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Letter from the Editors-in-Chief

Dear readers,

As spring settles over Chicago, the city begins to thaw and bloom—reminding us that growth often arrives quietly, then all at once. At the Chicago Journal of History, this spirit of renewal and growth has shaped our work over the past months. It is with great pride that we introduce the latest issue of our journal.

This spring, we welcomed our largest editorial team to date. Our growing staff has brought fresh perspectives and sharp rigor to the review and revision process. Their work—often quiet and behind the scenes—is what makes each article in this issue shine. We are especially proud of how fast this group came together and learned to work with one another, seamlessly meshing in with our senior editors.

Equal to our internal growth, we have expanded our external reach. This year, the Chicago Journal of History became a founding member

of the International Journal Forum, a global coalition of undergraduate history journals. This forum represents a shared commitment to dialogue across borders and institutions—a reminder that history, while rooted in the local and particular, is also global and shared.

Like spring, this issue is full of fresh growth. We proudly feature authors who represent institutions and topics new to the journal. Now more than ever, it is imperative that we welcome and foster challenging ideas. As historians, we must germinate these buds into the sprouting ideas that continue to push history forward.

Thank you for reading—and for growing with us.

Warmly,
Jack Sanders
Talia Halaas
Editor-in-Chiefs
Chicago Journal of History

Building the ‘Lunatic Line:’ Media Narratives of Indian Labor Migration for the Uganda Railway

Valarmathi Vishnu, University of British Columbia

Abstract

The Uganda Railway, often called the “Lunatic Line,” was both a marvel of British imperial ambition and a site of immense human suffering. This paper explores how two newspapers, *The Times of London* and *The East African Standard*, shaped public perceptions of Indian labor migration for the railway’s construction. *The Times* celebrated the project as a triumph of progress and glossed over the brutal realities faced by workers, while *The East African Standard* grappled with local tensions and the complexities of colonial governance. By uncovering these contrasting narratives, this study reveals how media shaped empire-building myths while silencing the laborers’ voices.

Introduction

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception of empire-building, often framing large-scale projects as symbols of progress while obscuring the exploitative realities underpinning them. The Uganda Railway, constructed between 1896 and 1901, was one of the British Empire’s most ambitious undertakings in East Africa, connecting the port of Mombasa in Kenya to Lake Victoria in Uganda. Often referred to as the “Lunatic Line” due to its exorbitant costs and perilous construction, the railway symbolized both the ambition and the contradictions of imperial infrastructure projects.¹ While it was celebrated as a triumph of economic progress and a symbol of British technological prowess, the railway was also a stark representation of the exploitation underpinning colonial infrastructure projects. Central to its construction were thousands of indentured Indian laborers, recruited by British colonial administrators under

harsh and dangerous conditions.² These workers, often derogatorily referred to as “coolies,” endured immense hardships, including disease, inadequate provisions, and perilous working environments.³ While the railway was intended to consolidate British control over East Africa and expand trade routes, it became both a literal and symbolic manifestation of the tensions between imperial ambition and the human cost of colonialism.

The portrayal of this migration in newspapers varied significantly depending on their context. *The Times of London*, a British newspaper with a metropolitan audience, framed the migration as a testament to imperial economic progress and a symbol of the civilizing mission. In contrast, *The East African Standard*, based in colonial Kenya, adopted a more localized perspective which could be seen through its emphasis on the logistical and social challenges of integrating Indian labor into East Africa’s colonial framework in many of their articles.

This paper argues that the portrayals of Indian labor migration in these two newspapers highlight the interplay between imperial ideology and regional colonial governance. While *The Times* emphasized the grandeur of British imperial ambition, *The East African Standard* grappled with the complexities of integrating Indian labor into East Africa’s socio-economic fabric. By situating these narratives within the broader context of British imperial ideology and colonial governance, this paper offers a novel lens to understand how media functioned as both a tool of propaganda and a reflection of contested realities

2 Central Intelligence Agency, Office of National Estimates, *Wider Implications of Uganda’s Expulsion of Its Asians*, October 25, 1972, 2

3 Samuel G. Ruchman. 2017. “Colonial Construction: Labor Practices and Precedents Along the Uganda Railway, 1893–1903,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 50 (2): 263, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44723449>.

1 Charles Miller, *The Lunatic Express: An Entertainment in Imperialism* (London: Penguin, 2001), 321-323

in empire-building.

Historical Background

The Uganda Railway project was a monumental endeavor fraught with extraordinary challenges. Its early stages were marked by mismanagement and misfortune, earning it the nickname the “Lunatic Line.”⁴ George Whitehouse, the chief engineer, faced a steep learning curve as he navigated the perils of East African terrain. Logistics failed almost immediately as half the donkeys purchased to transport goods succumbed to disease, and outdated locomotives from India proved ill-suited for the rugged landscape.⁵

As the railway crept inland, the environment grew even more treacherous. In the arid region of Tsavo, roughly 132 miles from Mombasa, progress came to a halt when a pair of man-eating lions terrorized the camp, killing 28 workers. These predators, later immortalized as the “Man-Eaters of Tsavo,” became a symbol of the project’s dangers.⁶ The railway’s path also crossed swamps, ravines, and dense forests, each presenting its own set of hazards. By 1899, the railhead finally reached Nairobi, then a swampy outpost, laying the groundwork for what would later become Kenya’s capital city.⁷

The workforce was as diverse as it was vulnerable. Approximately 7,500 skilled laborers were brought from India under indenture contracts, joined by 20,000 unskilled workers, including both Indians and East Africans. The conditions they faced were harrowing. Disease, malnutrition, and harsh climates took their toll, with 6,500 Indian workers wounded or disabled and 2,500 losing their lives by the project’s end.⁸ Casualties among

4 Miller, *The Lunatic Express*, 323

5 Ruchman, “Colonial Construction,” 260

6 Bruce D. Patterson. 2023. “The Man-Eaters of Tsavo and the Untapped Potential of Natural History Collections,” Curator: *The Museum Journal* 66 (3): 524, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cura.12562>.

7 Henry Gunston, 2004. “The Planning and Construction of the Uganda Railway,” *Transactions of the Newcomen Society* 74 (1): 50, <https://doi.org/10.1179/tns.2004.003>.

8 Ruchman, “Colonial Construction,” 266.

African workers, whose contributions were often unrecorded, remain unknown but are believed to have been significant. Despite these hardships, many Indian laborers chose to remain in East Africa, ultimately forming vibrant communities that became central to the region’s cultural and economic landscape.⁹

Economically, the railway transformed East Africa. Before its construction, transporting goods like ivory and cotton was arduous and perilous. The new railway reduced transit times from months to days which opened up the region to global trade and made the export of a broader range of commodities viable.¹⁰ Yet, this progress came at a profound human cost and serves as a stark reminder of the exploitation that carried colonial infrastructure projects.

This backdrop of suffering and ambition became fertile ground for media narratives and drew attention from both metropolitan and colonial audiences. *The Times of London*, a leading British newspaper, presented the railway as a testament to the Empire’s economic and civilizing mission by framing Indian labor migration as a necessary sacrifice for imperial progress. In contrast, *The East African Standard*, a regional publication based in Mombasa, adopted a more pragmatic perspective and acknowledged the critical role of Indian labor while also grappling with its socio-economic implications for East Africa. These divergent portrayals reflect the broader dynamics of the empire, where grand ambitions often collided with the grim realities of colonial rule.

Imperial Narratives and Local Realities

The media’s portrayal of Indian labor migration for the Uganda Railway reveals how imperial and colonial priorities were communicated through differing narrative strategies. *The Times* emphasized the economic benefits of Indian labor migration while downplaying the hardships endured by workers. In

9 A.V. Gevorkyan. 2022. “Diaspora and Economic Development: A Systemic View,” *The European Journal of Development Research* 34 (7):1524. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-021-00432-x>

10 Ruchman, “Colonial Construction,” 267.

its article, "Indian Affairs," the newspaper extolled the financial incentives offered to Indian laborers, stating that "clerks who would earn 75–125 rupees a month in Bombay obtain 150–200 rupees in Uganda."¹¹ The piece described the recruitment of "sturdy men" from northern India and emphasized their fitness for the arduous journey inland. While acknowledging the challenges of the "800 miles of a very trying route" to Uganda, *The Times* framed these obstacles as manageable within the broader narrative of British benevolence, thus suggesting that the migration was mutually beneficial for India and East Africa.

At the same time, *The Times* often sensationalized construction challenges to glorify British resilience. An article called, "The Uganda Railway," published two years into the construction of the railway, detailed the threats faced by workers. This included attacks by the infamous "man-eaters of Tsavo," which claimed the lives of 22 laborers. The piece described the lions' audacity in seizing workers from tents and wagons, alongside other adversities such as exceptional rainfall, the tsetse fly, and drought.¹² Despite these difficulties, the article celebrated the railway's progress, declaring that "the work is in full swing" and praising the advance of 96 miles in seven months as a "feat of which the staff may well be proud."¹³ By emphasizing British ingenuity and perseverance, *The Times* reinforced its portrayal of the railway as a symbol of imperial achievement, often glossing over the significant human costs borne by Indian laborers and African populations.

In contrast, *The East African Standard* took a more pragmatic approach, highlighting the indispensable role of Indian labor while addressing the socio-economic tensions it created. An article written two years after the railroad was completed,

11 "Indian Affairs." *Times*, June 1, 1896, 15. The Times Digital Archive <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS251977409/TTDA?u=ubcolumbia&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=4b9de596>.

12 (FROM A CORRESPONDENT.). "The Uganda Railway." *Times*, November 22, 1898, 10. The Times Digital Archive <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS167961462/TTDA?u=ubcolumbia&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=8e95785d>.

13 "The Uganda Railway," *The Times*, November 22, 1898

called, "The Uganda Railway" acknowledged that the project would have been impossible without Indian workers, stating that "the contractors could not have secured the coolie labor without which it would have been impossible to construct the railway."¹⁴ This acknowledgment reflected the critical reliance of colonial infrastructure projects on imported labor, even as the paper revealed the government of India's reluctance to support such migration.

However, *The East African Standard* also reported on the growing resentment among European settlers toward Indian workers, particularly regarding property ownership and economic competition. In its coverage of the "Indian Question," the newspaper highlighted settler anxieties about Indian influence in Nairobi, where Indians had become integral to the town's rapid growth.¹⁵ While some settlers advocated for restricting Indian immigration and confiscating property, the article noted the impracticality of such measures, observing that Indians were essential to the operation of the railway and other public works. It stated, "Indians already possess a great deal of property at Nairobi—their methods have rendered the rapid growth of that town possible."¹⁶ The piece further underscored the necessity of Indian labor for colonial development, asserting that "Indian coolie labour may be necessary for development, especially if public works such as roads, railways, and bridges are to make rapid progress."¹⁷

14 "The Uganda Railway", *East African Standard*, *Mombasa Times and Uganda Argus* January 15, 1903: 4. Readex: African Newspapers. infoweb-newsbank-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/apps/readex/doc?p=WHNPAFR1&docref=image/v2%3A12BE6F7A2FFCBE88%40WHNPAFR1-12BF52FA0948BD50%402416130-12BF-065850C453F0%403-12BF065850C453F0%40.

15 "Indian Question," *East African Standard*, *Mombasa Times and Uganda Argus* (Mombasa, Kenya), April 25, 1908: 17. Readex: African Newspapers. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/apps/readex/doc?p=WHNPAFR1&docref=image/v2%3A12BE6F7A2FFCBE88%40WHNPAFR1-12C0A3010A3A4170%402418057-12BF5C3AFAD89340%4016-12BF5C3A-FAD89340%40>.

16 "Indian Question," *East African Standard*, April 25, 1908

17 "Indian Question," *East African Standard*, April 25, 1908

Despite its critical tone, *The East African Standard* did not fundamentally reject the imperial framework. Its coverage reflected a regional context where governance and social stability often clashed with economic imperatives. By emphasizing the indispensability of Indian labor while also addressing settler concerns, the newspaper walked a fine line between endorsing and questioning British colonial policies. Both newspapers operated within the broader context of British colonial propaganda, which sought to justify and celebrate the Uganda Railway as a symbol of imperial ambition. However, their narratives diverged in focus and tone. While *The Times* leaned heavily on grandiose portrayals of British ingenuity and economic foresight, *The East African Standard* provided a more nuanced view that grappled with the realities of colonial governance and the socio-economic tensions surrounding Indian migration. The contrasting portrayals in these news outlets illustrate the pervasive influence of media in shaping public and regional perspectives, which also speak to the ways imperial and local priorities intersected and diverged even within the British Empire.

Reporting Indian Labor Migration

The reporting styles of *The Times of London* and *The East African Standard* reflected their divergent priorities and target audiences within the British imperial system. While *The Times* sought to promote national pride and the civilizing mission of the British Empire, *The East African Standard* addressed the practical realities and socio-economic implications of colonial governance. These differences in reporting style underscored the ideological and contextual frameworks that shaped their coverage.

The Times employed a narrative style that celebrated the Uganda Railway as a symbol of imperial progress. Its articles often relied on reports and excerpts from colonial administrators, including prominent figures like Captain Frederick Lugard, whose accounts bolstered the legitimacy of Britain's civilizing mission. Lugard was a British soldier and colonial administrator, who had played

a pivotal role in promoting British involvement in East Africa, as he argued for the economic and strategic benefits of establishing the Uganda Protectorate. In an article he wrote on February 6, 1893 for *The Times*, Lugard praised the region's "great natural fertility and very great possibilities,"¹⁸ emphasizing its untapped potential and aligning with broader imperial narratives. By presenting figures like Lugard as authoritative voices, *The Times* ensured its reporting aligned with the goals of British propaganda which cast imperial endeavors as both noble and necessary. Economic considerations also featured prominently in *The Times'* coverage, though often stripped of human cost. An 1898 article on railway expenditures celebrated the project's financial backing, detailing costs under the Uganda Railway Act of 1896, which allocated £3,000,000 for construction.¹⁹ While such reports highlighted the scale of British investment, they glossed over the social and labor-related expenses borne by Indian workers.

In contrast, *The East African Standard* adopted a more pragmatic and detailed approach, reflecting its regional audience of settlers and colonial administrators. The newspaper provided granular insights into the logistics of labor recruitment, as seen in its article, "The Imported Coolie."²⁰ This piece described the meticulous process of selecting Indian laborers, noting requirements for "good character certificates" and the preference for recruits from northern India, regarded as the "finest

18 LUGARD,, F. D. "Captain Lugard On Uganda." *Times*, February 6, 1893, 4. *The Times Digital Archive*. <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS67557446/TTDA?u=ub-columbia&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=9f715770>.

