional and reformed; rather than turning against democracy as many historians suppose, Nash argues, intellectuals “lamented the sickness of an old friend and searched for ways to restore his health and usefulness.”²⁷ However, despite his emphasis on the persistence of conservatism, Nash defends the influence of liberalism. He also challenges the notion that liberal tradition died in the aftermath of World War I; in fact, he argues that “in some quarters, [liberal tradition] actually gained strength from the challenge of meeting adversity.”²⁸ Nash asserts that this demands revision of “the image of intellectuals in the lost generation as nihilistic, narcissistic, and anti-American” as many held true to American democratic ideals and did not run into the arms of socialist doctrine as supposed by many historians.²⁹

²⁴ Ibid. 38.

²⁵ Ibid. 40.

²⁶ Ibid. 43.

²⁷ Ibid. 60.

²⁸ Ibid. 62.

²⁹ Ibid. 67.



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Nash links the persistence and ingenuity of intellectual thought to the *Esthetic* rejuvenation of the ballyhoo, the ‘jazz age,’ insofar as “innovation and artistic achievement” are concerned in contrast to “despair and dissipation.”³⁰ He presents evidentiary support for differing American groups, taking into account gender, race and different cultures, in his amalgamation of 1920s aesthetic culture and argues that Americans were not lost but authentically liberated by the creativity of intellectuals who had begun to diverge from traditional modes of thought.³¹ Nash’s “Ethics,” a discussion of “continuity of belief across the war years,” correctly challenges the long-held perception of a “lost generation.”³² He ventures so far from traditional “lost generation” attitudes that he suggests the disillusion arose merely from the sudden rise of existentialism, not an attack on core values but an intellectual penchant toward skepticism and doubt.³³ Self-titled as “lost” these existentialists defended their right to view events from an objective and more modern posture. Existentialists began to lose faith not only in politics and humanity but in the supposed objective ingenuity of science, whose morality was drawn into question by Einstein’s inconclusive theory of relativity.³⁴

Nash describes the cultural atmosphere of “ordinary people” in far greater conservative fashion than his counterparts.³⁵ These chapters contrast very little with Allen’s in terms of a profoundly socio-cultural, pop-culture focus. However, Nash emphasizes the victory of the mundane, the old and the backward over cultural sensation or social progress. Instead, Nash claims that “Americans from 1917 to 1930 constituted a *nervous* generation, groping for what certainty they could find” and insists that the idea that Americans fell into cynicism and spiraled into ballyhoo undermines the complex dynamism of thought that persisted throughout the 1920s.³⁶

³⁰ Ibid. 90.

³¹ Ibid. 103.

³² Ibid. 115.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid. 123.

³⁵ Ibid. vii.

³⁶ Ibid. 2.



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Nash concludes with a brief biography of Ford, arguing that he was not the change bearer most historians portray him to be; rather, Ford represented both the “old and the new.” He interprets Ford as a social and political conservative. In short, he challenges Ford biographies that stress liberal attitudes. Nash argues that “On the one hand Ford was a builder and bulwark of the modern, mechanized nation; on the other he devoted a remarkable amount of effort and expense to sustaining old-fashioned America.”³⁷ As an anti-Semite and large employer, Ford epitomized American values—that is, fear of the un-American, the Jewish union organizer and the labor agitator. Nash argues, “Ambivalence is the key to the mind of Henry Ford” who “looked both forward and backward.”³⁸ Nash’s interest in Ford relates to his argument on the whole, “testif[ying] to the nation’s ability to move into the future without losing the values of the past.”³⁹

Roderick Nash clarifies the history of the 1920s through the conservative lens, rescuing it from the notion of a unique decade, social myths and political assumptions. He introduces dynamic, nuanced intellectual interpretations and highlights their effects on popular culture and the public mind. His interest in supplanting the “lost generation” with the notion that intellectuals were responsible for public nervousness overwhelms the work, which reads far more conservatively than others; Nash defends liberal intellectuals, however, arguing that not all proved as radical as Sinclair Lewis.

Irrefutably, the historiography of 1920s America has been tainted with politicization, myths and fallacious arguments which have continued to change shape throughout the years. Now, it falls upon today’s historians to continue the dialogue.

³⁷ Ibid. 154.

³⁸ Ibid. 163.

³⁹ Ibid.



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Christine Jorgensen and the Media: Identity Politics in the Early 1950s Press

Emylia Terry

Christine Jorgensen's name was splashed across numerous headlines throughout the early 1950s. She had done the seemingly impossible: she had altered her sex, something that was supposed to be as immutable as it was unthinkable. Consequently, by the end of 1952 her "obscure personal triumph" was transformed "into mass media sensation," according to historian Joanne Meyerowitz. She thus assumed a celebrity status and "raised questions that resonated with force in the 1950s," questions that are still relevant: "who is male and who is female, and why do we care?"¹

As stated by historian Susan Stryker, Jorgensen generated "millions of words of press coverage" merely because she was a transgender person.² Despite the media's fascination with and sometimes celebratory coverage of Jorgensen, however, her portrayal in the press was often marked by skepticism and ambivalence. News outlets, such as the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, seemingly struggled with whether or not they accepted her identity as a woman. These contradictory attitudes are particularly evident when considering the great feat it was that Jorgensen was able to perform in the entertainment capital that is and was Las Vegas in November 1953, and that she managed to earn excellent reviews.³ Jorgensen's turn to show business was perhaps a way for her to salvage her reputation in the eyes of the press.

Christine Jorgensen rose to fame in the 1950s for a multitude of reasons. First and foremost, the climate of the 1950s was not simply a decade of postwar conformity. Meyerowitz argued that Jorgensen "embodied tensions central to the postwar culture."⁴ During World War II, women had taken on jobs and responsibilities traditionally reserved for men, something which bothered many observers.⁵ Consequently, "millions of women... [were] being steered back

¹ Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002): 1-2.

² Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008): 25.

³ Dennis McBride, from *Out of the Neon Closet: Queer Community in the Silver State*, forthcoming.

⁴ Meyerowitz, 67.

⁵ Meyerowitz, "Transforming Sex: Christine Jorgensen in the Postwar U.S.," *OAH Magazine of History* 20 (March 2006): 16-20, JSTOR, 19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25162028> (accessed March 17, 2012).



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toward feminine domesticity,” while “millions of demobilized military men” tried to readjust to “civilian social order,” according to Stryker. Thus, gender roles and what it was to be a man or woman “were very much up for debate.”⁶ Although Meyerowitz argued that there was “an attempt to reestablish gender,” with many critical authors demanding a return to traditional gender roles, Jorgensen’s story undermined such efforts.⁷ Therefore, gender roles were in flux, with Jorgensen serving as a figurehead for such strain on the home front.

Furthermore, Meyerowitz claimed that Jorgensen’s story was one “of individual striving, success, and upward mobility,” given special significance because her claim to a new identity made her an antithesis to the Cold War-inspired myth “of conformist imperatives in ‘totalitarian’ societies.” In other words, Jorgensen had defied biology and social norms by challenging “the demands that she conform to... masculinity.”⁸ Hers was a different story of individual success, but it was still a tale of self-determination and perseverance in the face of adversity.

Making Waves Before Jorgensen

Christine Jorgensen was hardly the first person in the press who questioned a binary system of gender. For example, in 1912, *The Macon [Georgia] Daily Telegraph* published an article that proclaimed, “German Baron is Now Countess, Rules Court.” This article gives insight into the early fascination that existed with what was merely labeled “transvestism,” in which a man “wears female clothing,” while a woman desires to wear male attire. The article continued to cite “Nero, Joan of Arc, Empress Elizabeth of Russia, Murray Hall, [and] Rosa Bonheur” as “[w]ell-[k]nown [e]xamples of [t]ransvestism,” apparently revealing an interest in – and knowledge of – historical figures who deviated from their assigned genders. However, this fascination did not equal understanding. The newly-recognized Countess was “[a] pretty young woman” who was dismissively regarded as “[j]ust a transvestite” after she gave “a stinging Berlin retort” to a man who wanted to assist her. Thus, the article portrayed the Countess in a humorous light, focusing on aspects about her that reflected her masculinity as opposed to her

⁶ Stryker, 48.

⁷ Meyerowitz, “Transforming Sex,” 19.

⁸ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 67.