19 "THE UGANDA RAILWAY.-The first account of." *Times*, May 11, 1898, 9. *The Times Digital Archive*. <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS151708331/TTDA?u=ubcolumbia&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=b593f460>.

20 "The Imported Coolie.", *East African Standard*, *Mombasa Times and Uganda Argus* (Mombasa, Kenya), September 26, 1908: 8. Readex: African Newspapers. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/apps/readex/doc?p=WHNPAFR1&docref=image/v2%3A12BE6F7A2FF-CBE88%40WHNPAFR1-12C0A3748F9286C8%402418211-12BF069E70224400%407-12BF069E70224400%40>.

physical type.”²¹ By emphasizing the organizational challenges and the role of colonial agents in recruiting workers, *The Standard* highlighted the practical dependencies of the colonial system on Indian labor.

While *The Times* emphasized imperial achievements through grand narratives, *The East African Standard* provided a more localized and nuanced perspective on Indian labor migration. The Times framed the railway as an emblem of British ingenuity and relied on official accounts and dramatic storytelling to captivate its metropolitan audience. In contrast, *The East African Standard* engaged with the complexities of labor recruitment and colonial administration, which often reflected the lived realities of its regional readership. Together, these reporting styles illuminate the multifaceted nature of British colonialism, where the grand ambitions of empire often collided with the practical challenges of governance.

What Media Tells Us About Empire

The Uganda Railway’s construction symbolized both the ambition and contradictions of empire, and served as a testament to imperial ambition while underscoring the exploitative foundations of colonial rule. Media portrayals of the railway highlight the power of newspapers in shaping imperial narratives. These publications not only reflected their respective audiences’ priorities but also reinforced the ideological frameworks of empire.

Winston Churchill, in *My African Journey*, epitomized the triumphalist tone of British imperial propaganda when he described the Uganda Railway as “a brilliant conception” and marveled at its perseverance: “Through everything—through the forests, through the ravines, through troops of marauding lions, through famine, through war, through five years of excoriating Parliamentary

debate, muddled and marched the railway.”²² Churchill’s romanticized portrayal celebrated the audacity of the project and positioned it as a testament to the Empire’s ingenuity and resilience. However, this framing also glossed over the immense human cost borne by Indian laborers and African populations, whose sacrifices enabled its completion.

The divergent portrayals of Indian labor migration in these publications illuminate the interplay between imperial ambition and colonial governance. For *The Times*, the Uganda Railway was an emblem of British ingenuity, a project that underscored the civilizing mission of the empire. By highlighting wage increases for Indian workers and emphasizing their voluntary participation, *The Times* cast migration as a mutually beneficial arrangement that aligned with Britain’s broader claims of benevolence. However, this framing silenced the harsh realities of labor conditions, reducing workers to mere instruments of empire.

In contrast, *The East African Standard* adopted a more pragmatic tone, acknowledging the indispensability of Indian labor while addressing the socio-economic tensions it introduced. Articles discussing settler anxieties about Indian competition for property and economic opportunities reflected the concerns of a regional audience directly affected by migration. Additionally, *the Standard’s* emphasis on logistical challenges, such as labor recruitment and transportation, underscored the complexities of maintaining colonial infrastructure. Yet, even as it critiqued colonial policies, *the Standard* upheld racial and economic hierarchies by framing Indian laborers as both essential and a source of disruption to the settler economy.

These differing narratives highlight the broader dynamics of empire, where media played an active role in legitimizing colonial exploitation. While *The Times* sought to inspire metropolitan pride by portraying the railway as an emblem of British ingenuity, *The East African Standard* reflected

21 “The Imported Coolie,” *East African Standard* (Mombasa, Kenya), September 26, 1908, 8.

22 Winston Churchill, *My African Journey* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), 4-5, <https://archive.org/details/myafricanjourney00churuoft/page/18/mode/2up>.

the tensions inherent in colonial governance and grappled with the realities of integrating Indian labor into East African society. Both publications, however, operated within a framework that prioritized imperial goals over the lived experiences of laborers. Together, their coverage reinforces how media not only mirrored imperial structures but also shaped public perceptions which helped sustain the systems of power that underpinned colonial rule.

Conclusion

In comparing the narratives of these newspapers, it becomes clear that media played a pivotal role in mediating the relationship between empire and colony. By reflecting and shaping the priorities of their respective audiences, *The Times* and *The East African Standard* offer valuable insights into how imperial and colonial discourses were constructed and contested. The contrasting portrayals reveal broader tensions within British colonialism, where grand imperial ambitions often clashed with the realities of governance in the colonies.

However, this analysis extends beyond the Uganda Railway or British colonial rule. It raises critical questions about the role of media in legitimizing systems of power and shaping public memory. By glorifying infrastructure projects like the railway while silencing the voices of the laborers who built them, these narratives reinforced imperial ideologies that persist in subtle ways today. The erasure of Indian and African laborers from dominant accounts of the railway mirrors broader patterns of exclusion in histories of empire, where the contributions of marginalized groups are often minimized or ignored.

The study of these media narratives also highlights the continuing relevance of interrogating how stories are told and who gets to tell them. In a contemporary world where infrastructure projects and labor migration remain politically charged issues, understanding the dynamics of historical erasure can inform how we approach similar challenges today. By critically engaging with the legacy of imperial media, we are better equipped to question narratives that prioritize the perspectives

of the powerful while marginalizing those who bear the costs.

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“An Alien to the Broad Masses of the People:” Village Life, *Intelligentsia*, and Bolshevism through Composer Sergei Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf*

Amy Baskurt, Princeton University

Abstract

This paper explores perceptions that the Soviet *intelligentsia* maintained about the Russian village, village peasant, and the Soviet state during the 1930s; this is done through an examination of one piece of classical music composition, written by one composer: Sergei Prokofiev’s 1936 *Peter and the Wolf*. While scholarship on the Soviet Union and Soviet composers is commonplace, it often underemphasizes Sergei Prokofiev as exemplary of *intelligentsia* or focuses on too broad a scope of musical composition. Rarely does one see the micro historical lens with which this paper is composed, through principally analyzing Prokofiev’s autobiography and the archived composition of *Peter and the Wolf* itself. While in narration, Prokofiev’s 1936 composition is emblematic of Soviet ideology, the music itself is very Western European, shows Prokofiev’s — and the *intelligentsia*’s — struggles with his village upbringing and with the rise and governance of the Bolsheviks.

Introduction

Students of classical music are familiar with composers of the Soviet Union. These composers are groundbreaking in nature, having produced great music despite the Soviet Union’s “peremptory and dogmatic directive[s]” for art and having a unique relationship with their motherland.¹ Soviet composers were called both heroes and enemies of the Soviet Union at different points in their lives.² Thus, these composers are abundantly taught and studied, and a myriad of secondary sources about

them exists, going as far as to include a work of narrative nonfiction about Shostakovich and the *Leningrad* Symphony.³ In my interest in studying the Soviet composers’ relationship with their homeland, in this paper, I will focus on the composer Sergei Prokofiev and his 1936 composition *Peter and the Wolf*. This composition is an example of pedagogical music, meaning it is a piece of music that is meant to teach lessons, normally to children. In fact, historians have largely accepted that *Peter and the Wolf* was composed to teach lessons about village life to young Soviet children.⁴ From this composition, I wondered what the composer *himself* had to say about *Peter and the Wolf* (i.e., what Sergei Prokofiev was trying to say to Soviet children through his composition).

Consequently, this paper stemmed from my studying and questioning historical conversations on *Peter and the Wolf*. Even though historians have written a lot on Soviet composers’ struggles with their homeland, I noticed that Prokofiev is under-included and misunderstood in scholarship. A large number of historians’ secondary sources lack 1) an emphasis on Sergei Prokofiev as an exemplary composer in demonstrating composers grappling with Soviet rule and or 2) the utilization of one sole piece of music for the purposes of expanding a larger argument (i.e., historians like to generalize and fit all of a composer’s works into their scholarship). Most notably, Prokofiev, his pedagogical composition, and Soviet composers are studied by historian Orlando Figes and music historian Simon Morrison. Historian Orlando Figes is a culprit of the first point

1 Cecil Parrott, “Music in The Soviet Union,” *The Musical Times* 100, no. 1391 (1959), 14-15. <https://doi.org/10.2307/938094>

2 Cecil Parrott, 14-15.

3 M.T. Anderson, *Symphony for the City of the Dead : Dmitri Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad* (Somerville : Candlewick Press, 2017).

4 Harlow Robinson, *Sergei Prokofiev : A Biography* (Paragon House, 1988), 249.

of lacking. In his works *Revolutionary Russia, 1891 - 1991: A History and Natasha's Dance: A Cultural History of Russia*, Figes mentions Shostakovich as a composer who struggled with changing Russian political and cultural landscapes. Additionally, in *Natasha's Dance*, Figes goes as far as to examine teachers and friends of Prokofiev's (e.g., composers Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and Igor Stravinsky, respectively) but circumvents Prokofiev himself. In scholarship and conversation, Dmitri Shostakovich is very often in the spotlight (e.g., on Carnegie Hall's Internet page) due to his more savage battle with the Soviet state.⁵ Music historian Simon Morrison is culpable of the second point that scholarship often misses. In his *The People's Artist : Prokofiev's Soviet Years*, while he does examine a smaller time period in the composer's life, the historian prides himself on exploring all of Prokofiev's Soviet works in order to make his larger argument (that Prokofiev's Soviet-year works were only crafted for economic reasons).⁶ In engaging with this historiography in this paper, I strive to understand the relationship of one composer—Sergei Sergeyevich Prokofiev—with the Russian village, Western world and *intelligentsia*, and the Soviet state. I believe that it is the *internal*—the context, methodology, and thoughts of one Soviet composer, with regard to one specific composition—where answers lie. Eventually, I came to establish the following two questions: First, in what ways can one interpret the composition of Sergei Prokofiev's 1936 *Peter and the Wolf*? Second, how—through both his composition process and the composition itself—does Prokofiev establish his opinions on the societal groups of the Russian village, *intelligentsia*, and Bolshevik government?

Sergei Prokofiev's 1936 composition of *Peter and the Wolf* is a complex piece of music. While the narration, written by Prokofiev himself, makes the piece of music appear to be communist propaganda, this is not entirely true. I argue that the actual music and context of the composition act more as a

metaphor for Prokofiev's turbulent relationship with both the Russian village and his desire to westernize his music and engage with the *intelligentsia*. Emotionally advanced and stylistically western, while also portraying evident socialist values, *Peter and the Wolf* materializes Prokofiev's relationship with his land, his internal conflicts between the village and the *intelligentsia*, and establishes what the composer wished to say about the two.

Throughout this paper, I examine one piece of archival material, primary sources, and secondary sources in concert. My principal primary source is the composer's autobiography and other writings: *Sergei Prokofiev, Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences*, compiled by S. Shlifstein and translated by Rose Prokofieva. As mentioned in the historiography, my predominant secondary sources are historians Orlando Figes's *Revolutionary Russia, 1891 - 1991: A History* and Simon Morrison's *The People's Artist: Prokofiev's Soviet Years*.

In Part I of this paper, I will orchestrate a close reading of Sergei Prokofiev's autobiography. Through this analysis, I aim to understand Prokofiev's thought processes prior to and during his composition of *Peter and the Wolf*, through his own words. I also aim to understand the composer's complex relationship with the Russian village, Soviet Union, and *intelligentsia*. In Part II of this paper, I will combine Part I's analysis with previous historical discourse and sources in order to show those aspects of *Peter and the Wolf* that are indeed Soviet propaganda, a fact that is due to the composer's fear of the Soviet state. Finally, in Part III I will analyze the actual music and original archived score of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, as well as the composer's notes on his composition. Analysis of actual music for the purposes of adding to historical scholarship is rarely seen. I will refute Figes and Morrison's aforementioned dismissals of Prokofiev and show that *Peter and the Wolf* is representative of Prokofiev's internal struggle with the village, Soviet rule, and the *intelligentsia*.

Before going into the paper's analysis, one needs to understand that the question of "what to do with the Russian people (i.e., the Russian peasant and Russian *intelligentsia*)" was at the

5 "Shostakovich and the Soviet State," *Carnegie Hall*, accessed January 11, 2025.

6 Simon Morrison, *The People's Artist : Prokofiev's Soviet Years* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 29.

forefront of Bolshevik political discussions during and before the 1930s.⁷ It is necessary to develop an understanding of changes in the Russian landscape, the mentality, and the lens through which the emerging Bolshevik party in the early twentieth century viewed its people. The sentiment and consciousness of the time period were derived from the conflict between the Bolsheviks and the people of “old Russia.” The Socialist Revolutionary Party (SR) was formed under Lenin and believed that it had to improve the lives of Russian peoples, for they otherwise “could not cope with the challenges of urbanization.”⁸ Writing about Russian peasant life, historian Orlando Figes states that the SR “idealized the peasant way of life [going] into the countryside to educate and organize the peasantry.”⁹ Essentially, under Lenin, the Bolsheviks held an idealistic view that they could educate peasants to be pioneers of socialist ideology. At this point, the Bolsheviks also wanted to eradicate the *intelligentsia*.¹⁰

Later, Stalin created a framework for the crusade against both Russian societal groups — those of the peasant and the *intelligentsia*. He weaponized Bolshevik idealism and injected it into all areas of life (as seen through his violent Five Year Plan (1928 - 1933)). According to Figes, “Stalinism’s vision of modernity gave fresh energy to the utopian hopes of the Bolsheviks. It mobilized a whole new generation of enthusiasts — young ambitious workers, officials[,] and technicians born around the turn of the century and schooled in Soviet values.”¹¹ The Five Year Plan also “complete[ly] overturned] a peasant way of life that had developed over many centuries — and a catastrophe from which the country never recovered. It was a social holocaust — a war against the peasants.”¹² Stalin’s reach for modernity also controlled the arts, which in turn controlled the *intelligentsia*. Stalin pushed for Socialist Realism in 1932 — a “perfection”

in Soviet art and a “regimented orthodoxy for all Soviet artists.”¹³ If a given artist did not concede to the rules and restrictions of Socialist Realism, there was reason to fear them being persecuted or, worse, purged.¹⁴ Prokofiev obeyed elements of Socialist Realism solely in the narration part of *Peter and the Wolf* (as examined in Part II).

Essentially, the Bolshevik party under Lenin and Stalin felt a mix of pride, pity, and hatred for its people. The Bolsheviks viewed peasants as lazy, but even more that the Russian peasant societal condition was the result of tsarist political failure. The Bolsheviks viewed Russian peasants as fixable, and they sought to change and reeducate them. At the same time, the *intelligentsia* needed to be controlled and stopped. Andrei Zhdanov, who was to become the eventual Chairman in charge of Soviet cultural policy and propaganda, fought brutally against Soviet artists and composers throughout the 1930s.¹⁵ “Fixing” a people through the control of Soviet art and music was pursued extensively by Zhdanov.

So, where did Prokofiev fit into this political, cultural, and ideological battle ? Uniquely, the composer did not identify with one particular group (i.e., either the Bolshevik party, the village peasant, or the *intelligentsia*), but rather the composer’s music was affected by *all* groups. Fear of persecution and death by the Soviet state worked in tandem with Prokofiev’s mixed sentiments about the Russian village and the *intelligentsia*, and these relationships are evident in *Peter and the Wolf*. In essence, historians Figes’s and Morrison’s understandings of this composer and composition are faulty, for they respectively omit Prokofiev or view Prokofiev’s Stalin-era works *only* as propaganda created for financial reasons.

Part I: A Close Reading of Sergei Prokofiev,

7 Orlando Figes, *Revolutionary Russia, 1891-1991 : A History* (Henry Holt and Co.), 18.

8 Figes, 13.

9 Figes, 18.

10 Figes, 102.

11 Figes, 4.

12 Figes, 4.

13 Figes, 186-187 ; Brad Weismann, “Peter and the Wolf” - Serge Koussevitzky, conductor ; Richard Hale, narrator ; Boston Symphony Orchestra (1939),” *Library of Congress* (2004). [loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/PeterAndTheWolf.pdf](https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/PeterAndTheWolf.pdf) ; Figes, 186.

14 Figes, 186.

15 Figes, 236.

Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences

A close reading of Sergei Prokofiev's compiled autobiography and memories — *Sergei Prokofiev, Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences* — is the most direct way to gain an understanding of Prokofiev's life and relationship with village life, as a member of the *intelligentsia*, and in connection to the Soviet Union. This critical analysis also contextualizes *Peter and the Wolf* within a time frame of the composer's life, rather than just within the time frame of the Soviet Union. In order to understand the relationship between Soviets, composers, and peasants, details of emotions and rhetoric are vital.

Yet, the composer's autobiography has some obvious limitations. The autobiography only has two chapters. The two chapters are reproductions of what were originally published in *Sovietskaya Muzika* (a magazine on Soviet music).¹⁶ The chapters were published in 1941 and 1946, respectively, and were heavily edited by the composer prior to publication.¹⁷ In the compilation of the two chapters, the composer's edits were reintroduced in the chapters.¹⁸

Firstly, having written and published his autobiography approximately five years after composing *Peter and the Wolf*, writing in hindsight has an effect on what the composer was to say, and there is bound to have been some rewriting. In other words, Prokofiev could have presented his stories from a different angle than the one that is completely factual and unbiased in order to push his own agenda. Furthermore, the five-year gap in time between the publication of the first and second chapters is strange. I am apt to question the reasons for such a long gap in time, including but not limited to : questioning whether the continuation or end of World War II in 1945 had an effect on what Prokofiev desired to express about himself and the Soviet Union, as well as if the gap in space and time would have made him

forget — even purposefully rewrite — some of his experiences. As a third limitation, it is necessary to consider the identity of the primary source's author. Considering that this is Prokofiev's autobiography, Prokofiev would have done everything in his power to promote and defend himself and to write his autobiography in a way that protects himself. Thus, it is logical to conclude that Prokofiev would have omitted facts that presented him in a negative light and is probable that he exaggerated facts that presented him in a positive fashion. Additionally, the autobiography is translated from Russian to English by Rose Prokofieva. In order to avoid confusion, the translator and author Rose Prokofieva is to my understanding not related to the composer Sergei Prokofiev, for the composer only had two children, both of whom were sons who did not have any children named Rose Prokofieva.¹⁹ But, in translating the document, Prokofieva might have encountered difficulties, possibly misunderstanding what the composer was trying to say. As a final limitation, the context of publication is the most pertinent. Originally published in 1941 and 1946, fear was very high during this time. Thus, Prokofiev likely self-censored in order to avoid persecution from the Soviet state ; the facts and objectivity of what Prokofiev wrote are immensely doubtful. Despite the promise of this source, these limitations must be taken into account.

I have already discussed the historical and political context of the time. I will now examine Sergei Prokofiev's relationship with the Russian peasant and the village, as explained through his upbringing. Prokofiev's autobiography tells its reader that the composer outwardly critiqued the village, but, at the same time, was nostalgic about it and viewed it as promising material for his musical compositions.

Sergei Prokofiev was born April 23, 1891 in the village of Sontsovka, Yekaterinoslav Guberina,

16 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, *Sergei Prokofiev, Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences*, trans. Rose Prokofieva (Honolulu, HI : University Press of the Pacific, 2000), 14.

17 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 14.

18 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 14.

19 "Prokofiev : 15 facts about the great composer," *Classic FM*. <https://www.classicfm.com/composers/prokofiev/guides/facts-gallery/> ; "Oleg Prokofiev," *Hay Hill Gallery*. <http://www.hayhill.com/prokofiev/prokofie.htm>

before the October Revolution.²⁰ He was born to parents that were a part of the Russian elite — they were educated, cultured, and cosmopolitan. His father was a Moscovite that managed a huge estate in the village and his mother “played the piano quite well ; chiefly Beethoven and Chopin, which gave [him] a taste for serious music from early childhood.”²¹ With the help of his mother, Prokofiev started learning piano and composing music ; this early education in music was incredibly formative for the composer, through which he “learned to form independent judgment at an early age.”²² Thus, starting at his birth, young Sergei was trained to live a life apart from that of the village. Prokofiev lived a city life within the village, which created a concrete distance between who he was and who he and his parents wanted him to be.

Reflecting on his days of sprightly youth, Prokofiev viewed his life as one that he created. In his first chapter, Sergei Prokofiev described his first interaction with opera. At age eight, Prokofiev’s parents took him to Moscow, and the young boy was “impressed by” *Faust, Prince Igor, and Sleeping Beauty*.²³ Upon returning to his village, the young composer was so inspired that he told his mother “I’m going to write my own opera” and “got to work at once” in June 1900.²⁴ In 1901, Prokofiev performed this opera, *The Giant*, with his cousins at his uncle’s estate.²⁵ Prokofiev described feeling proud of the well-received performance, his uncle stating : “When your operas are performed on the imperial stage [...] remember that your first opera was staged in my house.”²⁶ From this, it is evident that Prokofiev was heavily influenced by his family’s disconnect from the village. At such a young age, the young boy was inspired by what the city had to offer and felt driven to pursue the beauty

of classical music. He was also encouraged by his family to pursue this beauty. Perhaps Prokofiev used classical music composition — and by extension, the city — as the earliest way to leave his village, to which his family did not truly belong anyway. Prokofiev wished to distance himself from the village and hence “went to Moscow for [a] second time.”²⁷ Finally, giving into the desire, at the age of 13, the young composer entered the Conservatoire in St. Petersburg.²⁸

Later, in 1911, the composer joined a group of progressive composers who were based in Moscow, which directly connected him to the elite of the musically progressive magazine, *Muzika* (Music).²⁹ Prokofiev wrote that *Muzika* “gave [him] a good write-up and invited [him] to contribute to it” following his “first performance and [...] first appearance with orchestra as [a] pianist.”³⁰ Prokofiev was fitting into the intelligentsia of modern progressive music and surrounding himself with like-minded composers. The composer’s experiences with city life furthered the distance from the village his childhood had created. Prokofiev adopted the Russian *intelligentsia* mentality and sense of superiority about his music. At the end of his first chapter, Prokofiev noted that he “prefer[red] [his] music to be described as ‘Scherzo-ish’ in quality, or else by three words describing the various degrees of the Scherzo-whimsicality, laughter, mockery.”³¹ With a tone of great disgust, Prokofiev claimed to “strenuously object to [his music being described as] ‘grotesque,’” for the word had “become hackneyed to the point of nausea.”³² Similarly, the composer wrote about his concerto performance in Pavlovsk in 1913. He was thrilled to see that the “modernist critics were in raptures.”³³ The critics had cried: “Brilliant [...] What freshness! [...] What temperament and originality !”³⁴ While

20 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, *Sergei Prokofiev, Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences*, trans. Rose Prokofieva (Honolulu, HI : University Press of the Pacific, 2000), 15.

21 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 15-16.

22 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 16.

23 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 18.

24 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 18.

25 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 18.

26 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 19.

27 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 19.

28 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 22.

29 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 32.

30 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 32.

31 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 37.

32 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 37.

33 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 33.

34 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 33.

the modernists were enthused, “the audience was scandalized. The majority hissed.”³⁵ Through this pride in being superior to those who were not modernists, Prokofiev evidently mocked anyone who was not *bourgeois* (e.g., village peasants) by way of his music.

In his days after conservatory, Sergei Prokofiev focused an era of compositions on a few Russian folk tales written by Afanasyev, titled *The Buffoon*. During this time, he was writing music with the guidance of Sergei Diaghilev, the founder of the Ballets Russes. Diaghilev expressed to Prokofiev: “Only [...] write music that will be truly Russian [since] they’ve forgotten how to write Russian music in that rotten Petersburg of yours.”³⁶ Prokofiev then thought to look into his childhood for material in order to succeed musically during this era: I settled down to composing the thematic material for *The Buffoon*, trying to make it as truly Russian as possible. In my childhood in Sontsovka I had often heard the village girls singing in chorus on Saturday evenings or on Sundays. I do not know whether Sontsovka was especially poor in folk songs, or whether it was the crude, raucous manner of the local singers that irritated me — they always yelled at the top of their voices — but their performance had not impressed me with the beauty of Russian folk music and I did not remember a single tune. It is possible, of course, that subconsciously I was affected by the village songs, for now the Russian national idiom came quite easily to me. It was as if I had stumbled upon an unsuspected store of wealth, or as if I had planted seeds in virgin soil that were now bearing rich fruit. By the end of the summer all six scenes [of *The Buffoon* composition] were finished.³⁷

This story offers a deeper understanding of Prokofiev. Despite judging music through the *intelligentsia* superiority that he developed at a young age and that grew over his lifetime, this was not the composer’s sole vector. As gathered from this story, even within the *intelligentsia*, opinions of the relationship between folk music — from

Russian villages — and the process of creating contemporary music differed. Somehow, Prokofiev both disliked the sounds of Russian village music and understood its potential as “an unsuspected store of wealth.”³⁸ Hence, Prokofiev’s discussion on gathering material for *The Buffoon* is important; it indicates Prokofiev’s struggle, for during this time the composer grappled with *how* his upbringing and opinions about the changing Russian landscape were going to change his music. Additionally, this story helps to understand the ways in which Prokofiev viewed his upbringing. One is able to gather that Prokofiev was not entirely dissatisfied with growing up in a Russian village; rather, he showed us that he viewed the village with some sentimentality.

Sergei Prokofiev’s autobiography provides more than just insight into the composer’s relationship with the village and the *intelligentsia*. The composer’s relationship with the Bolshevik revolution — and with Lenin and Stalin — was proven to be equally as complicated. Prior to the October Revolution of 1917, during the February Revolution of that same year, Prokofiev wrote that he was in Petrograd and “welcomed [the revolution] with open arms.”³⁹ Prokofiev recounted that he was writing *Fugitive Visions*, which “reflected [...] the feeling of the crowd [at that point in time] rather than the inner essence of the Revolution.”⁴⁰ Here, the composer expressed a new and crucial feeling : fear. As mentioned in the limitations, the years of publication 1941 and 1946 are notable, for written works about the Soviet state were heavily monitored. Prokofiev had to be incredibly careful in what he wrote, thus avoiding politics seemed like the composer’s best option. Further evidence of this fear is seen in the composer’s writings on the October Revolution. Prokofiev did not participate in it and instead took advantage of the opportunity to leave his country. Addressing the Bolsheviks’ taking control, the composer wrote:

I had not the slightest idea of the scope and significance of the October Revolution. It never occurred to me that like any other citizen I might be

35 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 33.

36 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 39.

37 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 40.

38 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 40.

39 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 46.

40 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 46.

of use to it. And hence the idea of going to America took root in my mind. I believed that Russia had no use for music at the moment, whereas in America I might learn a great deal and interest people in my music at the same time.⁴¹

Prokofiev was by no means a revolutionary, nor was he a tsarist. In regard to the October Revolution, he continued to write with great trepidation and aimed to avoid conflict. He claimed that he left the Soviet Union during the October Revolution because he did not understand it and because he did not think he would be of use to the Bolsheviks. From this, the composer had a considerable amount of privilege, for he was able to part from his homeland when his fear became too great. With this advantage, the composer had the means and abilities to distance himself. However, it is again incredibly easy to refute what the composer wrote. His true reason for leaving the Soviet Union (I assume that he left out of fear) was unwritten.

However, no matter the reason, the composer did travel West during the October Revolution. Going to America was an easy choice for him, despite being begged by Anatoly Lunacharsky to stay in Russia under the emerging Bolshevik rule. Prokofiev wrote about this encounter with Lunacharsky, who claimed that the two men, as revolutionaries in different domains, should work together.⁴² Later, Prokofiev held to have “missed [his] chance of becoming part of the life of the new Russia at its very birth” when he left the USSR.⁴³ Nonetheless, despite needing to be taken with a grain of salt, Prokofiev’s discourse on and prior to the October Revolution furthers the composer’s complicated relationship with his homeland. At the same time that he sought America as a way to stay safe in a time of uncertainty, the composer missed his country. Prokofiev displayed similar traces of sentimentality towards Russia throughout his autobiography.

Prokofiev’s initial feelings about his country’s changing dynamics persisted under Stalin’s rule (starting in 1922). Prokofiev published that he was

at this time “very anxious to start working on Soviet themes” and “interested in subject matter that would assert the positive elements [of life in Soviet Russia]. The heroic aspects of socialist construction. The new man. The struggle to overcome obstacles.”⁴⁴ While appearing to buy into the Soviet way of life under Stalin, one can quickly doubt this. Under Stalin’s increased violence, the composer’s fear had to have increased. In order to avoid persecution, the composer had to claim that he was excited to work on Soviet themes in his music. Despite his increased fear, it is true that Prokofiev wished to create beautiful music about his beautiful country. Upon returning to the Soviet Union, he wrote: “How can I describe my feelings on returning to my native land !”⁴⁵ The composer felt “the moving spirit” of his old composer friends, and went straight into rehearsal with Moscow’s orchestra.⁴⁶ Overall, while incredibly scared of Soviet rule, Prokofiev’s love for his country and for creating music seeps through his autobiography. In this story, Prokofiev had great sentimentality. Prokofiev loved his country, was affected by the Soviet Union’s changes, and was nostalgic for what his country looked like before being surrounded by such intense fear.