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femininity. The article cited Dr. Magnus Hirschfield, the renowned founder of sexology, and his assessment of the Countess. Hirschfield noted that “[t]ransvestism... is common,” marked by “an instinctive desire to dress in the clothes of the opposite sex.”⁹ Thus, Hirschfield made the early argument that such cases were natural and instinctive.

Another example of the press’s fascination with gender nonconforming people before Christine Jorgensen became a household name is apparent in the 1937 *Los Angeles Times* article, “Montana Girl Becomes Man by Sex Change and Weds,” in which “a sex transformation had occurred to make the husband a male.” The article used masculine pronouns throughout, revealing an acceptance of the man’s identity, though the taboo nature of such a phenomenon was acknowledged: the matter was being investigated by a Sheriff Palagi.¹⁰ Five years later, the 1941 *Los Angeles Times* article “Sex Change Victim Wed” used striking language to discuss the “metamorphosis” of Barbara Anne Richards, “who believed herself to be a male until recently.” The headline utilized the strong word “victim” to seemingly display that a sort of crime against nature had occurred, robbing a man of his masculinity. However, it was even more startling to the press that Richards eloped with a woman, signifying a deep discomfort with homosexuality.¹¹ A later article about Richards was even less flattering in regards to her “[s]ex [c]hange [c]ase,” with the presiding judge Emmet H. Wilson of the Superior Court demanding proof that Richards “will stick to the *Ladies’ Home Journal* instead of the *Esquire* ‘she’ read when she fancied she

⁹ “German Baron is Now Countess, Rules Court: Has Official Permission to be a ‘Transvestite,’” *The Macon Daily Telegraph*, August 11, 1912, *America’s Historical Newspapers*, 8,

<http://infoweb.newsbank.com.ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive...> (accessed March 17, 2012).

¹⁰ “Montana Girl Becomes Man by Sex Change and Weds,” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, March 6, 1937, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987)*, 1, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/164688987?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

¹¹ “Sex Change Victim Wed: Angeleno Undergoing Metamorphosis Admits Ceremony in Arizona,” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, July 4, 1941, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987)*, A2, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/165203901?accountid=3611> (accessed March 17, 2012).



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was a man” before he granted her a “legal change of name.”¹²

Thus, it is clear that these prior sex changes were hardly news to the press. It is noteworthy that none of these figures were able to generate the same amount of headlines that Christine Jorgensen did and, when they did make the news, they were met with less-than-subtle disapproval. Jorgensen, on the other hand, “made *sex change* a household term” in the 1950s, according to Meyerowitz.¹³ As Stryker pointed out, “the procedures she underwent in Copenhagen” were legal and almost routine, yet she became an “instant and worldwide celebrity” and “the most written-about topic in the media” during a year that included news about hydrogen bomb testing and the Korean War.¹⁴ What was it about Jorgensen, and the 1950s, that allowed her to rise to fame?

From Anonymity to Fame

Christine Jorgensen was born George Jorgensen in the Bronx in 1926.¹⁵ As a child, Jorgensen recalled her “feminine qualities,” noting that it was her sister Dorothy “who later analyzed [her] girlish ways.”¹⁶ As she grew older, Jorgensen “found that the longer [she] lived in the male role of George,” the more her mental anguish accumulated.¹⁷ According to Stryker, while Jorgensen had served in the military and was unsuccessfully pursuing photography and film editing, she discovered in 1949 “that hormonal and surgical ‘sex change’ was possible – in Europe.”¹⁸ On December 1, 1952, the *New York Daily News* released a front-page story with the headline, “Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty,” igniting the media firestorm centering on Christine Jorgensen. Although the article was written by the reporter Ben White, “how [he] uncovered the story is still not clear,” according to Meyerowitz. Regardless, her story was not one that would

¹² “Action in Sex Change Case Delayed by Superior Court: Judge Withholds Authorization to Alter Name From Man's to Woman's Until Further Inquiries,” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, August 13, 1941, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), A12, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/165246930?accountid=3611> (accessed March 17, 2012).

¹³ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 51.

¹⁴ Stryker, 47.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Christine Jorgensen, “The Story of My Life,” part 1, *The American Weekly*, February 15, 1953, 7.

¹⁷ Christine Jorgensen, “The Story of My Life,” part 3, *The American Weekly*, March 1, 1953, 15.

¹⁸ Stryker, 47.



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be easily forgotten.

Christine Jorgensen's personal characteristics helped propel the frenzy of media coverage surrounding her. She was touted as a former G.I. who had served in World War II before being honorably discharged, making her a source of patriotic pride.¹⁹ This, however, was incorrect – as Jorgensen herself noted, she “entered the service after the war ended.”²⁰ Regardless, this coverage attests to the popularity of the “soldier’s story,” which, according to historian David Serlin, “never really disappeared from the cultural imagination” and was thus revered as national mythology.²¹ Indeed, the 1952 *Chicago Daily Tribune* article “Parents Praise Bravery” likened Jorgensen’s transition to a heroic, soldier-like feat: Jorgensen’s father declared that his daughter “deserve[d] an award higher than the congressional medal of honor” for volunteering “to undergo... guinea pig treatment.”²² The language used in this article seemingly paralleled popular news stories of soldiers returning home from war.²³ Her transition was apparently viewed as a feat as heroic as her reported service in World War II.

Christine Jorgensen’s transformation also made her a figurehead for American scientific progress. For example, the abovementioned “Parents Praise Bravery” article also noted that Jorgensen’s determination, combined “with the help of medical science,” made her a woman.²⁴ In other words, ultimately it was scientific progress that was credited for her success. According to Stryker, Jorgensen represented “the mid-twentieth-century awe for scientific technology,” technology which could now seemingly “turn a man into a woman.”²⁵ However, *Newsweek*, a widely circulating news magazine, mentioned that “Danish tabloids ate [Jorgensen’s transition] up... only for three days,” largely because “the ‘transformation’ into a woman” by artist Lily

¹⁹ “Parents Praise Bravery,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963), December 2, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1987), A7.
<http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/178456970?accountid=3611> (accessed March 17, 2012).

²⁰ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 245.

²¹ David Harley Serlin, *Replaceable You: Engineering the Body in Postwar America* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2004): 165.

²² “Parents Praise Bravery,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, A7.

²³ Serlin, 165.

²⁴ “Parents Praise Bravery,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*: A7.

²⁵ Stryker, 47.



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Erbe had been covered in the 1920's, and "doctors explained that the case was no great medical phenomenon."²⁶ In other words, Jorgensen's case – and the spread of such groundbreaking technology – was hardly that uncommon, especially in Denmark. However, the coverage of Jorgensen raged on in the U.S.

An Image Tarnished

Although Christine Jorgensen did experience a surge of positive press coverage, it is important to analyze the language used in early articles about her. Such language arguably precipitated the trend of sullyng her image, for it reveals the press's early skepticism and ambivalence toward her identity as woman. Indeed, many of the headlines generated about Christine were sensationalistic, with the press soliciting "public interest in order to sell newspapers and magazines," as Meyerowitz argued.²⁷ For example, a December 1, 1952 *Chicago Daily Tribune* article ran the headline, "Surgery Makes Him a Woman, Ex-GI Writes." The article used masculine pronouns and references throughout, referring to Jorgensen as "him," "George," and "son."²⁸ Furthermore, the title suggested disbelief that Jorgensen was really a woman; by including the afterthought of "Ex-GI Writes" in the headline, the article insinuated that the transformation was an implausible claim.

The next day, however, the same newspaper ran an article espousing Jorgensen's courage and provided an expert's testimony regarding the difference between "pseudo-hermaphrodites" and "true hermaphrodites," who "[have] sex glands of both male and female."²⁹ According to Meyerowitz, this article represents reporters' consultations of doctors "[a]s soon as the... story broke," in which most physicians believed Jorgensen to be "a pseudo-hermaphrodite (with

²⁶ "Christine and the News," *Newsweek*, December 15, 1952: 64.

²⁷ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 66.

²⁸ "Surgery Makes Him a Woman," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, December 1, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988): 1, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/178426186?accountid=3611>, (accessed March 17, 2012).

³⁰ "Parents Praise Bravery," *Chicago Daily Tribune*: A7.