Sergei Prokofiev’s autobiography gives extensive insight into the composer’s feelings about village life, the musical *intelligentsia*, and Soviet governance. Simultaneously, it yields the composer’s opinions on composition. Throughout his publication, the composer presented times spent in the United States of America and different European cities. Starting in his youth, Prokofiev idealized westernized cities. After finishing his studies at Conservatoire, his family sent him to London to continue his music studies “as a reward for having done well at the final exams.”⁴⁷ Prokofiev wrote that “everything in London was so interesting” that he “was hardly aware of the approaching European war [World War I].”⁴⁸ This moment in the composer’s life demonstrates

41 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 49.

42 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 50.

43 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 50.

44 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 82.

45 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 69.

46 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 69.

47 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 37.

48 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 38.

Prokofiev and Prokofiev's family's values. His family was able to enjoy privilege (as part of the cosmopolitan *intelligentsia*) and voyages to Europe, which allowed the composer to equate European composition with beautiful composition.

Throughout the 1930s, the composer toured extensively around Europe and America. Prokofiev wrote that touring let him "accumulate[...] some material" and develop his "lyrical subject[s]" that he would otherwise not have been able to do.⁴⁹ In 1936, the composer returned to Moscow because the opportunity arose to compose *Peter and the Wolf*.⁵⁰ Through the composer's travels, one can understand the composer's relationship with the West. Prokofiev was a musical idealist who wished to establish himself in places — cities — where his modern music was liked and where he could develop his compositions.

In short, Sergei Prokofiev's autobiography is riddled with experienced combinations of fear, frustration, self-importance, and sentimentality. The composer's emotions were not directed towards one societal group, but rather towards all groups: the village peasant, the *intelligentsia* and West, and the Bolsheviks. This is seen through his stories, wording, and tone in his writings of these groups.

The interactions between Prokofiev's responses to these groups provide a nuanced emotional basis for Prokofiev in the years leading up to 1936. By 1936, Prokofiev's feelings about Soviet rule, the Russian village, and the bourgeoisie were mixed but solidified. While he outwardly claimed to dislike the Russian village and its music, Prokofiev was partially nostalgic and kind towards his upbringing. He wrote that he wanted "to convey the true flavour of childhood" in his music.⁵¹ On *intelligentsia*, Sergei Prokofiev's autobiography presents the reader with his love of European and *intelligentsia* musical style — which, in Parts II and III, I will explain that scholars and Bolsheviks define these musical styles as modernist and formalist. The composer's modernization in music found its roots in old, beautiful structures of music. Finally,

49 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 85-86.

50 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 88.

51 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 88.

in regard to Sovietism, Prokofiev tried to remain apolitical out of fear (the autobiography having been published in 1941 and 1946). He wrote as if he were neutral about the Bolshevik revolution. Under Lenin's rule, unsure about the future of the Soviet Union, Prokofiev fled his country. When Stalin led the USSR, the composer cautiously returned to compose in his homeland. His autobiography shows that Prokofiev loved his country and was concerned about how the Bolsheviks were changing it.

Hence, *Sergei Prokofiev, Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences* provides *Peter and the Wolf*'s foundations. One can start to make sense of *Peter and the Wolf* through an understanding of the composer's mental state and personality, determined by the composer's relationship with his context. *Peter and the Wolf* captures the composer's emotions and Western musical style — but also portrays socialist values in its narration — in order to realize the composer's relationship with his land and these societal groups.

Part II: Peter the Soviet Pioneer — Sergei Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* as Propaganda

Scholars vastly agree that *Peter and the Wolf* was exemplary of Socialist Realism — a stylistic perfectionism that the Soviet Union created around the arts.⁵² Socialist Realism was born during the 1930s out of Stalin's wish to pursue art "that featured idealistic depictions of the common man, depictions that were mandated, reviewed, critiqued, and censored by the central government."⁵³ At the time, Stalin would release a line up of decrees offering a template for Socialist Realism ; "art had to be Proletarian, Partisan, Realistic and Typical."⁵⁴ On the contrary, Stalin and the Soviet government hated the flourishing Avant Garde style in the arts

52 Brad Weismann, "Peter and the Wolf" -- Serge Koussevitzky, conductor ; Richard Hale, narrator ; Boston Symphony Orchestra (1939)," *Library of Congress* (2004). <https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/PeterAndTheWolf.pdf>.

53 Brad Weismann, "Peter and the Wolf."

54 Ivan Lindsay, "Russian art history has been hijacked by the West," *Lindsay Russian Art - Agents and Dealers in Russian Art* (2017). <https://www.russianartdealer.com/journal/russian-art-history-hijacked-west/>

: the formalist and naturalistic movements, which had been deemed anti-Soviet.⁵⁵

Prior to writing *Peter and the Wolf*, Prokofiev was scared about receiving the “anti-formalist, anti-Western backlash affecting Shostakovich” and therefore avoided certain productions (e.g., producing *Romeo and Juliet* at the Leningrad Choreographic Technical College appealed to him but was too risky).⁵⁶ Out of fear, Prokofiev readily accepted Soviet restrictions on production and composition and, in writing *Peter and the Wolf*, fueled Stalin’s desired “new” art world. During the 1930s, the composer was forced to adhere to Stalin’s rules of Soviet Realism if he wanted to avoid being purged.⁵⁷ In 1936, Natalia Satz — who was, at the time, the director of the Moscow Children’s Musical Theater — sought Prokofiev’s composition. Satz had commissioned the youth poet Antonina Sokolovskaya to write the narration ; however, Prokofiev rejected Sokolovskaya’s work, declared it as too poetic and distracting, and decided to write his own narration.⁵⁸ Prokofiev completed *Peter and the Wolf* within a few short weeks.⁵⁹ Prokofiev wrote that “there was a big demand for children’s music” at this time, due to music’s ability to serve as a way to transfer knowledge.⁶⁰ The composer premiered *Peter and the Wolf* in

55 Andrei Zhdanov, “On Music : Concluding Speech at a Conference of Soviet Music Workers, 1948,” *On Literature, Music and Philosophy* (London : Lawrence and Wishart, 1950). https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit_crit/zhdanov/lit-music-philosophy.htm#s3

56 Simon Morrison, *The People’s Artist : Prokofiev’s Soviet Years* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 44.

57 Caryl Emerson, “Leo Tolstoy and the Rights of Music Under Stalin (another Look at Prokofiev’s Party-Minded Masterpiece, War and Peace),” *Tolstoy Studies Journal* 14 (2002), 1. <https://login.ezproxy.princeton.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/leo-tolstoy-rights-music-under-stalin-another/docview/3062163056/se-2>.

58 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, *Sergei Prokofiev, Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences*, trans. Rose Prokofieva (Honolulu, HI : University Press of the Pacific, 2000), 88.

59 “Prokofiev’s ‘Peter and the Wolf’ is 50 Years old,” *The New York Times*, accessed January 11, 2025.

60 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, *Sergei Prokofiev, Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences*, trans. Rose Prokofieva (Honolulu, HI : University Press of the Pacific, 2000), 88.

1936, at the height of Stalin’s purges, and therefore it is obvious that the composition had to be some form of propaganda. Thus, historian Morrison is not entirely incorrect in his assessment of *Peter and the Wolf*, for the composer was afraid of being persecuted and killed.

Peter and the Wolf aimed to introduce the Soviet youth to orchestra instruments through an enchanting narration.⁶¹ Prokofiev’s narration created the main character, Peter, as a “Soviet boy scout” and a “head-strong, goodhearted Pioneer who sets wrong to right by defying an elder.”⁶² Similarly, Prokofiev’s work gives examples of Soviet values of the time, including (but not limited to) featuring a “group [not one single] of heroes,” prioritizing “humanity and nature living in harmony,” being “profoundly humanist,” and having an “optimistic ending in that the wicked wolf is defeated and that the duck seems to have survived in the wolf’s stomach” ; the piece concludes in a triumphant procession, in which the group of heroes uniformly march with their captured wolf to the zoo.⁶³ In Prokofiev’s fear of Stalin, the composer’s *written* narration was very much in line with Socialist Realism. However, *Peter and the Wolf* is not just a narrative work ; it is not solely made of words, but also of music.

While historians such as Morrison and critics such as Weismann see *Peter and the Wolf* as nothing more than propaganda, this assumes that Prokofiev’s motives were utterly political. I argue that *Peter and the Wolf*’s narration was limited to being propaganda in spite of the composer’s true wishes. Prokofiev was not a Soviet ideologue, but, when necessary, Prokofiev understood that adaptability was crucial and therefore crafted said narration. However, while conceding to Sovietism in his narration, the composer was unable to do this musical composition. Art dealer

61 Simon Morrison, *The People’s Artist : Prokofiev’s Soviet Years* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 46.

62 Simon Morrison, 45-46.

63 Jenny Farrell, “Prokofiev’s ‘Peter and the Wolf’ : A beloved piece of music for children,” *People’s World* (2021). <https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/prokofievs-peter-and-the-wolf-a-beloved-piece-of-music-for-children/>

Ivan Lindsay supports adaptability within the arts in his explanation of changing Soviet art styles, from formalism (e.g., Avant Garde) to Socialist Realism. Lindsay understands that “Western art historians [as well as a select number of Russian art historians] say that the Bolsheviks crushed creativity and destroyed the Avant Garde in the early 1930’s, when they created the Socialist Realist template.”⁶⁴ Instead of sustaining the Avant Garde, “leading Soviet thinkers [...] wanted art to return to a more traditional style that would promote the new Soviet State and be more familiar to Russian people.”⁶⁵ Thus, while in narration this may be true, it is much too dismissive of Morrison to call *Peter and the Wolf* nothing short of propaganda, for doing so assumes that Prokofiev created propaganda out of his own desire. Instead, composers along with Prokofiev were grappling with the changing Soviet art landscape and wanted to have their own style. Prokofiev wrote that he wished to have his own style in his autobiography, in which he desired his music to contain “degrees of the Scherzo-whimsicality, laughter, mockery.”⁶⁶ Hence, while Prokofiev’s narration adhered to Stalin’s Socialist Realism, his music was occidental.⁶⁷

Part III : Content & Composition — Sergei Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf* as a Metaphor

Through the music and composer’s notes of Sergei Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf*, one can understand that Prokofiev’s music opposed rules of Soviet propaganda. Putting this in conversation with the composer’s autobiography, one can deduce that the composer housed a significant amount of

64 Ivan Lindsay, “Russian art history has been hijacked by the West,” *Lindsay Russian Art - Agents and Dealers in Russian Art* (2017). <https://www.russianartdealer.com/journal/russian-art-history-hijacked-west/>

65 Ivan Lindsay, “Russian art history has been hijacked by the West.”

66 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, *Sergei Prokofiev, Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences*, trans. Rose Prokofieva (Honolulu, HI : University Press of the Pacific, 2000), 37.

67 Ivan Lindsay, “Russian art history has been hijacked by the West,” *Lindsay Russian Art - Agents and Dealers in Russian Art* (2017). <https://www.russianartdealer.com/journal/russian-art-history-hijacked-west/>

love for Europe and the *intelligentsia*, and *Peter and the Wolf* acted as a love letter to Western music, from which the composer gained a lot of influence in his musical upbringing and instruction.

For my analysis, I will use Sony Music Entertainment’s 1978 LP record release of *Peter and the Wolf*. This version is performed by The Philadelphia Orchestra, conducted by Eugene Ormandy, and narrated by David Bowie. This LP has 13 tracks on it and is one of the most popular audio recordings of Prokofiev’s piece.⁶⁸ I will additionally be looking at the *New York Philharmonic’s* Shelby White & Leon Levy Digital Archives, where Prokofiev’s original notes, score, and parts for *Peter and the Wolf* can be found. Both of these sources will be used with Prokofiev’s autobiography.

Collected from his autobiography, the most obvious notion in Prokofiev’s *Peter and the Wolf* narration is his fear of the Soviet Union. Composing *Peter and the Wolf* in the Soviet Union was a way to receive money and applause for his work as a composer.⁶⁹ While Prokofiev’s opportunism is true, this definition limits the composer. Sergei Prokofiev was a musical idealist, forever in his pursuit of beauty. Again, Prokofiev was not a Soviet idealogue, but his fear of being persecuted as a formalist caused him to adhere to Soviet Idealism. However, the composer’s pursuit of beauty clashed with his adherence to rules of Soviet composition, which ultimately led to his being criticized in a 1948 Zhdanov decree.⁷⁰

Peter and the Wolf reveals Western style’s influence on Prokofiev. The composition is an incredibly occidental piece of music, in both the composition and the composition’s myriad of adaptations. *Peter*, the bird, the duck, the cat, *Peter’s* grandfather, the wolf, and the hunters are

68 “Peter and the Wolf” : a selective discography,” *Chicago Symphony Orchestra* (February 04, 2022). <https://cso.org/experience/article/8681/peter-and-the-wolf-a-selective-discography>

69 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, *Sergei Prokofiev, Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences*, trans. Rose Prokofieva (Honolulu, HI : University Press of the Pacific, 2000), 63.

70 “The Zhdanov Decree 1948,” *DSCH Journal No. 9* (1998). https://dschjournal.com/wordpress/onlinearticles/dsch09_zhdanov.pdf

the characters that appear in the piece ; each of these characters is represented by their own instrument. This type of composition is defined as programme music : music that includes description or narration, which is only seen in Western composition and was mostly seen towards the end of the 19th century.⁷¹ Franz Liszt was the first to define programme music, saying that it “guard[ed] the listener against a wrong poetical interpretation” and “direct[ed] the listener’s attention to the poetical idea of the whole or to a particular part of it.”⁷² Considering that Prokofiev spent a lot of his life in Europe — notably studying in London and touring in a variety of Western cities — the influence of Western music styles is not surprising. However, the fact that this genre of music was specifically chosen, a genre that was not very popular to begin with and that reached its height of popularity decades before Prokofiev composer *Peter and the Wolf*, leads me to see that Prokofiev was retaliating against Stalin’s Socialist Realism through this composition.

Despite returning to the Soviet Union to composer *Peter and the Wolf*, the composer had a difficult time leaving the spirit of Europe behind, due to the continent’s production of beautiful music (e.g., in 1932, Prokofiev joined a society of Paris-based composers called “Triton” whilst in France, where he learned how to compose through watching his Western peers).⁷³ In the composer’s archived score, notes, and parts, Prokofiev wrote in the original margins of the first performance’s “Supplementary Materials” that he wished to remove a lot of the first violin part’s slurred notes.⁷⁴ Instead, the composer wanted *staccato* — short, punchy, and separated — notes for the violin’s part, which are much more emblematic

71 Roger Scruton, “Programme music,” *Grove Music Online* (2001), 1. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.22394>

72 Roger Scruton, 1.

73 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, *Sergei Prokofiev, Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences*, trans. Rose Prokofieva (Honolulu, HI : University Press of the Pacific, 2000), 83.

74 Sergei Prokofiev, *Peter and the Wolf*, Opus 67 - Score and Parts, New York Philharmonic Shelby White & Leon Levy Digital Archives (accessed via <https://archives.nyphil.org>).

of Western Avant Garde music than of the desired simplicity and smoothness of Soviet Realism, as defined by Chairman Zhdanov in his 1948 decree.⁷⁵ Chairman Zhdanov implored simplicity within Soviet composition and defined formalism in music as “the denial of the basic principles of classical music, the prosounding (sic) of atonality, dissonance, and disharmony [,] is strongly redolent (sic) of the contemporary modernistic, bourgeois music of Europe and America [,and was defined by] a chaotic accumulation of sounds.”⁷⁶ Zhdanov stated that “classical music [should be] marked by its truthfulness and realism, its ability to blend brilliant artistic form with profound content, and to combine the highest technical achievement with simplicity and intelligibility. Formalism and crude naturalism [which appear everywhere in *Peter and the Wolf*] [were] alien to classical music in general and to Russian classical music in particular.”⁷⁷ Nonetheless, Prokofiev created zestful formalism in the violin parts, going as far as to write that notes needed to be played as short as possible at the very beginning of the piece.⁷⁸ In order to increase the power of the violin part, Prokofiev finally decided to add additional violinists into the orchestral performance.⁷⁹ In his doing so, the composer’s work fit into Zhdanov’s “chaotic accumulation of sounds.”⁸⁰ Similarly, Prokofiev’s orchestration (i.e., each instrument chosen for each character) demonstrated an evident anti-Soviet sentiment. Scrawled over his original score, Prokofiev noted that “[the] villain, the wolf, is represented by sinister

75 “The Zhdanov Decree 1948,” *DSCH Journal No. 9* (1998). https://dschjournal.com/wordpress/onlinearticles/dsch09_zhdanov.pdf

76 “The Zhdanov Decree 1948.”

77 Andrei Zhdanov, “On Music : Concluding Speech at a Conference of Soviet Music Workers, 1948,” *On Literature, Music and Philosophy*

78 Sergei Prokofiev, *Peter and the Wolf*, Opus 67 - Score and Parts, New York Philharmonic Shelby White & Leon Levy Digital Archives (accessed via <https://archives.nyphil.org>).

79 Sergei Prokofiev, *Peter and the Wolf*, Opus 67 - Score and Parts.

80 “The Zhdanov Decree 1948,” *DSCH Journal No. 9* (1998). https://dschjournal.com/wordpress/onlinearticles/dsch09_zhdanov.pdf

horns,” in which he underlined the word “sinister” himself, increasing the importance of representing the wolf as scary.⁸¹ The wolf in the story goes directly against Peter, challenging the young Soviet Pioneer. Hence, through the composition itself, Sergei Prokofiev’s public and dangerous battle against Sovietism was evident.

Prokofiev’s disdain for the Russian village was just as evident, as seen through his use of older characters. These older characters are Peter’s grandfather and the hunters from the village. While Peter is youthful, a part of a new and proud generation that was to physically and politically outlive all that was considered old and backwards, the pioneer boy is surrounded by characters of archaic ideals, a story which fits in line with Zhdanov’s Soviet Idealism. In other words, Peter was the Soviet whereas the adults in the composition were the tsarists and villagers. Prokofiev introduces the village’s hunters first; these hunters were supposed to aid Peter in his pursuit of the wolf. Introducing these hunters into the story, Prokofiev “portrayed [them] as stupid,” for “they followed [the wolf] and fired [randomly and at will] from guns” — sounds which are depicted through timpani drums.⁸² The hunters do not appear until track 12 of the LP record, the second to last track of the piece. In doing this, Prokofiev claimed that hunters are unhelpful and lazy — it is up to Peter to lead them. The hunters appear during the celebratory march of the piece, which is “playful, springy, with unexpected accents, sharp, bouncing.”⁸³ They flaunt “their courage, which

81 Sergei Prokofiev, *Peter and the Wolf*, Opus 67 - Score and Parts, New York Philharmonic Shelby White & Leon Levy Digital Archives (accessed via <https://archives.nyphil.org>).

82 Tatyana Martynova, “Heroes Peter and the wolf Prokofiev. Sergei Prokofiev - Peter and the Wolf,” accessed January 11, 2025. <https://journalist-nsk.ru/en/buildings/geroi-petya-i-volk-prokofev-prokofev-sergei---petya-i-volk-smotret-chtotakoe.html> ; Sergei Prokofiev, *Peter and the Wolf*, with David Bowie (narrator) and the Philadelphia Orchestra, conducted by Eugene Ormandy, track 12, Sony Music Entertainment, May 02 1978, LP record.

83 Tatyana Martynova, “Heroes Peter and the wolf Prokofiev. Sergei Prokofiev - Peter and the Wolf,” accessed January 11, 2025. <https://journalist-nsk.ru/en/buildings/geroi-petya-i-volk-prokofev-prokofev-sergei---petya-i-volk-smotret-chtotakoe.html>

they have not had time to demonstrate. Playful decorations are heard in the melody, and jumping, scattered chords are heard in the accompaniment. At the end of the hunters’ march, [the listener can hear] their menacing and worthless firing.”⁸⁴ Prokofiev poked fun at the village through the hunters’ pride. Peter chooses to fight the wolf because he is a good Soviet, while the hunters aim to take credit for Peter’s victory. Prokofiev mocked village life through *Peter and the Wolf*. Leaving and distancing himself from his village at age 13, Prokofiev saw village life as silly and uncultured.⁸⁵ Therefore, putting *Peter and the Wolf* in conversation with Prokofiev’s autobiography adds to the ways in which the composer’s presentations of the village contradict each other and presents an interesting dichotomy. In his autobiography, the composer outwardly criticized his village upbringing, but he also showed the musical promise and nostalgia that the village gave him going into 1936 (as discussed in Part I).⁸⁶ The composer’s use of a village as the setting of *Peter and the Wolf* could be evidence of its “musical promise,” but it is more likely that Prokofiev wished simply to add to his mocking of the village.

Another of Prokofiev’s characters that represents Russia’s past is Peter’s grandfather, who first appears in track 5 of the LP.⁸⁷ At this point in the story, Peter’s grandfather is upset with him. Grandfather drags his disobedient son back to the family house in an attempt to make sure that the boy does not continue his pursuit of the wolf.⁸⁸ Evidently, Peter disobeys his grandfather, for he understands his moral duty as a Soviet is to pursue the wolf. In addition to the hunters’ being lazy, ignorant, and greedy, Peter’s

84 Tatyana Martynova, “Heroes Peter and the wolf Prokofiev.”

85 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, *Sergei Prokofiev, Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences*, trans. Rose Prokofieva (Honolulu, HI : University Press of the Pacific, 2000), 22.

86 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 40.

87 Sergei Prokofiev, *Peter and the Wolf*, with David Bowie (narrator) and the Philadelphia Orchestra, conducted by Eugene Ormandy, track 5, Sony Music Entertainment, May 02 1978, LP record.

88 Sergei Prokofiev, *Peter and the Wolf*, with David Bowie (narrator) and the Philadelphia Orchestra.

grandfather is harsh and, even worse, scared. This contrasts Peter's intrepid pursuit of the wolf. Again, in Prokofiev's original "Supplementary Materials," he noted that "grandfather [was to be represented by]...a big, deep bassoon."⁸⁹ Prokofiev wrote the ellipses himself, adding a dislikeable and ominous air to the character of grandfather.

Lastly, I must explore how *Peter and the Wolf* was handled after its creation. Following the composition's debut at and by the Moscow Children's Theater — for which the composition was commissioned — the first recorded version of *Peter and the Wolf* was completed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1939, in the United States. This is proof of Prokofiev's desire to return to the West. The composer's economic prospects for *Peter and the Wolf* initially came from the Soviet Union. While attaining success in the Soviet Union was possible, it was just as possible in the United States. Since staying in the Soviet Union was stifling his musical growth, the composer weighed his options. In short, Prokofiev did not want to limit his art, so when the composer found the possibility to make advancements in composition and reap the financial rewards of performances of his compositions, he took full advantage of them (i.e., he took full advantage of the United States).⁹⁰ Touring and venturing into Western Europe and the United States had historically provided Prokofiev with these two elements, thus recording in the United States seemed like the natural option. The composer took full advantage of *Peter and the Wolf* after its debut, used it as a vector to return to the Occident, and enhanced his income and prestige.

The composer believed in musical opportunism, which started in his youth and continued into his time of writing *Peter and the Wolf*. As seen in his autobiography, even in his youth the composer took advantage of traveling and learning as much as possible for the sake of music. All of this comes back to the composer's all-consuming pursuit of

89 Sergei Prokofiev, *Peter and the Wolf*, Opus 67 - Score and Parts, New York Philharmonic Shelby White & Leon Levy Digital Archives (accessed via <https://archives.nyphil.org>).

90 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, *Sergei Prokofiev, Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences*, trans. Rose Prokofieva (Honolulu, HI : University Press of the Pacific, 2000), 66.

music. The composer goes as far as to say that "the story [of *Peter and the Wolf*] was important only as a means of inducing the children to listen to the music."⁹¹ While the composition provides evidence of prejudices and opinions on the Soviet state and the village, *Peter and the Wolf* was another one of Prokofiev's attempts at beauty in music. Anything that got in the way of Prokofiev's quest — i.e., the backwardness of the Russian village and the stringency of the Soviet Union — had to be criticized. Through the composer's personality as *intelligentsia*, it is understood that he did everything possible for music. In short, despite Prokofiev's traces of sentimentality towards his upbringing (as seen throughout his autobiography), *Peter and the Wolf* did not manifest these opinions. Instead, the composer felt the need to emphasize his negative opinions and mock the societal groups that prevented him from pursuing musical excellence.

Conclusion

Clearly, Sergei Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf* in narration, content, and composition has complexity baked into it. As mentioned, historical scholarship on the subject tends to dismiss the importance of Prokofiev's music in the larger struggle of Soviet composers to find their place in the bouleversement of Soviet society — and of their homeland — throughout the whole of the 1930s. Oftentimes historical conversations ignore the depth and aliveness of Soviet composers, including Sergei Prokofiev. As examples of this historiography, Orlando Figes and Simon Morrison misunderstand the role of Prokofiev up until 1936, but they do so differently. Figes does so by undermining Prokofiev's importance, while Morrison dismisses Prokofiev's works as the result of the composer's opportunism.

As seen in the intricate interactions between his autobiography, musical work, and historical context, Prokofiev was not the most cohesive in his thoughts surrounding the Russian village, the *intelligentsia*, and Sovietism. Prokofiev was quite simply a human, unsure about his place in the

91 Sergei Prokofiev and S. Shlifstein, 88.

world during a time of great change. *Peter and the Wolf* was therefore a way for Prokofiev to voice his layered opinions, which he did in the piece's composition and context leading up to and after its end. Without this understanding, scholars would have to accept the simplicity of Prokofiev's message — as Simon Morrison did — or completely ignore the composer as emblematic of this internal struggle — like Orlando Figes.⁹² Yet, to call the message and story of *Peter and the Wolf* simple is not sufficient. Instead, Prokofiev's composition taught us the coexistence of nostalgia and disdain for Russian peasants — and the Russian village — as well as fear of the Soviet Union. The piece also shows Prokofiev's love for the West, mostly through his adopting of the Western style of composition that was burgeoning at the time.

In 1948, twelve years following the finished composition and debut of *Peter and the Wolf* at the Moscow Children's Theater, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Andrei Zhdanov gave a speech "On Literature, Music and Philosophy." At a Conference of Soviet Music Workers, the labelled "propagandist-in-chief" went back and forth between the productivity as well as the limits and downfalls of Soviet composition during Stalin's era.⁹³ More than any other element, Zhdanov critiqued the group of composers and artists that Prokofiev was now very much a part of : the formalist *intelligentsia*. Zhdanov's words were striking and went perfectly well with the sentiments that butted up against Prokofiev's musical idealism. The Chairman stated : "What a step backward it is along the high-road of musical development when our formalists, undermining the foundations of true music, compose music which is ugly and false, permeated with idealist sentiment, alien to the broad masses of the people, and created not for the millions of Soviet people, but for chosen

92 Simon Morrison, *The People's Artist : Prokofiev's Soviet Years* (Oxford University Press, 2010) ; Orlando Figes, *Revolutionary Russia, 1891-1991 : A History* (Henry Holt and Co.).

93 V. M. Zubok and Konstantin Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War : from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge : Harvard UP, 1996), 119.

individuals and small groups, for an élite."⁹⁴ Thus, the main issue was that the composer intelligentsia was not understood and refused to understand the Soviet people and the Soviet Union's government under Stalin. In his pursuit of musical excellence, and through his relationship with the village and state, Prokofiev's composition style alienated the composer from his own homeland, despite his having returned in 1936.

Considering the precarious position of Sergei Prokofiev between the West and the Soviet Union — between village, *intelligentsia*, and government — this paper adds important context to the composer's profile in scholarly conversation. Prokofiev was an elitist, a member of the intelligentsia, hated by Soviet rule and that Stalin in the 1930s wished to eradicate. Using Prokofiev as a particular case, this paper gains insight into the detachment and practical sanctimoniousness of the Russian "high brow." This elite was more frustrated with Soviet rule — due to the constraints that being under political rule caused a reduction in musical expansion and expression — and peasants, due to a sense of socioeconomic hierarchy, in which the elites viewed themselves as more morally righteous as a result of their societal standings. In historiography, said study provides an argument for increasingly nuanced hierarchies within broader, generally accepted, Soviet systems. *Peter and the Wolf* allows one to understand opinions of Soviets and peasants by the *intelligentsia*, which are rarely explored.