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masculine genitals but female organs inside).³⁰ For example, the weekly news magazine *Quick*, in a December 15, 1952 article titled “Lost Sex,” cited the testimony of a “gland expert,” who ruled that Jorgensen was a “pseudo-hermaphrodite” who “can now have sexual relations, but can’t be a mother.”³¹ Thus, reports such as these preceded later coverage that claimed “Jorgensen was not actually a *real* woman,” but a mentally ill transvestite, due to her lack of “a vagina, a menstrual cycle, or productive ovaries,” as claimed by Serlin.³²

Additionally, many articles concerning Jorgensen pertained to her vanished maleness. For example, “Blonde Ex-Man,”³³ “Ex-Boy,”³⁴ “Ex-GI,”³⁵ and “Man-Turned-Woman”³⁶ were variations of some of the headlines Christine Jorgensen generated. By associating Jorgensen’s transition with lost masculinity, these articles were hardly celebratory and instead bore negative connotations associated with a forfeited masculine identity as opposed to newfound femininity.

Language aside, it is also important to take note of what words were confined to quotation marks in the headlines about Jorgensen. The *New York Times*’ coverage of Jorgensen’s transition ran the headline, “Bronx ‘Boy’ is Now a Girl.”³⁷ In other words, the state of Jorgensen’s boyhood was debatable, whereas her identity as a girl did not need to be qualified. In contrast, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* ran the headline, “Air Force Sergeant Tells of Love for

³¹ “Health: The Lost Sex,” *Quick Magazine*, December 15, 1952, <http://www.christinejorgensen.org> (accessed March 17, 2012).

³² Serlin, 162.

³³ “Very Glad She’s a Woman, Says Blonde Ex-Man,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*: A7.

³⁴ “U. S. Sergeant Calls Ex-Boy ‘Girl Friend,’” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*: 1.

³⁵ “Ex-GI Christine Says She Won’t Turn Actress,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*: 14.

³⁶ “Man-Turned-Woman Deluged by Show Offers: Fabulous Contracts Held Out for Appearances No Matter if She Can’t Sing, Dance or Act,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, December 1, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988): 43.

<http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166363600?accountid=3611> (accessed March 17, 2012).

³⁷ “Bronx ‘Boy’ is Now a Girl: Danish Treatments Change Sex of Former Army Clerk,” *New York Times (1923-Current file)*, December 2, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2008): 18.

<http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/112347271?accountid=3611> (accessed March 17, 2012).



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‘Christine,’” while the article itself referred to her as “Christine (ex-George) Jorgensen.”³⁸ By placing Jorgensen’s chosen name in quotation marks, and then referring to her as “ex-George,” the veracity of her identity as Christine was being questioned and debated. However, the *RJ* at least managed to spell her name correctly in that article. In a subsequent *RJ* publication, Christine Jorgensen was referred to as “Publicity-Shy ‘Christina,’” in which both her identity – and the spelling of her name – were questioned.³⁹

Further, the press coverage by *Time* was hardly flattering and was far more straightforward with its suspicions of Jorgensen. *Time*, a nationally circulating magazine with a wide readership, declared on December 15, 1952 that the “parents of George and/or Christine” were “fast learning the sweet uses of publicity,” and that her parents were going to sell her “life story for \$30,000,” while Jorgensen would profit from a documentary film she had been shooting in Denmark.⁴⁰ Further indicating confusion with Jorgensen’s gender identity after the outwardly unfriendly coverage in *Time*, a reader declared, “Christine Jorgensen... for Man and/or Woman of the year,” seemingly paralleling *Time*’s aforementioned language of referring to Jorgensen as “George and/or Christine.”⁴¹ Thus, the preexisting skepticism in many news outlets likely set the framework for the subsequent widespread negative press she received.

The Souring of the Press

When Jorgensen returned to the U.S. from Denmark, her story was rumored to be a fraud.⁴² According to Jorgensen’s autobiography, she “was making headlines,” with her arrival in the States “fully reported, sometimes in a friendly and sometimes in a hostile way.” The reports hint at an underlying ambivalence in regards to Jorgensen’s womanliness: “Christine, by George!” contrasted with, “Chris back home, perfect little lady,” which in turn differed from,

³⁸ “Air Force Sergeant Tells of Love for ‘Christine,’” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, December 5, 1952: 1. UNLV Microfilms.

³⁹ Louella O. Parsons, “Publicity-Shy ‘Christina’ Prefers Hollywood Instead of Romance,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, December 10, 1952: 1. UNLV Microfilms.

⁴⁰ “The Press: The Great Transformation,” *Time*, December 15, 1952, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,820503,00.html#ixzz1lgSDky51> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁴¹ “Letters: Letters, Dec. 22, 1952,” *Time*, December 22, 1952, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,889523,00.html#ixzz1lgV9KZGP> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁴² Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 70.



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“Christine teeters on high heels, leaving the plane.”⁴³ On February 19, 1953, the *Los Angeles Times* added further fuel to the fire with the headline, “Total Sex Change Called Impossible.”⁴⁴ Six days later, on February 23, 1953, *Time* reported that Jorgensen “husked ‘Hello’ and tossed off a Bloody Mary like guy,” had poor technique with high heels, spoke in “a husky, masculine contralto,” and had a flat, hard face.⁴⁵ Thus, the headlines towards Jorgensen in February 1953 were hardly flattering, despite the comparatively kind headlines she had received in December 1952.

The continuously incredulous portrayals of Jorgensen were widely attributable to the publication of the *American Weekly* series, a weekly newspaper supplement that printed numerous sensationalist articles which, according to Meyerowitz, “casted more doubt on the nature of Jorgensen’s condition.” The publication’s article, which first appeared February 15, 1953, situated her within the context of transvestitism in its March 8, 1953 story.⁴⁶

The dictionary definition of “transvestite,” however, was medically insufficient. According to Meyerowitz, Jorgensen’s doctor, Christian Hamburger, “suspected that ‘transvestitism,’ as he defined it in *American Weekly* and elsewhere,” had a physical basis. Regardless, Americans in the 1950s associated transvestitism with cross-dressing, which was believed to be a psychological disorder and “perversion,” separate from physiology.⁴⁷ According to Jorgensen’s autobiography, she “was to suffer considerably” due to the popular definition of “transvestite.”⁴⁸ Ironically, although Dr. Hirschfield had defended the transgender woman in the 1912 “German Baron is Now Countess” article, the Countess was laughably deemed to be “just a transvestite.” Similarly, Jorgensen was faced with similar consequences four decades later,

⁴³ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 175.

⁴⁴ “Total Sex Change Called Impossible: Stanford Cancer Expert Comments on Former GI Turned Into Woman,” *Los Angeles Times* (1923-Current File), February 19, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1987), 4.

<http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166450212?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁴⁵ “Manners and Morals: Homecoming,” *Time*, February 23, 1953.

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,889911,00.html#ixzz1lgR68YwA> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁴⁶ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 71.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 71.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 162.



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despite Dr. Hamburger's defense.⁴⁹ Regardless of the Jorgensen debate rising in the media – and the confusion arguably generated among readers – transitions continued to attract media attention.

On March 19, 1953, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that “a 20 year old Japanese girl” became a man “after three operations” and now hoped to find work in Tokyo.⁵⁰ An article in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, published the same day, claimed, “Christine in Reverse Is Now a Happy Father” after transitioning in New Orleans. The transgender man in the *RJ* article was quoted as saying that he wanted to “avoid ‘any unpleasant publicity.’”⁵¹ In both of these articles, Jorgensen's name was used – and thus compared to – the transitions of others, showcasing her celebrity and renown despite the press's suspicions. However, the man featured in the *RJ* article was seemingly well-aware of the negative attention Jorgensen was attracting, as evidenced by his decision to remain anonymous. Unfortunately for Jorgensen, the adverse media attention only worsened.

On April 6, 1953, the *New York Post* published an exposé detailing that “‘Christine’ Jorgensen [was] a woman in name only”⁵² after following several leads, such as Danish doctors confirming that Jorgensen had “no vestiges of female organs,” according to Meyerowitz.⁵³ On April 9, 1953, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported, “Christine's Sex Isn't Changed.”⁵⁴ On April 20, 1953, *Time* claimed that Jorgensen “was... only an altered male.” The article continued to mention that “[t]his was no surprise to U.S. psychiatrists... or to careful readers of Jorgensen's own story” in *American Weekly*. Thus, it was widely reported that Jorgensen was not a woman,

⁴⁹ “German Baron is Now Countess,” *The Macon Daily Telegraph*, 8.

⁵⁰ “Girl Reverses Christine Case – Becomes a Man,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, March 19, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988): 4. <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166450212?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).”

⁵¹ “Christine in Reverse is Now a Happy Father,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (evening edition), March 19, 1953, 1. UNLV Microfilms.

⁵² Alvin Davis, “The Truth About ‘Christine’ Jorgensen,” part 1, *The New York Post*, April 6, 1953, 2.

⁵³ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 72.

⁵⁴ “Christine's Sex Isn't Changed Doctor Admits,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, April 9, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988): 7. <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/178488980?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).



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but simply a male recipient of Denmark's "program of voluntary emasculation."⁵⁵

The unflattering articles continued to pour in. For example, it was heralded that a lobotomy could be seen as "Aid for Christine" in the *Los Angeles Times*;⁵⁶ doctors had to justify that "they did right for Christine" in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*;⁵⁷ and it was espoused that "Christine is No Lady" by the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*.⁵⁸ These articles reported largely on the medical and psychological state of Jorgensen and in turn pathologized her. Thus, they arguably reflected the press's view that Jorgensen had betrayed the notion of scientific and medical progress that had helped propel her to fame in the first place.

Struggle for the Sahara

Despite Jorgensen's image seemingly declining in the press, "the news stories... did little to damage [her] popularity," according to Meyerowitz. She made headlines because "she remained controversial," despite her refusal to pigeon-hole herself as a "pervert." The press maintained its coverage "of her everyday life" in order to satisfy "a public whose curiosity had not yet been allayed."⁵⁹ This in part seems to explain why there was sustained ambivalence in certain media outlets regarding her portrayal, even after the brutal *New York Post* exposé. For example, the *Los Angeles Times* used these three contrasting headlines in the month of May: "Brain Surgery Seen as Aid for Christine,"⁶⁰ "Christine's Femininity Charms Interviewer,"⁶¹ and

⁵⁵ "Medicine: The Case of Christine," *Time*, April 20, 1953,

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,822780,00.html#ixzz1lgS0ggyw> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁵⁶ William Barton, "Brain Surgery Seen as Aid for Christine: Psychiatrists Told of Success With Lobotomy Operation Christine Case," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, May 6, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1988): A1, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166496959?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁵⁷ "Doctors Claim They Did Right for Christine," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*, May 28, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1988), 7, <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/178501933?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁵⁸ "Christine Is No Lady, Danish Doctors Admit," *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (evening edition), May 29, 1953, 12, UNLV Microfilms.

⁵⁹ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 73.

⁶⁰ William Barton, "Brain Surgery Seen as Aid for Christine," A1.

⁶¹ Fay Hammond, "Christine's Femininity Charms Interviewer: She Appears Glamorous and Beautiful at 'Woman and Clothes Chat' in Hotel," *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, May 9, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1988) A1.



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“Christine Not Woman.”⁶² Thus, some newspapers were seemingly hesitant to completely renounce Jorgensen, and this flip-flopping of opinions presumably reflected disillusionment warring with captivation, both of which could potentially garner a profit.

Jorgensen remained just as active as the press. She channeled the media attention in order to spark a career “that kept her in the news and heightened her claim to fame,” as pointed out by Meyerowitz. For example, shortly after returning to the United States from Denmark, she started making public appearances and was even awarded “Woman of the Year” by the Scandinavian Societies of Greater New York.⁶³ A few weeks after Jorgensen’s return to the U.S., she met Charlie Yates, who would change her life.⁶⁴ In late April of 1953, Yates became her manager, adding Jorgensen to a list of celebrity clientele that included Bob Hope.⁶⁵ Yates informed Jorgensen that she was “a world-famous personality” who couldn’t “leave the limelight” due to the press’s fascination with her, whether she liked the attention or not.⁶⁶

Yates became instrumental in Jorgensen’s life, explaining to Jorgensen that she had few opportunities left. She recognized the limitations fame had brought her; according to her autobiography, she “had many offers from various enterprises” and “was perfectly aware” that they wanted her not for her talents “but for the notoriety surrounding [her] name.” Yates convinced her that a nightclub act would make money and satisfy her “immediate problem of making a living.” Jorgensen, however, told Yates that she couldn’t sing, dance, or “give out the snappy chatter,” and that she was “a photographer, not an entertainer.” She also had misgivings about the “low moral tone” of nightclubs. Regardless, she agreed to “an engagement at the

<http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166488409?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁶² “Christine Not Woman, Danish Doctors Hint,” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, May 9, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1988): 4.

<http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166474706?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁶³ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 73.

⁶⁴ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 186, 190.

⁶⁵ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 74.

⁶⁶ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 191.



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Orpheum Theater in Los Angeles,” set to open in early May.⁶⁷

Jorgensen’s decision to enter the entertainment business largely contradicted her earlier goal of avoiding the stage altogether. For example, an article in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported on December 11, 1952 that “Ex-GI Christine Says She Won’t Turn Actress” and that Jorgensen had “no intention to profit commercially from her situation.”⁶⁸ Despite early offers she received to give appearances and performances, Jorgensen claimed that she “had absolutely no interest or inclination for the entertainment world,” save for her desire to be a photographer,⁶⁹ as she originally believed that “the nightclub circuit” would represent “the sacrifice of [her] self-respect,” as well as the “crucifixion of others who would follow [her].”⁷⁰ Yet, less than a year later, she had been courted by Yates to enter stage business. This seemingly represented an increased sense of desperation on Jorgensen’s part: because she had “little money left and no job in sight,” she was prompted to reassess her prospects,” according to Meyerowitz.⁷¹

Furthermore, show business was arguably a way for Jorgensen to salvage her name in the press. She had been hurt by the *New York Post* article, which had manipulated facts that she had already divulged in her *American Weekly* series. The paper’s perspective “that no transformation had taken place,” suggesting that she had propagated lies, irritated Jorgensen.⁷² Yates had offered Jorgensen a way to make money, a way to martial her fame into a career that could sustain her, a career she reluctantly pursued. However, she had been opposed to going into show business in early December 1952, when much of the press had not been outwardly skeptical of her transition. It is likely that Jorgensen perceived a threat to her name, and thus her financial status, which also motivated her to reconsider her original stance.

Regardless of Jorgensen’s early prejudices against the night life scene, or her motives for going into show business, she ultimately agreed to a performance at the Orpheum Theater in Los

⁶⁷ Ibid., 191-192.

⁶⁸ “Ex-GI Christine Says She Won’t Turn Actress,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14.

⁶⁹ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 135.

⁷⁰ Jorgensen, “The Story of My Life,” part 1, *The American Weekly*, 5.

⁷¹ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 74.

⁷² Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 193, 195.



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Angeles after a successful test run in Connecticut.⁷³ On April 24, 1953, the *Los Angeles Times* reported, “Christine Scheduled to Open Revue Here,” noting that her name would “appear as ‘Miss Christine Jorgensen’ in all billings” – as if there was any question otherwise.⁷⁴

On March 7, 1953, a day after the *LA Times* ran the aforementioned, odious article advocating for Christine to have brain surgery, the paper switched gears to understated rhetoric. The newspaper reported that Christine had arrived in L.A. “[c]ool and [s]elf-[a]ssured” and had informed reporters that after a week-long performance in California, she would “make one or two appearances in Las Vegas.” The article was subtly critical, stating that Jorgensen “claim[ed] surgery in Denmark changed her,” again questioning her credibility; it went on to state that she had “just misse[d] being statuesque,” making fun of her appearance. Further, she was accused of being “prepared to capitalize on her change of sex experience,” mirroring *Time* sentiment by citing her supposed self-exploitation.⁷⁵ After her performance, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on May 9, 1953, “Christine Gets Applause at Theater Debut.” Despite this seemingly positive coverage, Jorgensen claimed that Los Angeles reviewers, who were “[l]ess prejudiced in [her] favor,” reacted to her show mercilessly. She lamented that she “had just laid one of the largest eggs in show-business history.”⁷⁶

Jorgensen’s despondency grew when her subsequent Las Vegas contract was threatened. Yates had secured Jorgensen an engagement at the Sahara Hotel within two months of her L.A. performance. However, after seeing one of her performances, the management at the Sahara wanted nothing to do with her.⁷⁷ On June 4, 1953, the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* ran an article

⁷³ McBride.