Moreover, Prokofiev's life story is the most accurate representation of what the *intelligentsia* Soviet composers, sprinkled across the USSR, experienced. As previously mentioned, composer Dmitri Shostakovich is more discussed in academia, as he is done in Orlando Figes's works. While this is true, Shostakovich's life story was incredibly different from other Soviet composers, in the sense that he was prosecuted for his compositions to a much greater extent. In the study of Shostakovich as emblematic of other composers, a lot of historiography is exaggerated, hence the study of

94 Andrei Zhdanov, "On Music : Concluding Speech at a Conference of Soviet Music Workers, 1948," *On Literature, Music and Philosophy*

Prokofiev can indicate a larger accuracy in the study of *intelligentsia* composition.

While through this paper, I spoke to Prokofiev's relationship with the Russian village, *intelligentsia*, and Soviet state, there is significant additional material to promote for further study. Principally, I would consider researching into additional works composed by Prokofiev on the subjects of previous Russian generations and of village life and that include subjects of naturalism — e.g., the composer's *Tales of an Old Grandmother* (1918) and *The Love for Three Oranges* (1921). It would also be pertinent to discuss Prokofiev's works on Russia and the Soviet Union — e.g., *Arise, Russian People!* (1938) and *War and Peace* (1946) — and on Western themes — e.g., *Romeo and Juliet* (1935). Finally, looking into composers falling into the same *intelligentsia* category, such as Myaskovsky, Khachaturyan, Popov, Kabalevsky, Shebalin, and Shaporin (but not including Shostakovich), would add life to the relationship between composers and their changing homelands.

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Footnotes in Gaza: Redrawing the Boundaries of Memory and Historicity

Emma Li, University of British Columbia

Introduction

As a discipline, history has been paralyzed by a “coldly intellectual and static”¹ mode of analysis and critical thinking. The pursuit in universalizing or creating objective narratives is largely responsible for history’s tendency to fabricate, oversimplify, or downright deny perspectives of the past. However, I assert that history’s intention is more interested in memory than in objectivity. The discipline of history continues to be a selective memory. Selectivity has correlation to what humans deem as powerful, as prestigious, or constructive. But who gets to choose? The construction and manufacturing of memory as known to global historical narratives is what I deem the so-called objectivity known by scholarship, and it is the same force that casts doubt on the independent memories of individuals. To mainstream narratives, individual memory cannot be relied upon as it contains inherent biases, vagaries, and partialities. The resulting skepticism towards personal testimonies, oral histories, and other forms of memory have therefore been deemed as incompatible to those belonging to global historical narratives. But memory, by nature, has a reparative quality. As Charles Maier suggests, individuals “repair and remember because [they] cannot return.”² This statement is applicable whether it refers to a perpetrator or victim, a winner or loser, the state or individual.

In his journalistic graphic, *Footnotes in Gaza*, Joe Sacco seeks to liberate those lost in the “broad

sweep of history”.³ To Sacco, the literary liberation of individual narratives is fundamental and necessary to a postmodern movement of history striving to debunk the overarching narratives prescribed by those with privilege, power, and influence. His investigation for truth posits itself in the 1956 events in Rafah where 111 Palestinians were killed, and another event in a neighbouring town, Khan Younis, in which 275 Palestinians were killed. His collections of interviews with local survivors, witnesses, and family members spotlight the oral testimonies of different people after many decades following the event. This essay places *Footnotes in Gaza* as countering the selective memories shaping dominant historical dialogues pertaining to the 1956 events in Rafah and Khan Younis. In challenging this selectivity, I assert that Sacco develops a restorative and reconciling memory based on the relationships of its three distinct levels—the individual, the national, and the transnational.

I. Truthfulness if not Truth, Authenticity if not Accuracy

In the foreword of his, Sacco urges his readers to remember that people’s memories are subject to change, especially considering Rafah and Khan Younis’ decades-old events of 1956 to the time of his graphic novel’s 2009 publication. In one part, Sacco describes how memory “blurs edges... adds and subtracts”.⁴ The selective memory in the discipline of history has claimed the ability to forge an “essential truth”.⁵ During his research, Sacco found a limited amount of material acknowledging

1 Viljoen, Jeanne-Marie. “‘Productive Myopia’: Seeing Past History’s Spectacle of Accuracy in Joe Sacco’s *Footnotes in Gaza*.” *Journal of War & Culture Studies* 8, no. 4 (2015), p. 323.

2 Barkan, Elazar. “Historians and Historical Reconciliation.” *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 4 (2009), p. 907.

3 Joe Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza* (Editeurs Divers Royaume-Uni, 2009), ix.

4 Sacco, Joe. *Footnotes in Gaza*, 112.

5 Shay, Maureen. “Framing refugee time: perpetuated regression in Joe Sacco’s *Footnotes in Gaza*.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 50, no. 2 (2014), p. 212.

the 1956 events in Rafah and Khan Younis, with a United Nations report highlighting the event in a few brief sentences.⁶ This section attempts to frame the individual memory as the most overlooked counterpart of historical memory. When examining the individual memory from a place of conflict and violence, the impacts of grief, trauma, and shame are worthy of consideration regarding someone's memory. As a result, emotions are key to the "formation, reproduction and destruction"⁷ of memories. Sacco expresses the vagaries of memory as useful to historical dialogues because it demonstrates the individuals' own search or recovery of the past. By situating individual memories alongside others, these competing narratives reveal the precarious nature of seeking an objective, essential truth to history. As described by Jeanne-Marie Viljoen, using memory to inform history may have its limitations, but it allows for learners to "gain admission into the realm of truthfulness if not truth, of authenticity if not accuracy."⁸

One instance of individual memory can be seen through the character of Khamis, who recalls the death of his brother Subhi, which he claims to have borne traumatic witness to. However, in conversations with two other family members, both claim Khamis as having been physically absent during the time of Subhi's death. Despite the inconsistent narratives, Sacco does not diverge his attention from the authenticity of the story. Instead, he begins to acknowledge the psychological complexities that shape Khamis' testimony. Sacco probes the reader with the question: what are we to make of these contradictions?⁹ Could it be that all three narrators are informed by their trauma and thus pave a memory that is unreliable? Was Khamis experiencing guilt in his absence at the time of Subhi's death, leading to a constructed truth of events? Current practices of history often oppose

the agency of the subjects it interviews. Unhindered by an emotional barrier, these practices presume superiority over individual experience. But Sacco "accepts and works against this limitation"¹⁰ as part of the historical journey.

Indeed, pain may distort language and facts, but Sacco is far less concerned about accuracy than the psychological validity of memory that subsequently shapes and informs the impacts of an individual's particular experience. Sacco's inclusion of Khamis' account conveys the way trauma can "destroy the subject's own representation" of reality, creating fear, confusion, or helplessness. Shame can develop its own narrative. Grief, as a part of a natural human response to loss, may cause one to resign from the existence of an event altogether through denial or other emotions of sadness and anger.¹¹ The attempt to universalize all aspects of history subsequently attempts to universalize an individual's trauma, grief, and shame. Sacco engages with his shortcomings and limitations as a listener, going on to explain that to "untangle the twining guilt and grief" of Khamis and "explain what might induce a traumatized individual"¹² is not a productive course of dialogue. While Khamis' testimony demonstrates the influence emotions have on rationality, Sacco asserts that history should not distrust emotionally dominated testimonies. Rather, these testimonies involve the "presence and experience"¹³ necessary for an ethical and methodological approach to history telling. Authentic expression in a traumatized subject restores their agency of an otherwise static, defaced individual. Emotions allow for the listener to extend beyond understanding a perspective and move towards understanding a belief system that shapes the ways history is produced.¹⁴ Memory's validity has previously been decided by a given history, but what if instead, history nurtured the

6 Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza*, ix.

7 Aquino, Marianela B., Nicola J. Chanamoto, and Anastasia Christou. "Introduction: Emotions and Mobilities: Gendered, Temporal and Spatial Representations." *Emotions: History, Culture, Society* 6, no. 2 (2022), p. 202.

8 Viljoen, Jeanne-Marie, "Productive Myopia", 323.

9 Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza*, 115.

10 Rosenblatt, Adam. "Silence and listening as rhetorical arts." *Choice Reviews Online* 48, no. 12 (2011), 48-6739-48-6739. doi:10.5860/choice.48-6739, p. 141.

11 Viljoen, Jeanne-Marie, "Productive Myopia," 318.

12 Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza*, 116.

13 Sylvester, War as Experience, Contributions from international relations and feminist analysis." *Routledge*, 2013, p. 92.

14 Rosenblatt, "Silence and listening as rhetorical arts," 143.

culmination of individual experience and memory? By employing individual memory as a central tool for constructing narratives of the past, individuals can “enlarge the ambit of history” and thereby include what otherwise may be excluded.¹⁵

II. Memory as Mosaic: Remembering as a Nation

Stories may “wobble and strain”¹⁶ as they indulge multiplicities of perspective. *Footnotes in Gaza* undeniably deals with immeasurable loss and grief of an entire community. Losses towards a people causes aspects of grief to be a larger social trauma as opposed to individual suffering. To organize individual levels of memory, one might observe the “particular absences”¹⁷ in subjectivities which inevitably emerge. Proponents of individual approaches to historical narratives often return to the requisite that these subjectivities must be observed alongside a myriad of other narratives. The history of 1956 as recorded by Sacco reveals how the national level of memory combats myths that trauma, grief, or shame are privatizing and should remain as such.¹⁸ In reality, individuals espouse only fragmented components, but “cumulatively... provide an overarching storyline”¹⁹ which offer a “commemorative power... rather than nebulous narratives”.²⁰ The contradictions and tensions incited by multiple perspectives should not be perceived as negative components to memory recall, but an opportunity for historians to interweave “private experiences with collective representations”²¹ that constitutes a field of memory. Hence, this section argues that the construction of national memory in Sacco’s work, provides “patterns of understanding” to the ways in which people “define and re-define the

place [they] occupy in the world”.²² As a common establishment in dominant historical discourse, the national memory has been absorbed into a state-centric conceptualization which imposes hegemonic standards in the history of a nation.

In *Footnotes in Gaza*, Sacco attempts to re-tell a particular violence that occurred in Rafah on November 1, 1956, in which a massacre erupted at a local schoolground. To detail the play by play of its events, he interviews multiple survivors, bystanders, and family members over their recollections of that specific day. In doing so, many pages frame an individual speaker with their name beneath their portrait and a speech bubble voicing their narrative. In a visually compelling, documentary-style segment, the interviews circulate between numerous voices, while allowing the 1956 events to slowly unfold before the reader. This attentiveness to the individual memory offers agency to these actors in accordance with the history they know, edifying their humanity beyond a statistical number in a report. By visualizing these narratives as co-existing, the national memory is no longer expressed as a “homogenous [entity]”²³ where the wants, needs, and expectations are the same among all. Rather it is composed of an individuality that affirms diversity, variety, and multiplicity.

Another element to the national memory is accentuated by the relationships between multiple generations. Most of Sacco’s interviewees are with the elderly, however the interactions with youth and adults reinforce the significance of the present moment as a participant to a collective investigation of a national past. One of Sacco’s final interviews is with a man named Abu Juhish who sustained a head injury in 1956. The emotional toll of remembering causes him to stumble, and his grandson, Belal, urges him to abandon passion and speak from the mind.²⁴ Displayed by this interaction, there are multiple layers of separation from 1956. There is the individual, Abu Juhish,

15 Viljoen, Jeanne-Marie, “Productive Myopia,” 323.

16 Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza*, 298.

17 Sylvester, Christine. “War as Experience”, 103.

18 Sylvester, “War as Experience”, 103.

19 Kuperberg Levin, Jeremy. “Contested Destinations: Tourism and Memory in the Former Yugoslavia.” PhD diss., Northwestern University, p. 174.

20 Ibid, 174.

21 Mickwitz, Nina. “History in the Making: Comics, History, and Collective Memory.” *Documentary Comics*, 2016, p. 78.

22 Ibid, 60.

23 McDowell, Sara. “Heritage, Memory and Identity.” *The Routledge Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, 2016, p. 45.

24 Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza*, 384.

struggling to forge a bridge between memory and trauma. There is the national, exemplified through Belal in his Palestinian identity. But though Belal is generationally separated from the event, readers can work under the presumption that Belal's experiences of oppression differ drastically from Sacco's given his national identity. Finally, there is the transnational as expressed through Sacco, which I explore in the following section. The alternation between different passages of time demonstrates how history transforms multiple generations and develops a "progress narrative for the future" rather than a "historical time with little alteration".²⁵ Time, demonstrated through the multi-generations of his story, shapes not a linear history, but a circular one. It also molds a national consciousness informed not just by history, but by the power of relations through neighbor and kin.

III. Memory in Transit: Bearing Witness Across Borders

Throughout *Footnotes in Gaza*, Sacco maintains an acute self-awareness to his position as a reporter, storyteller, and humanist.²⁶ But the greatest principle which Sacco attaches his work to is entering conversations with recognition that there is no "single or positivistic 'truth'"²⁷ in the complexities surrounding war, occupation, and trauma. Sacco's position as a foreigner and his commitments to memory and oral testimony situate his work in a highly vulnerable place.²⁸ Transnational memory refers to the way historical narratives are conveyed across cultural and national borders. Transnational memory has been the most problematic driver in contemporary historical discourse because it has traditionally reproduced the contexts of individual and national

levels of memory to maintain a global status quo. In a similar way, it reveals the role of the spectator as one that largely exploits and commodifies individuals of history into dehumanized subjects. In this section, I identify the ways Sacco's documenting journey demonstrates a transnational memory and perspective that strives to liberate local storytelling to the broader world in historical dialogue. It further acknowledges how history cannot and should not remain within a national border but must be expressed internationally with integrity to those it depicts.

In one of the final pages of *Footnotes in Gaza*, Sacco writes:

"Perhaps there were more revelations to uncover and accounts to hear, but we have reached the point of diminishing returns, and now we cut the cord and let the rest slide into oblivion. The historian could keep on digging but he's tired now, and wants to get on with his own life, and he knows the reader does too."²⁹

With a tone of irony, Sacco betrays his own commitments as an author to level with the reader in their discomfort and temptation to look away from historical events with indifference. It sets out both the intentions and limitations he holds as someone attempting to communicate a history as authentically as possible, while maintaining the privilege to walk away. In the same way his position holds privilege, he contends that as readers and consumers of history, the transnational memory is capable of remaining voyeuristic, passive, and oftentimes complacent. In turn, it puts into perspective the ways Palestinians do not have the luxury to 'walk away' from history. The collected data of violence, conflict, and occupation prevail despite the author's absence. Rosenblatt et al. contends that Sacco in no way attempts to transcend his reporting to a "non-commodified ideal",³⁰ rather, he willfully acknowledges the inherent compromises in trying to understand the events of 1956. He endures his

25 Shay, "Framing refugee time," 206.

26 Rosenblatt et al., "Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Art," 131.

27 Rosenblatt et al., "Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Art," 131.

28 Pellicer-Ortín, Silvia. "Wandering Memory, Wandering Jews: Generic Hybridity and the Construction of Jewish Memory in Linda Grant's Works." *Traumatic Memory and the Ethical, Political and Transhistorical Functions of Literature*, 2017, p. 102.