⁷⁴ “Songs and Dances: Christine Scheduled to Open Revue Here,” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, April 24, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1988): 2. <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166447462?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁷⁵ “Christine Arrives... Cool and Self-Assured: Ex-GI Has Aplomb of Movie Queen as Curiosity Seekers Eye Her at Airport,” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*, May 7, 1953, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-1988): 1. <http://ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/166486441?accountid=3611> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁷⁶ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 201.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*



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headlined, “Sahara Cancels Christine Because He’s No Woman,” and it detailed how the contract had been cancelled because “the ex-soldier was ‘not now and never can be a woman.’”⁷⁸ The following day, the *RJ* reported that Jorgensen was challenging the Sahara “on [s]ex [m]isrepresentation,”⁷⁹ and Yates “instituted a lawsuit to hold the club to its original contract.”⁸⁰ The theme of Jorgensen misrepresenting herself and lying, then, was given legal weight, which she and Yates contested.

Regardless, Jorgensen continued performing. According to her autobiography, she had “two exciting and rewarding weeks” at Pittsburgh’s Copa Club and was beginning to feel “nothing but enthusiasm” in regards to her new career in show business. Although several clubs refused to host her due to “immorality,” the reviews generated by her performance at the Copa Club were fantastic. These reviews sat well with Las Vegas promoters, who “no longer seemed to have any public objections to [her] womanhood.” Thus, the lawsuit was dropped, and her show was set for November. Interestingly enough, Jorgensen’s name appeared to be something to attack or celebrate depending on which was more profitable at the time. For example, only after Jorgensen “had proven that [she] could make money for [her] employers” was she welcomed back to Las Vegas.⁸¹ Thus, Jorgensen’s identity was a commodity that could be spun a myriad of ways for economic benefit.

Once Jorgensen arrived in Nevada, the press hardly ceased its coverage of one of Vegas’ “[o]ff beat attractions,” as *Billboard* magazine, an entertainment newsweekly, labeled Jorgensen in a March 1953 article.⁸² For example, *Billboard* published the article, “Chris May Be a Fem, But – ” on November 14, 1953. The article detailed “[a] backstage rebellion” against Jorgensen by the Sa-Harem chorus girls accompanying her in her performance, who were apparently

⁷⁸ “Sahara Cancels Christine Because He’s No Woman,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, June 4, 1953: 6. UNLV Special Collections.

⁷⁹ “Christine Challenges Sahara on Sex Misrepresentation,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, June 5, 1953: 9. UNLV Microfilms.

⁸⁰ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 211.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 213-214, 216, 222.

⁸² “Talent Buying War Breaks Out in Full at Las Vegas Spots,” *Billboard*, March 14, 1953, 16, <http://www.billboard.com/archive#/archive/read?id=RAseAAAAMBAJ&pg=16&query=Talent+Buying+War+Breaks+Out+in+Full+At+Las+Vegas+Spots&date=1953-03-14> (accessed March 18, 2012).



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concerned that Jorgensen “might be a Peeping Tom.”⁸³ However, the dancers sent Jorgensen a letter shortly after, detailing their “deep admiration for [her] as a performer” and as a person, according to Jorgensen’s autobiography.⁸⁴ Paralleling the early press Jorgensen received, in which certain details, such as her service in WWII, were fabricated to suit the needs of the press, it appeared that Jorgensen had yet to escape such lies. Thus, *Billboard* was but one news source reporting with sensationalistic verve rather than with objective accuracy, advancing its own agenda. In essence, the Sa-Harem article was one of many stories about Jorgensen that was “meant only to harass and harm,” as pointed out by Las Vegas archivist and historian Dennis McBride.⁸⁵

Despite the coverage surrounding Jorgensen, or the struggle for the Sahara that had ensued well before her performance, Jorgensen’s two-week engagement was a hit; the press trailed her around Vegas and described her outfits, outings, and other details, such as the celebrities who came to her performances.⁸⁶ She also had to quell engagement rumors, hinting that the press coverage in Vegas had shifted – at least temporarily – from intrusive questions about her sex, to benign, idle gossip about her daily happenings.

In an interview with December’s *Magazine Las Vegas*, Jorgensen raved about her experience in Vegas, not touching upon the controversies aroused before she even arrived. She claimed that her opening performance “was a never-to-be-forgotten episode” in her show business career, as her audiences had responded warmly to her, making her “heart swell.” In addressing rumors of a marriage proposal, she conceded that although she “received flowers daily from a very dear friend,” she was “not engaged.” Lastly, in remembering her “wonderful engagement at the Sahara,” she concluded courteously with the question, “[j]ust when can I come back to this fabulous Las Vegas?”⁸⁷

⁸³ “Chris May Be a Fem, But--” *Billboard*, November 21, 1953, 1.
<http://www.billboard.com/archive#/archive/read?id=aAoEAAAAMBAJ&pg=1&query=Chris+May+Be+a+Fem,+B+ut&date=1953-11-21> (accessed March 18, 2012).

⁸⁴ Jorgensen, *Christine Jorgensen*, 223.

⁸⁵ McBride.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ “Christine Jorgensen Speaks,” *Magazine Las Vegas*, December 1953, 1. UNLV Special Collections.



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An Immortal Legacy

Christine Jorgensen was able to generate national headlines and become an apparently celebrated figure in the early 1950s for a myriad of reasons. However, in the eyes of much of the press, she ultimately represented a betrayal of scientific progress, a disavowal of masculinity, and a subversion of sexual norms in the age of McCarthyism. Regardless, there was perhaps not an abrupt souring of the press after her initial appearance in the media but rather the presence of both early skepticism and ambivalence toward Jorgensen that exacerbated the subsequent tarnishing of her image. Jorgensen's turn to the entertainment industry, and the significance of her being able to perform in Las Vegas, both hint at the contradictory coverage Jorgensen received, as well as her likely attempt to salvage her reputation.

Regardless of Jorgensen's ambivalent portrayal in the press, it is important to remember that she was an inspiration to many other transgender people. Although Christine Jorgensen never saw herself as a political activist, "she was well aware of the historic role" she played as an "advocate for the issues that were central to her own life," according to Stryker.⁸⁸ Despite the often negative press she faced, Jorgensen's overall resilience, combined with her commitment to garnering good publicity for those she represented and inspired, makes her truly newsworthy.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Stryker, 48.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

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Sagebrush Liberal:

State Governance in the West and Senator Richard Bryan of Nevada

Kristin Leigh Guthrie

U. S. Senator Richard Bryan's greatest political successes have been connected to his efforts to expand Nevada's state power. Looking at the narrative of his political history, his efforts appear methodical. The seat of power he most coveted, Governor, bespeaks his attraction to state power by contrast to federal power. Richard Bryan bears some, but not all, of the traits possessed by successful predecessors. A unique man, he does not fit within any specific convention. While past leaders of the Silver State possess their own specific traits, ambitions and attitudes about their office that made them influential and popular, Bryan's successes have been, by oral, primary and secondary accounts, related to the following factors: 1. family connections, 2. resourcefulness, 3. changing times, 4. luck, and 5. stalwart dedication to the state before the nation.

How Senator Richard Bryan Succeeded in Nevada Politics

Oddly enough, despite Bryan's long and influential career which pervaded many levels of leadership in Nevada, a book about his life and work has yet to be written and an interpretation of his success has not yet been authored. Few texts attempt to discuss his work in depth and the few that do focus on very particular issues rather than the man and his overall career. Bryan is of particular interest because he demonstrated a stalwart devotion to the interests of the state before other interests. Despite his transition from Governor to Senator, he maintained the viewpoint of a state-focused public servant and stubbornly fought to expand Nevada's land right by preventing the Yucca Mountain project, a controversial non-partisan issue which many Republicans and Democrats mutually opposed.