29 Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza*, 382.

30 Rosenblatt et al., "Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Art," 135.

own forms of shame in the process—shame that erupts in moments when he bears witness to the symptoms of loss and consumes it for the purposes of his own agenda as a journalist.

While Sacco's work remains subject to the imperious nature of historical telling and retelling, it is distinguished by his ruminations on alternative methods to listening and hearing empathetically as a human, rather than instrumentally, as a journalist. He places great emphasis on the power of relationships with locals, accepting what those locals wish to tell as opposed to what Sacco seeks to hear. Scholars diagnose this idea as the "impossible neutrality"³¹ of oral sources, implicating the historian's fundamental aim to remain loyal in expressing the inexpressible, understanding the unintelligible, and restoring what cannot be restored otherwise. To criticize Sacco's "ideal model of [listening]"³² is to overlook the overarching purpose of *Footnotes in Gaza*. While gaps and flaws may accompany his authorship, it is his determination to look for not the absolute truth but "the truth as he can best apprehend it".³³

These sentiments situate how Sacco utilizes his memory as a transnational voice for the 1956 events, cementing his "own story of knowing".³⁴ There must be an established notion that transnational memory will necessarily differ from its individual and national counterpart. The transnational memory is interested in the movement of experiences that can assist in unraveling "inaugurated" accepted meanings and sense systems.³⁵ By this, Sacco takes the 1956 events in Rafah and Khan Younis to counteract the simple acceptances of conflict and violence that dictate "whose life can emerge from it and who...[vanishes] into its fog".³⁶ Christine Sylvester carries out her argument that events contain abstract levels of experience. Focussing solely on the individual memory distracts from

broader issues of power relations that circulate in history and contemporary institutions. Therefore, both national and transnational memories shed valuable insight to how individuals occupy history and tell it. "People can move between spectator levels," writes Sylvester, "[occupying] more than one location at a time".³⁷ In this sense, the victim can also be a witness, as conveyed by so many interviewees Sacco encountered, including Khamis. Even then, being a witness, particularly a transnational witness, can yield little forms of public response in which witnessing becomes "a posture, a substitute for action".³⁸ It is by this token in which accepted forms of political life have become norms, such as violence. But here, Sacco suggests a transition between merely 'witnessing' into a state of 'bearing witness', in which 'to bear' something is to produce, endure, suffer, or be burdened by it, an idea which Sacco addresses throughout his work. The transnational should strive to transcend the emotional, social, and geospatial boundaries that have traditionally stunted the reach of empathy and understanding across borders, allowing people to be compassionately obligated³⁹ to these events.

These differing proximities to history matter insofar as engagement and relations are necessary for yielding a historical effort that does not exclude some over others. The transnational memory holds itself responsible for how language, portraits, and the naming of people and places withstand such movement beyond national boundaries. As suggested by El Rifaie, authenticity is not fully transferable through the transnational memory.⁴⁰ Thus, the role of the historian is twofold: on one hand, the historian must strive to be "faithful" to people and their words, but on the other, they should support the reader by making choices that smooth and reproduce for the purpose of accessibility.⁴¹

31 Portelli, Alessandro. "The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History." *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (1992), p. 54.

32 Rosenblatt et al., "Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Art," 144.

33 Ibid.

34 Viljoen, Jeanne-Marie, "Productive Myopia," 322.

35 Sylvester, "War as Experience", 109.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid, 101.

38 Sue Tait, "Bearing witness, journalism and moral responsibility." *Media, Culture & Society* 33, no. 8 (2011), 1, doi:10.1177/0163443711422460.

39 Sylvester, "War as Experience", 102.

40 El Rifaie, Elisabeth. "Performing Authenticity." *Autobiographical Comics*, 2012, p. 142.

41 Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza*, 417.

Even so, the ‘twofold’ holds that accountability does not surrender one for the sake of the other. To accept *Footnotes in Gaza* for its place in history is to accept Sacco’s sincere effort to expose the gaps in memories, with implications that make for a more genuine, truthful, and reparative form of history than current forms of transnational reconstruction.

Conclusion

Memory must be reparative, not selective. Popular assumptions hold that the national, and certainly the individual, are far too entrenched in bias, misperception, and emotional turmoil to tell a narrative effectively, and that the job should fall unto those situated outside the history. Joe Sacco considers the palpability in skewing and manipulating these narratives as worthy of scrutiny and self-critique. To reconcile and restore this relationship, Sacco returns to the individual with attempts to build the story from ground up. The Palestinian voices, swept into the footnotes of history, have been subject to this selective memory and misrepresentation fuelled by ‘universal’ and ‘objective’ constructions of the historical discipline. Throughout *Footnotes in Gaza*, Sacco demonstrates how the individual memory sheds valuable insight into how subjectivity, psychological trauma, and emotions may contribute to the plural nature of telling history. The formerly static and intellectual boundaries of history have disavowed the ways experiences and perspectives are influenced by unique sets of cultural, ideological, and political constraints known to an individual or society. By reconciling history to the individual, Sacco places the various levels of memory as different “[stories] of knowing”,⁴² which thus create meaningful relations and dialogue infused by empathetic humanity through the individual, the national, and the transnational.

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42 Viljoen, Jeanne-Marie, p. 322.

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Interpreting Media Perspectives: Analyzing American Responses to Kristallnacht through the Reporting Practices of Two North Carolina Newspapers

Jacob Margolis, Duke University

“In reporting on Kristallnacht, the press transmitted to the American public firsthand, unimpeachable evidence of what it meant to be a Jew in Nazi Germany.”

– Deborah Lipstadt, American Historian & Diplomat

Abstract

This paper explores the ways in which two Durham, North Carolina based newspapers – The Durham Morning Herald and The Durham Sun – responded to the events of Kristallnacht, in which Jewish businesses, homes, and places of worship across Germany were raided and destroyed on November 9th and 10th, 1938. In analyzing the content of the articles produced by these papers, in conjunction with broader themes pertaining to the ways American newspapers responded to these events, this research uncovers the respective levels of isolationist rhetoric embedded within each newspaper’s respective pattern of practice. Additionally, my research makes several inquiries into other potential interpretations about the way these media outlets reported. Taking into consideration the context of Durham’s Jewish community, and the observable tendencies in each newspaper’s previous publications, I will draw connections to develop a comprehensive framework through which we can begin to understand how, and perhaps why, these newspapers described these events as they did. Using my findings, we may begin to develop a better appreciation for the reasons why newspapers across America – and even within a single city – reported on the same events in vastly different ways. This will simultaneously allow us to analyze articles we read in the 21st century with a more critical eye.

Introduction

Diversity of journalistic expression is one of the hallmarks of a country that prides itself on its citizens’ inalienable rights to free speech. Indeed, it wouldn’t be difficult to argue that within the context of American newspapers, singular events can be interpreted in vastly differing ways by varied news outlets – one needn’t look further than modern debates on misinformation to understand this phenomenon. Such a pattern of individual expression can be observed in the way that American newspapers reported on the events of Jewish persecution during World War II, as well.

By adopting a close analysis of both the content and context of newspaper articles that were responding to the persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany, we can generate informed assumptions about what types of convictions and ulterior motives may have existed which drove these papers’ reporting practices; and in looking at the ways in which the Durham Morning Herald and the Durham Sun reported on Kristallnacht, we can do just that. In dissecting two papers that operated out of the same city, and by analyzing their respective patterns of practice in the way they referenced, elaborated on, and drew conclusions from the events of Kristallnacht, we can come to recognize that the degree to which papers can vary in practice is tremendous, even for those situated within the same locales and reporting on information received from the same wire services. By uncovering the subliminal messaging embedded within these articles, we can draw compelling and complex conclusions about where – and perhaps even why – these papers differed, both from one another, and from those of prevailing popularity in larger cities across the nation, in their respective reporting on

Kristallnacht and its aftermath.

What we will come to discover through our analysis of the reports in the Herald and the Sun, is that these papers posted reactions to Kristallnacht which were very similar to those of other outlets. As one scholar describes, “For over three weeks following the outbreak, eyewitness reports from Germany could be found on the front pages of numerous papers. Practically no American newspaper, irrespective of size, circulation, location, or political inclination failed to condemn Germany.”¹ My findings unquestionably support this notion, as we shall soon see. However, these two Durham publications reflected another trend amongst American papers, and each in their own ways: “the press did not only condemn; once again it sought rational explanations for this apparently senseless course of events.”² Through this effort, papers from across the country came to varying conclusions about why these events had transpired as they did. Some felt the riots were a sign of some embedded weakness in Nazi control and governance over the country’s citizenry. Some saw it as strength. Particularly isolationist papers admonished the attacks as the outcome of Britain’s “misguided policies” and inability to act.³

As my findings will exemplify, the Herald and Sun came to their own conclusions, ones which were distinct from one another, but which appeared similar to those made in other cities. For the former, the editors seemed to possess a rare (for the time) comprehension of the level of organization that contextualized these riots, and through their reporting in the aftermath of Kristallnacht, they exemplified a contempt for Nazi government that was informed by this fundamental understanding. At the same time, the paper reflected the growing concern over U.S. involvement in Europe through its use of isolationist rhetoric. The paper’s specific emphasis on how American church officials were responding to the events was particularly unique and may say something about what types of information

were valued by the editors at the Herald. For the Sun, the editors similarly pushed back against Joseph Goebbels’ notion that the riots of Kristallnacht were not organized, demonstrating an equally rare yet ever present demonstration of the paper’s accurate interpretation of government involvement in the riots. Despite this noticeable similarity, however, the Sun diverged from the Herald in its less blatant – and often complete lack – of perceived isolationism, in many instances quoting Nazi officials in their disdain for “international Jewry” and the regime’s disapproval of foreign comment on the domestic Jewish persecution, unwilling to shy away from these tensions when reporting.

The variance of perspective and reporting practice within a city as comparatively small as Durham should help us to recognize that the way American newspapers interpreted reports from overseas atrocities could not be reduced to a singular, agreeable narrative. Rather, the American people received varying analyses which uniquely shaped public opinion in a way that brought the country to a united front in opposition to Nazi rule and Jewish persecution, but which came to such an opinion by way of extremely variably conclusions – and which had the potential to inspire fear, nationalism, and confusion all at once. Additionally, this variety of opinion included an equally diverse spectrum of anxiety as it pertained to the urgency with which Americans felt responsible for responding to and aiding the ailing Jewish population in Europe. The main factors involved in this urgency to respond, or more often the lack thereof, included isolationism and anti-immigration sentiment.

In order to fully understand the ways in which the Herald and the Sun were outgrowths of both political and societal sentiment, we should briefly review what isolationism meant to the U.S. in the 1930s. As Charles Kupchan puts it, “the main U.S. policy response to Europe’s strategic descent during the second half of the 1930s was to embargo trade with belligerents to avoid a replay of the chain of events that brought the

1 Deborah Lipstadt, *Beyond belief the American press and the coming of the Holocaust*. (Free Press, 1993), 172.

2 Ibid, 173.

3 Ibid, 175.

country into World War I.”⁴ Looking at one such policy in the year 1938, the same year in which the events of Kristallnacht played out, the Ludlow Amendment was on the House floor.⁵ Introduced in 1935 by Indiana Democrat Louis Ludlow, the constitutional amendment would have required that any declaration of war receive the approval of the populace via referendum, before going into effect.⁶ As Kupchan put it, “the debate over the Ludlow Amendment during the second half of the 1930s made clear just how fully elites and the public alike had embraced isolationist attitudes.”⁷ Aside from the substantial effort by members of Congress to throw barriers in the way of any attempt to declare war on another nation, opinion surveys from this time would support such an overarching sentiment as well, with one demonstrating that roughly 75% of Americans supported the amendment.⁸ If we are to consider these political and societal sentiments in conjunction with what we will soon discover in the articles produced by our two media outlets of focus, we will see that journalism was likely effected by this popular sentiment just as the rest of the country was. As I previously mentioned, this phenomenon manifested itself in a perceivably strong isolationist sentiment in the articles produced by the Durham Morning Herald and a present but more subtle capacity in the Durham Sun. Citing specific portions of the text from articles at each of these outlets, I will demonstrate this phenomenon in action.

Now briefly turning to the impact of anti-immigration feeling across the country, we can similarly track how those developments would have impacted journalistic expression. Dating back a decade earlier, as Kupchan notes, isolationism and anti-immigration went hand in hand as ideologies: “In the 1920s, the United States imposed immigration quotas based on country of origin, leading to a dramatic decrease in arrivals of

Catholics and Jews from southeastern Europe in favor of Protestants from the north. The isolationism of the interwar era went hand in hand with anti-immigrant sentiment, reinforcing the aversion to foreign entanglement.”⁹ Though it does not appear as clearly as the isolationist rhetoric that pervades the Durham Morning Herald (and the Sun, to an extent), anti-immigration feeling is entangled in the former and thus it cannot be ignored as a potential byproduct in both of these papers.

Historiography

Throughout much of the proceeding sections, I will make reference to Deborah Lipstadt, who observes in her seminal work, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust*, that papers like the Christian Science Monitor and Chicago Tribune could differ considerably in the way they went about actively reporting on the events taking place in Nazi Germany. For example, “the Christian Science Monitor seemed particularly intent on describing life in Germany as ‘normal and serene,’”¹⁰ whereas the Tribune adopted a persona as an “isolationist” paper.¹¹ Yet even so, despite their seemingly different tones and outlooks, both newspapers maintained the belief that, as the Monitor put it, “power tempers the Chancellor’s ready tongue,” and that Hitler would soon relax his rule.¹² In this way, it was possible for American papers to simultaneously agree in their predictions about the potential consequences of world issues, yet nevertheless come to formulate extraordinarily different patterns of practice in the way they presented their content to readers, as we shall soon see.