Richard Bryan was born on June 16, 1937 in Washington D.C. to parents Oscar Bryan and Lillie Bryan; the family moved to Las Vegas when he was a small child. Bryan attributes the formation of his interests and future goals to his parents. His mother inspired in him a passion for history while his father, a lawyer and politically connected Democrat, encouraged him to pursue



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politics from a very young age.¹ He first began seeking leadership roles through his involvement with the Boy Scouts. Before long, he began running for offices in student government in grade school. He ran for 8th grade class president, much to the chagrin of a discouraging teacher, and won.² While his father's influence and connections influenced his success, Bryan also got by due to his own resourcefulness and strength of focus: "Well no, I don't think I was a natural leader. I guess in some respects I was a little bit more mature in terms of knowing what I wanted to do. I always knew I wanted to be a lawyer, [and] that I would like to be in politics. So I had a sense of direction unlike most kids that age..."³ Despite the occasional strategic miscalculation, he was able to maneuver himself into positions of influence throughout his childhood.

Bryan grew up during World War II and credits his fascination with the military and service to the government to his involvement in organizations that benefited the war effort like the Victory Garden, as well as participation in the Helldorado Parade, the Elks Club and Boy Scouts.⁴ The strong sense of community he experienced as a young man also influenced his desire to serve, coupled with early exposure to prominent men through his father. These political acquaintances would later result in greater opportunity for him. He particularly recalls looking up to governors Grant Sawyer (D) and Paul Laxalt (R) for their natural charisma.⁵ He credited his father for forging important connections that influenced his opportunities, from serving as the manager of his high school basketball team to becoming the first Public Defender of the state of Nevada. Bryan confessed, "I think I was a beneficiary of wonderful parents. You know, my friend Warren Buffett talks about his success that he was a beneficiary of the ovarian lottery. I was too. My father knew most everybody..."⁶

¹ Kristin Guthrie, Transcript of Interview with Richard Bryan, November 18, 2011: 2.

² Richard H Bryan and Claytee D. White, *An Interview with Senator Richard Bryan: an Oral History*. Las Vegas: University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Oral History Research Center; Voices of the Historic John S. Park Neighborhood Oral History Project, 2010.

³ Guthrie, Transcript, 8.

⁴ Ibid. 6.

⁵ Ibid. 12.

⁶ Ibid, 9.



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The Bryan name certainly improved his odds of making his way in the political world. It should be no surprise why since his father, Oscar Bryan, served as a Las Vegas attorney and Justice of the Peace, ran for state Assembly and District Attorney and was very active in the Democratic Party. But, as Richard Bryan suggested, he could not have gotten very far without matching his fortune with merit in equal or greater parts.

Bryan benefited from his quick wit and resourcefulness. He has many stories about lessons he learned in campaigning throughout his youth. He overcame his weakness of not being an athlete by enlisting a football player to run on his ticket for student body president of Las Vegas High School, and won. He courted other students by taking them for lunch yet ran for student body president and lost because he over-emphasized the need for "front steps" votes.⁷ He was a resourceful thinker, which greatly improved his chances of being a successful leader. For example, Bryan once collected flowers from a local mortuary to use at a campaign party when he was running for his first term as state legislator. Attendants believed that the flowers had been donated by supporters; they generated such popularity and confidence in him that it ultimately led to Bryan leading the ticket as a young thirty-three year old freshman candidate in a district shared by several well-known Democratic legislators.⁸

Richard Bryan identified himself as a fiscally conservative, social liberal. While he acknowledged the importance of his ideas, he also attributed a portion of his success to luck: "I had a very strong work ethic. These were not natural talents. If you work hard and you have a goal, your chances of success are greatly enhanced. I was lucky, very lucky...Lucky in the era I grew up in, lucky in terms of where I was in school at the time I was doing these things. I worked hard at it."⁹ Bryan discussed his experience of emerging as a fresh faced state Senator with Harry Reid during the tumultuous era of the Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy assassinations, student protests against the Vietnam War, the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement and renewed lobbying for an Equal Rights Amendment, and equity

⁷ Ibid, 14.

⁸ Ibid, 20.

⁹ Ibid. 11.



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(Welfare Rights) movements." ¹⁰ He credited his popularity to his socially progressive stance and his success at getting elected to changing times and attitudes, which undeniably influenced his own views as well as those of the voters.

Further, Bryan committed himself to the battle for states' rights through every elected position he held, other than Public Defender: state legislator (1972-1978), Attorney General (1979-1983), Governor (1983-1989), and United States Senator (1989-2001). Clearly, he could not have maintained popularity, despite conservative shifts over the past four decades, if it were not for some overriding desirable constant that he demonstrated throughout his entire career. This constant is his unchanging, stalwart dedication to the best interest of the state before that of the federal government.

State Legislator (Assembly and Senate; 1972-1978)

Nevada experienced great economic growth in the 1970s, despite the 1970-71 recession and 1973-74 national energy crises. The subsequent Sagebrush Rebellion was a desperate effort to raise revenue and generate taxation power over federally appropriated land. Each of these factors influenced the economy and contributed to the great need for revenue reform in Las Vegas and its new suburbs. However, Governor O'Callaghan recognized that "increases in revenues to the State of Nevada have not kept pace with that growth" in his "State of the State Address" for the Fifty-Sixth Session in 1971.¹¹ When revenue cannot keep pace, the function and infrastructure of the state naturally declines. The Governor called for a study to determine the sustainability of the existing tax system before proposing reform, which he asserted was on the horizon. Nonetheless, throughout O'Callaghan's administration he neither increased taxes nor proposed drastic budget cuts; because the energy crisis directly impacted the volume of tourism and immigration, growth slowed.

Instead, the Corporate Gaming Act of 1969 contributed to the sustained stability of the state throughout Governor O'Callaghan's term (1971-1979). Richard Bryan served in the Nevada

¹⁰ Ibid. 20.

¹¹ Governor Mike O'Callaghan, "Message of Governor Mike O'Callaghan to the Legislature of Nevada. State of the State Address" 1971.



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State Senate during Paul Laxalt's gubernatorial administration (1967-1971) and participated in the drafting and promotion of this bill. Bryan regards it as one of the biggest successes of his career as it insulated the state and has since provided a significant source of revenue to it.¹² The Corporate Gaming Act reformed the industry by eventually displacing organized crime's influence on the casinos. Corporatization eliminated the threat of federal regulation and heavy taxation of casino gambling, which could have potentially divested much power from the state government. Corporatization also enabled operators to target class demographics, which broadened gaming's clientele base. The new law drew investors and bankers to Las Vegas and allowed existing operators like Sam Boyd and Kirk Kerkorian to gain access to large pools of capital, resulting in higher gaming revenue and mitigating the energy crisis of the early 1970s. In a video conference between Governors Sawyer, Laxalt, List, Bryan and Miller, Laxalt discussed the effect of corporatization upon gaming. Laxalt took full credit for the reform achieved under his administration and remarked that it cleaned up the industry with shareholding, diminished mob presence and improved its growth potential.¹³ But, in truth, credit should be shared with the state legislators who crafted the bill, and particularly with Bryan who played an integral role in promoting it.

After Governor Robert List's Tax Shift of 1981, a tax policy change that occurred as a consequence of California's Proposition 13 and Nevada's Question 6, the casinos contributed even greater revenue to the economic lifeblood of the state, making Bryan's contribution all the more significant. Prop. 13 and Question 6 were both ballot referendums calling for a cap on property taxes to curb the effect of inflation. Governor Robert List (1979-1983) supported this shift, since it now placed the tax burden on the shoulders of tourists rather than Nevada residents.

Another major issue that Bryan contended with as a state senator was land use. The Sagebrush Rebellion began on the local level in rural Nevada in 1973. Nevadans objected to federal regulation and control over unappropriated federal lands guaranteed in the Constitution. Rebels wanted to reclaim land they felt should have been under the control of states. According

¹² Leslie Nino, "Keeping it Clean: Richard H. Bryan and Nevada Gaming." *UNLV Gaming Law Journal* Vol. 2: 89.

¹³ Curt Daniels, director, Rosemary Peacock, "A Gathering of Governors," Video-recording, April 14, 1993.



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to Sears and Citrin, it was "an attempt to reassert validity of the ethos of economic individualism that is a predominant element in the historical political culture in this country."¹⁴ Reasserting economic individualism, however, reinforces self-interest and thereby undermines the people's ability to influence policymakers through collective action. The 1970s ended with the introduction of a leader who would uphold federal dominance.

The Sagebrush Rebellion promulgated anti-federal sentiments that simultaneously combated federal regulation of other industries, like gaming. Individual and commercial property owners also benefited from the popularizing conservative opposition to federal and state level oversight and taxation. While the mines opposed taxes levied by the federal government, which lobbyists argued inhibited growth, property owners throughout the West began to bend under the weight of inflation's effect on housing values and inequitable assessments. Throughout the decade, a consensus grew that federal and state governments were not enacting regulatory or tax policies conducive to economic health and growth.

While Californians began to agitate for property tax reform in 1977, Nevadans (with the strong cultural memory of the Sagebrush Rebellion) acted as free-riders paving the way for property tax reform in the Silver State as well. Nevada's property owners benefitted from the Sagebrush Rebellion and subsequent property tax reform measures passed in 1981, along with small and corporate businesses that also benefitted from substantial property tax relief.

Throughout Bryan's tenure as a state legislator, he presided over rampant change - both nationally and locally. However, growth management, conservation and a passionate opposition to a Yucca Mountain nuclear waste site characterize Bryan's leadership as heavily focused on land and state's rights issues.

Attorney General (1979-1983)

As Attorney General, Bryan once more took on gaming regulation and asserted the state's authority over regulating its own industry through overseeing many high profile federal cases.

¹⁴ Jack Citrin and David O. Sears, *Tax Revolt: Something for Nothing in California* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1982): 242.



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Legal historian Leslie Nino cited a conversation with Patricia Becker, a co-worker of Bryan's on the Gaming Control Board, wherein she claims that Bryan was "closely involved in each case...but entrusted" other attorneys to argue cases as well.¹⁵ Bryan recalled that had it not been for the states recovering the image of gaming, the federal government would have assumed regulatory dominance.¹⁶ Cases such as *Rosenthal v. State ex rel. Nevada Gaming Commission*, *Spilotro v. State ex rel Nevada Gaming Commission*, and *State v. Glusman* each demonstrated Bryan's brilliant legal techniques as well as a strong push against federal oversight. Bryan proved to the nation that Nevada could regulate itself without external scrutiny by winning those cases. Particularly important, Bryan represented the Board and Commission of the state before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and argued for "the Commission's power to revoke the Aladdin's license without federal judicial review."¹⁷

The federal court "declined to extend federal jurisdiction to questions concerning the operation or interpretation of gaming licenses, which were purely matters of state law."¹⁸ This was a major win for expansion of state regulatory power over the casino industry. Bryan, in essence, cleaned up gaming, transforming it from an illegitimate, vice-ridden industry to a respectable one capable of being controlled by Nevada's legal system. This created a precedent that insulated the industry against oversight by the federal government. Although this was a major success for Bryan, the current governor, O'Callaghan, took credit for advances in gaming law and the triumph of the state against federal regulation. However it was really by Bryan's hand that Nevada's gaming and tourism industries escaped scrutiny to blossom into the most important economic engines of the state in the 1980s and 1990s. This enormous contribution reflects the progressive evolution of Bryan's stalwart states' rights political persona.

Governor (1983- 1989)

¹⁵ Nino, 89.

¹⁶ Guthrie, Transcript.

¹⁷ Nino, 89.

¹⁸ Ibid.



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Richard Bryan significantly benefited from allegations of corruption levied upon his competitor, incumbent Governor Robert List.¹⁹ When he entered the office of the Governor, Richard Bryan inherited a massive budget deficit and immediately set out a plan for reform in his "State of the State Address" for 1983. Bryan noted that "When the legislature adjourned in 1981, it was expected that the state would collect \$417 million dollars in the current year. We will, in fact, take in less than \$353 million dollars leaving the state with a \$64 million shortfall."²⁰ Moreover, Bryan lamented that Nevada had been unable to fund schools on a quarterly basis and was forced to write checks month to month. The return of a \$20 million loan to the retirement system, he argued, would not adequately make up for the shortfall. He advocated changing from a quarterly to a monthly collection of the gaming gross revenue to infuse the state immediately with \$25 million. Bryan then called for a massive reduction in administrative and supervisory services of state programs. Bryan's major tax proposal was to revise the 1981 Tax Shift. He proposed the institution of a personal income tax, which was unconstitutional; new beer and wine taxes; and corporate and civil action filing fees. He also urged the legislature to reinstate the 5.3% gaming gross revenue rates. The property tax would also be reinstated at the local level at a rate of 75 cents per \$100 of assessed valuation because of "serious inequities enacted during the 1981 session;" ultimately voters approved only a 50 cent increase.²¹ He recommended a \$17.1 million increase in funding for schools.

In addition, Bryan proposed constitutional amendments for equal property tax exemption for all properties and established an equitable property tax credit to correct \$33 million in unintended property tax reductions for utilities, railroads and airlines by assessing and taxing their property separate from others. He also modified the unconstitutional statute that required real property be assessed by replacement cost rather than condition; he advocated that depreciated value be based on effective age rather than chronological age to offset this inequity. He also increased general fund revenue from the liquor, insurance premium, gaming, corporate

¹⁹ Warren Bates, "Bryan Leaves Legacy of Success." *Las Vegas Review Journal* February 19, 1999.

²⁰ Governor Richard Bryan, "Biennial Message of the Governor, 1983," January 19, 1983, 1.

²¹ *Ibid.* 8.



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license, fees and fines and federal slot taxes by 17,027,900 from 1983-1984.²² Bryan also devoted much of his energy to economic diversification initiatives, vowing to make Nevada "the next Silicon Valley."²³ State archivist Guy Rocha explained in a 1999 article that "Nevada must look beyond tourism to stage yet another comeback," noting that weak infrastructure, presumably due to revenue shortfalls, undermined Nevada's ability to compete with other states, like California's Santa Clara Valley.²⁴

In 1985, Bryan's reforms went further in an effort to curb state government control over local governments; he amended the law allowing local governments to increase their property taxes by 6% a year. Bryan stated that the budget improved due to revenue enhancements and "national economic recovery" because government "curtailed state agency's spending, doing more with less."²⁵ Due to substantial revenue increases, Bryan expanded state government, increased pay and benefits for state employees, as well as allocated funds for diversification and education programs.

Throughout Governor Bryan's administration (1983-89), he focused on raising revenue and fortifying the state's tax structure. One of the most crucial tax policy studies occurred during his second term, the Price Waterhouse Tax Study conducted by the Governor's Commission to Study the Fiscal Affairs of State and Local Governments in Nevada. The goal of the study according to the 1987 legislature was to "construct a fair and adequate tax structure for the future."²⁶ The study suggested instatement of an income tax, but the findings were ignored when the public voted to constitutionally prohibit the levying of a state income tax in 1988.

In his 1989 "State of the State Address," Bryan focused primarily on the problem of growth. He emphasized the need to enhance revenue in order for the state's infrastructure and schools to keep pace with rising immigration rates. It seemed, according to Bryan, that while the budget crisis was now behind Nevadans because "the state regained its economic vitality, created

²² Background Paper 83-7, "Nevada Tax Relief: 1978-1983," 18-20.

²³ Guy Rocha, "Nevada must look beyond tourism to stage yet another comeback," September 03, 2009.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Governor Richard Bryan, "State of the State Address," January 23, 1985.

²⁶ Guy Rocha, "Myth 146: Another Tax Study?"

<http://nsla.nevadaculture.org/index.php?view=article&catid=130%Aarchives-myth&id=1>



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a record number of new jobs and new businesses and invested more of [its] resources in education than ever before" between 1984 and 1986, a new problem had emerged.²⁷ Population increases meant significant increases in expenditure for schools (roughly \$91 million more) and greater dependence on gaming revenue, which at the time adequately funded state programs. Governor Bryan, however, resigned shortly after in 1989 to become a U.S. Senator, transferring his seat to Democratic Lieutenant Governor Bob Miller.

Throughout his terms, managing the state's budget was of paramount importance, but he was able to improve the economy overall through his efforts to diversify the state's economy. He accurately recalled this as the most significant accomplishment of his gubernatorial career in the November 28th oral history interview.²⁸ He prioritized tourism promotion, established a tourism commission and opened an office in Japan, reorganized the state's Economic Development Department, and called a special legislative session to clear the way for Citicorp to build a regional credit card center. He also made advances in progressive education and healthcare policies.²⁹

Bryan also succeeded in creating an agenda to strengthen the economy through cooperation with business, and deficit reduction through spending cuts. Bryan inherited a substantial shortfall from List after the Tax Shift. His response was to reduce age increases for state employees, a typical conservative move but he remained popular despite this and benefited from overall system recovery in the aftermath of the Reagan recession of 1981-82. Nevada's governors have historically cited 'economic diversification' as the long-term fix for any substantial economic problem. Such diversification has not truly been realized but Bryan achieved diversification of tourism during his term as governor and has argued that greater diversification and a broader tax base is needed in order for Nevada to become a more economically stable overall.³⁰

United States Senator (1989-2001)

²⁷ Governor Richard Bryan, "State of the State Address," January 21, 1987.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Alan Neuhart, *Profiles of Power*, 133.

³⁰ Guthrie, Transcript.



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Finally, as United States Senator, Bryan took on the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste project. According to reporter Warren Bates, Bryan ran his political campaign for the seat against Republican Chris Hecht's soft record and ineffectiveness on the nuclear waste issue. Bryan argued that the weak stance of Republican leadership in Nevada on the issue allowed Congress to draft the "Screw Nevada Bill."³¹ A 1996 case note, "The Future of High Level Nuclear Waste Disposal, State Sovereignty and the Tenth Amendment: Nevada v. Watkins," detailed the case Nevada brought against the federal government for the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982.³² Richard Bryan opposed this bill when it was first introduced while he was Attorney General. Interestingly, Governor Robert List became a lobbyist on behalf of the nuclear waste site, totally abandoning the environmental interest of the state. Other leaders like Mayor Oscar Goodman (D), Governor Kenny Guinn (R), and Senator Harry Reid (D) stood in solidarity in opposition to the bill.³³

While many newspapers reported that Bryan did not want to participate in land use committees as an incoming senator, Bryan claimed otherwise. He stated that not only did he want to serve on that committee, but also that he left the office of the Governor, which had been his most coveted position, because of his passion over the issue, a major benefit to his campaign. As Bryan told it, lobbying against the Yucca Mountain nuclear dump site ranked among his greatest motivators to run for United States Senate.³⁴ His conjoined efforts with Senator Harry Reid resulted in the halting of the Yucca Mountain project of 2009, but ultimately operations began again in 2002 despite arguments by environmentalists and Nevadans against it. Then in 2011, under the influence of Senator Harry Reid, funding for the project was ended in 2011 with the passage of the federal budget.

Richard Bryan worked diligently with Senator Harry Reid, who had been a peer throughout his entire political career, to fight for state control of public lands. While the state

³¹ Warren Bates, "Bryan Leaves Legacy of Success." *Las Vegas Review Journal* February, 19, 1999.

³² Casenote: The Future of High-Level Nuclear Waste Disposal, State Sovereignty and the Tenth Amendment: Nevada v. Watkins," 36 Nat. Resources J. 127, 1996.

³³ Shawn Zeller. "Gambling Millions on Anti-Yucca Lobbying." *National Journal* June 2002.

³⁴ Guthrie, Transcript.



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resisted intrusion by the federal government into affairs, some legislators began seeking a state level growth management policy to complement the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The Southern Nevada Strategic Planning Authority was created under Republican Jon Porter to develop a growth management strategy which would enable the state to reduce saturation of the housing market and control prices. Though the Southern Nevada Strategic Planning Authority did not aggressively stall growth, the BLM continued establishing its own growth boundaries. Sagebrush Rebellion activists had strongly opposed "growth management" by the BLM during the 1970s because it signified direct oversight by the federal government which cramped development and mine operations, impeding productivity. To many, the BLM intruded in state matters. Still, the agency had established "a de facto boundary with a new set of land-use policies."³⁵ Regardless of the BLM's influence, then state legislator Dina Titus pursued her own growth management plan, citing the passage of such measures by other states as evidence that growth was an issue that needed to be dealt with at the state level.

While Titus fought to limit growth, others strove to expand it. Senators Reid and Bryan got the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act passed in 1998 which forced the BLM to push back its southwestern boundaries to allow for new development. SNPLMA provisions enforced land sale and acquisition procedures allowing public land to be sold within a specific boundary around Las Vegas, conferred the McCarran Airport noise-zone land title to Clark County, and sold BLM land for affordable housing. The beneficiaries of revenue raised by these sales include the State of Nevada General Education Fund and Southern Nevada Water Authority, among others. The Public Lands Institute at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas called the act innovative because it set the standard for cooperative conservation; Secretary of the U.S. Department of Interior Gale Norton hailed the act as "one of the best examples of an innovative solution benefiting conservation anywhere in the country."³⁶ The act allowed for acquisition of "environmentally sensitive lands" and promoted "orderly development in the Las Vegas Valley" as well as "lessened the impact of urban growth on Lake Mead National

³⁵ Shaun McKinnon, "Lawmaker Frets over Inaction on Growth," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, January 24, 1999.

³⁶ "SNPLMA," Public Lands Institute, <http://publiclands.unlv.edu/snplma.htm>.



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Recreation Area, Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, and the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area.³⁷ The sale proceeds were allocated for conservation, education, planning for parks, trails, and natural areas in Clark County, capital improvements projects, multi-species habitat conservation plans (MSHCP), environmentally sensitive land acquisitions, and Lake Tahoe restoration act projects. However, according to the Public Lands Institute, "Many projects are being carried out in partnership with community stakeholders."³⁸ Therefore, land sales have benefited business and conservation efforts while it controlled growth.

Richard Bryan enthusiastically took credit for having drafted the SNPLMA while he was serving as U.S. Senator, proving how unlike early Nevada leaders that caved to special interests he was throughout his career. Bryan worked to expand state power and succeeded in many efforts, to the great benefit of the state's interests, primarily its economic development and sovereignty.

Success in Review: Nevada's Richard Bryan

Bryan governed a libertarian state which was highly influenced by its pioneer past. Being a fiscally conservative Democrat, he found it quite easy to straddle the boundary between libertarianism and liberalism, seemingly disparate ideologies. Nevadans eagerly supported his agendas and he enjoyed great popularity because of his alignments and well-articulated dedication to Nevada's interests foremost. Numerous sources have cited his work as successful; however, the *Las Vegas Review Journal* article by Warren Bates titled "Bryan Leaves Legacy of Success" details his weaknesses and failures. Nonetheless, Bates clearly states that Bryan fought, "...for Nevada's right to control gaming, afraid if the state didn't do it, the federal government would. He touted efforts to increase Nevada's share of power from Hoover Dam and to compensate crime victims....[opposed] nuclear waste" and celebrated his position as governor."³⁹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Warren Bates, "Bryan Leaves Legacy of Success," *Las Vegas Review Journal*. February, 19, 1999.



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Bates quoted Bryan as having said, "Just driving into the parking space outside the Capitol and seeing the sign that said 'Governor Bryan' was like a dream. It was something I always wanted."⁴⁰

While some sources claim politicians use "gubernatorial career[s] as political stepping stone[s]," Bryan asserted that he always wanted to be Governor.⁴¹ From childhood, he looked up to figures like Governor Grant Sawyer (1958-1966), a progressive Democrat in a conservative state who enforced integration of casinos, established an Equal Rights Commission, and created the state Gaming Commission to begin cleaning up the casinos. Sawyer even participated in the fight against the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste site until his death in 1996.⁴² While Bryan denies having aped any other politician,⁴³ it is clear that on some issues he was a follower - but perhaps a more successful one, a politician who accomplished more due to a fortuitous political environment, changing times, connections, luck, resourcefulness and unwavering dedication to states' rights.

Richard Bryan's political career as Governor and Senator was long and nuanced. While he suffered some failures and missteps, the majority of his career represents avid support for states' rights, economic interests and conservation, which distinguished him from most of the state's previous leaders. A liberal, he pushed through many progressive bills that improved the credit and healthcare systems; he advocated for equity and fair treatment of women and minorities. But, more than anything, he proved a true success through what he accomplished for the state - an extension of its power and the ability to use it. His political attitude represented that of the ideal western governor. Richard Bryan is a sagebrush liberal; a fiscally conservative Democrat and state-centered thinker, who identifies best as an accomplished past Governor of the great Silver State.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Jeremy D. Walling, "The Gubernatorial Career as Political Stepping Stone," *Midwestern Political Science Association*, 2008.

⁴² Grant Sawyer, *Hang Tough: Grant Sawyer, An Activist In The Governor's Mansion : From Oral History Interviews with Grant Sawyer*, 1993.

⁴³ Guthrie, Transcript.



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