Lipstadt’s analysis of hundreds of newspapers goes a long way in providing readers with insights into the unique role that these papers played in acting as what we might call a one-way mirror of editorial opinion: receiving information

4 Charles A. Kupchan, *Isolationism: A History of America’s Efforts to Shield Itself from the World* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 275.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid

7 Ibid, 276.

8 Ibid.

34

9 Ibid, 143-144.

10 Deborah Lipstadt. *Beyond belief the American press and the coming of the Holocaust*. 66.

11 Ibid, 91.

12 Ibid.

transmitted from foreign wire services – mainly the Associated Press – through the translucent window of information exchange, and imposing their own subtle yet ever present methods of reporting against that information, thus projecting their own biases onto the edifice of American public opinion. We might be so inclined as to judge these practices as inherently non-objective, especially in a profession where such standards might be expected. Certainly, such a critique may be well-evidenced, and if so, the ramifications are damning both for our understanding of the motivating factors behind specific newspapers’ decisions to present information in differing ways, as well as our current perception of the ways in which newspapers convey consequential international events.¹³

On the point of objectivity within the profession of journalism, it’s important that we take a step back to consider when and how this idea developed. In doing this, we may come to better understand where exactly the Herald and the Sun diverged from such standards. The history of objectivity in journalism, as Peter Galison puts it in *Objectivity in Science: New Perspectives from Science and Technology Studies*, could more aptly be characterized by a conglomeration of “histories,”¹⁴ in which the term’s meaning has drastically shifted

13 Sukhjeet Sahni, “Coverage of foreign news by the United States media: A study of perception of bias amongst the international students at West Virginia University,” *Research Repository @ WVU* (2003).

I emphasize “international events” in this instance to denote a difference between reporting on local versus overseas events. As Sahni puts it, “If news helps sell a newspaper’s bottom line, it tends to be the lead story. Local news does that, so local tops every editor’s list.” However, in my findings, it seems that during a time in which international news was highly sought after, reporting on Kristallnacht was a practice that appeared across many newspapers that fit within that general trend. Hence, though we may find that even today, local news overwhelmingly captures the attention of area-specific audiences, especially for comparatively smaller outlets like the now-called *Durham Herald-Sun*, the takeaways that we glean from my research should likely only be applied to U.S. reporting on international stories.

14 Peter Galison, “The Journalist, the Scientist, and Objectivity,” in *Objectivity in Science: New Perspectives from Science and Technology Studies*, ed. by Flavia Padovani, Alan W. Richardson, and Jonathan Y. Tsou (Springer, 2015), 57-75.

across decades. For the purposes of our analysis, we should concern ourselves with the way in which objective reporting was understood in newsrooms around the year 1938, when the “night of broken glass” took place. As Galison explains, “World War I had subjected reporters to tremendous pressure to follow government bulletins, propaganda, and censorship. Emerging from the war, newspaper men and women looked to science for a model of objectivity at just the moment the journalists were most shaken in their faith that it could be achieved. Put shortly: after the Great War, scientists began to supplement mechanical objectivity with trained judgment; journalists simultaneously entered the discourse of objectivity and launched a drive that has never ceased to guard a place for interpretation.”¹⁵ Thus, we should understand journalistic objectivity as a notion that left room for creative expression, and thus failed to embrace a uniformity of practice across the profession. In hearing this, we may be inclined to view the Durham Morning Herald and the Durham Sun as fitting within this definition. However, as far as “creative expression” is concerned, this weak framework for categorizing objectivity within a journalistic context leaves ample room for us to raise questions to the contrary. This gray area, in which journalistic practice teeters on the balance beam of objectivity constructed by Galison’s research, is precisely what I will engage with over the course of the following sections. In order to round out our understanding of this phenomenon, however, we must also consider what is meant by the “profession” of journalism, to which this standard of objectivity has been applied.

To answer this question, we can turn to the scholarship of Stephen Banning, who analyzes the origins of the professionalization of journalism in the nineteenth century.¹⁶ Insofar as it was thought to constitute a profession, by the time the 1930s rolled around, journalism was still yet to be widely considered a “profession” as we would now think of it, though some scholars have attempted to argue

15 Ibid, 73.

16 Stephen A. Banning, “The Professionalization of Journalism: A Nineteenth-Century Beginning,” *Journalism History* 24, no. 4 (98, 1999): 157-163.

that a “process” of professionalization actually began in the nineteenth century. Thus, it may suffice to say that by 1938, the year we will be studying, journalism was somewhere on the scale of professionalization, though perhaps not fully realized, and thus likely had some forms of industry standards, of which the notion of non-objectivity might arguably contradict. These clarifications of definitions and the emphasis on discrepancy and complexity in the interpretation of these terms are necessary if we are to step out of our modern perception of these phenomena and step into the period of which we are analyzing. Simply put, such considerations are important to keep in mind throughout the analysis of the following newspaper articles.

As we consider stepping into the past, we must also make note of the presence of Jews in Durham during this time, as well as the production of cigarettes by the British-American Tobacco Company, and how each of these realities may have affected local perspectives on both the persecution of Jews and Anglo-German conflict as a whole.

Community Contexts: Durham’s Jewish Demographic and British-American Tobacco

As Duke University professor Karin Shapiro put it in a 2013 article for the *News and Observer*, “Jewish faith and culture have been part of Durham history since its earliest beginnings.”¹⁷ Thus, though the *Herald and Sun* were reporting on the plight of the Jews in a country thousands of miles away, the papers did not produce their reports within a bubble absent of Jewish interaction. In fact, according to the Institute of Southern Jewish Life, in the late 1800s “most of the... Jewish businesses [in Durham] were owned by immigrant German-speaking Jews or

NUMBER OF JEWS AND THEIR DISTRIBUTION BY STATE, 1917 AND 1927¹

STATE	1917			1927		
	Total Population	Jews	Per Cent	Total Population	Jews	Per Cent
Alabama.....	2,363,939	11,086	0.47	2,549,000	12,891	0.5
Arizona.....	263,788	1,013	0.38	459,000	1,455	0.32
Arkansas.....	1,766,343	5,012	0.28	1,923,000	8,850	0.46
California.....	3,029,032	63,652	2.10	4,433,000	123,284	2.78
Colorado.....	988,320	14,565	1.47	1,074,000	20,321	1.89
Connecticut.....	1,265,373	66,862	5.28	1,636,000	91,538	5.59
Delaware.....	215,160	3,806	1.77	243,000	5,311	2.18
D. of C.....	369,282	10,000	2.71	540,000	16,000	2.96
Florida.....	916,185	6,451	0.70	1,363,000	13,402	0.98
Georgia.....	2,895,841	22,414	7.74	3,171,000	23,179	0.73
Idaho.....	445,176	1,078	0.24	534,000	1,141	0.21
Illinois.....	6,234,995	246,637	3.95	7,296,000	345,980	4.74
Indiana.....	2,835,492	25,833	0.91	3,150,000	27,244	0.86
Iowa.....	1,224,771	15,555	1.27	2,425,000	16,644	0.68
Kansas.....	1,851,870	9,450	0.51	1,328,000	7,792	0.59
Kentucky.....	2,394,093	13,362	0.56	2,538,000	19,533	0.77
Louisiana.....	1,856,954	12,723	0.68	1,934,000	16,432	0.85
Maine.....	777,340	7,387	0.95	793,000	8,480	1.07
Maryland.....	1,373,673	62,642	4.56	1,597,000	70,871	4.44
Massachusetts.....	3,775,973	189,671	5.02	4,244,000	225,634	5.32
Michigan.....	3,094,266	63,254	2.04	4,490,000	89,462	1.99
Minnesota.....	2,312,445	31,462	1.36	2,686,000	43,197	1.61
Mississippi.....	1,976,570	3,881	0.19	1,790,618	6,420	0.36
Missouri.....	3,429,595	80,807	2.35	3,510,000	80,687	2.3
Montana.....	472,935	2,518	0.53	714,000	1,578	0.22
Nebraska.....	1,284,126	13,547	1.06	1,396,000	14,209	1.02
Nevada.....	110,738	503	0.45	77,407	264	0.34
New Hampshire.....	444,429	3,257	0.73	455,000	2,779	0.61
New Jersey.....	3,014,194	149,476	4.96	3,749,000	225,306	6.01
New Mexico.....	423,649	858	0.20	392,000	1,052	0.27
New York.....	10,460,182	1,603,923	15.33	11,423,000	1,903,890	16.67
North Carolina.....	2,434,381	4,915	0.20	2,897,000	8,252	0.28
North Dakota.....	765,319	1,492	0.19	641,192	2,749	0.43
Ohio.....	5,212,085	166,361	3.19	6,710,000	173,976	2.59
Oklahoma.....	2,289,855	5,186	0.23	2,397,000	7,823	0.33
Oregon.....	864,992	9,767	1.13	890,000	13,071	1.47
Pennsylvania.....	8,660,042	322,406	3.72	9,730,000	404,979	4.16
Rhode Island.....	625,865	20,502	3.27	704,000	25,003	3.56
South Carolina.....	1,643,205	4,816	0.29	1,845,000	6,851	0.37
South Dakota.....	716,972	1,262	0.18	696,000	1,584	0.23
Tennessee.....	2,304,629	14,034	0.61	2,485,000	22,532	0.91
Texas.....	4,515,423	30,839	0.68	5,397,000	46,648	0.86
Utah.....	443,856	3,337	0.75	522,000	2,857	0.55
Vermont.....	364,946	2,221	0.61	352,428	2,036	0.58
Virginia.....	2,213,025	15,403	0.69	2,546,000	25,656	1.01
Washington.....	1,597,400	9,117	0.57	1,562,000	14,698	0.94
West Virginia.....	1,412,602	5,129	0.36	1,696,000	7,471	0.44
Wisconsin.....	2,527,167	28,581	1.13	2,918,000	35,935	1.23
Wyoming.....	184,970	498	0.27	241,000	1,319	0.55
Total.....	103,640,473	3,388,951	3.27	118,140,645	4,228,029	3.58

¹The population figures for 1927 and other non-census years in this table and in all subsequent tables are the estimates of the United States Bureau of the Census, or of the writer, following the method of the Census Bureau, whenever official estimates were not available.

Figure 1. Taken from the American Jewish Committee’s 1927 “American Jewish Year Book.”

their descendants.”¹⁸ To quantify this observation, data presented by the American Jewish Committee – as pulled from the U.S. Census – observed that in 1927, North Carolina was home to a reported 8,252 Jews, with 375 inhabiting Durham.¹⁹ Of course, we would be hard pressed to state that this was a large constitution given the comparatively higher makeup of Jews in other states like Massachusetts (225,634) or New York (1,903,890).²⁰ Nevertheless, this figure was still higher than it appeared in many other neighboring states, including Mississippi (6,420), South Carolina (6,851), and West Virgin

18 “Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities - Durham/Chapel Hill North Carolina,” Institute of Southern Jewish Life, accessed on December 7, 2024, <https://www.isjl.org/north-carolina-durham-encyclopedia.html>.

19 H. S. Linfield, “Jewish Population in the United States,” in *American Jewish Year Book* (American Jewish Committee, 1927), 101-198.

20 Ibid.

17 Karin Shapiro, “History of Jewish Life in Durham,” Museum of Durham History, August 10, 2023, accessed on December 7, 2024, <https://www.museumofdurhamhistory.org/history-of-jewish-life-in-durham#:~:text=Durham's%20Jews%20soon%20began%20to,of%20a%20Main%20Street%20shop>.

(7,471).²¹ With this in mind, we could reasonably put forth that the Jewish population in North Carolina and Durham was undeniably present in the years leading up to Kristallnacht.

The presence of the British-American Tobacco Company in Durham is not to be overlooked as we attempt to unfurl the biases and local contexts that may have driven the Durham Morning Herald and the Durham Sun to report on the events of Kristallnacht with their respective levels of isolationist rhetoric. Born out of the origins of a “territory skirmish” between America and Great Britain, the American Tobacco Company would go on to become the Imperial Tobacco Company after James Buchanan Duke spent \$30 million to “buy up competing British tobacco firms... The Imperial Tobacco Company then used its new leverage to strike a deal with Duke to form the British-American Tobacco Company to protect their trade interests in Great Britain.”²² Evidently, business moguls in Durham (e.g., James Duke) had a vested interest in the affairs of their overseas partners in Britain. Through the lens of merely protecting an investment, this would appear to be a good reason for U.S. involvement in WWII, insofar as Nazi-British conflict would pose a financial risk to American businesses such as this one. However, closer analysis will show that the isolationist perspectives which emerged from these Durham-based papers were actually consistent with the presence of foreign business interests.

When Neville Chamberlain added his signature to the Munich Agreement on September 30, 1938, roughly a month and a half before the events of Kristallnacht, some leaders in Britain had the exceptional foresight to understand that despite the temporary appeasement to Hitler’s fascist appetite, Nazi expansionism would soon pull the British into a conflict with the Third Reich. In his famous speech delivered on October 5th, just a week later, Winston Churchill (then just a member of Parliament) would acknowledge the grave threat that this deal posed

21 Ibid.

22 Discover Durham Staff, “Tour Durham’s Tobacco History,” Discover Durham, February 22, 2024, accessed on December 8, 2024, <https://www.discoverdurham.com/blog/tour-durhams-tobacco-history/>.

to the sovereignty of European nations in the years to come: “We are in the presence of a disaster of the first magnitude... Do not let us blind ourselves to that... I fear we shall find that we have deeply compromised, and perhaps fatally endangered, the safety and even the independence of Great Britain.”²³ With this in mind, we must acknowledge the possibility of similar fears in the United States during the time. If the British arm of the tobacco trade went under, it would logically follow that business executives such as James Duke would want to avoid involvement in the conflict, as that would only worsen the losses that the company experienced as a result of British proximity (and eventual direct involvement).²⁴ It appears to be the case that American executives of this multinational corporation would thus likely have been incentivized to adopt an isolationist ideology, so as to protect their company from further deterioration in the event of the country being pulled into the war.

“The Night of Broken Glass”

Before engaging with the main body of my analysis, I will briefly detail the events of November 9th and 10th, 1938, as well as the developments in the days prior, which many scholars believe contributed to their fruition. The night of horror that has been etched into the history of Jewish persecution as “Kristallnacht,” actually began two days earlier in the German embassy in France. On the morning of November 7th, Herschel Grynszpan, a 17-year-old Polish Jew, entered the German embassy in Paris.²⁵ Stating that he had an important

23 Winston Churchill, “Disaster of the First Magnitude, 1938,” America’s National Churchill Museum, October 5, 1938, accessed on December 8, 2024, <https://www.nationalchurchillmuseum.org/disaster-of-the-first-magnitude.html>.

24 According to the official British American Tobacco Website, the years leading up to WWII marked a time in which the company’s “global operations” were severely disrupted. “Our history,” British American Tobacco, accessed on December 8, 2024, <https://www.bat.com/who-we-are/our-history>.

25 Uta Gerhardt and Thomas Karlauf, eds., *The Night of Broken Glass: Eyewitness Accounts of Kristallnacht*, (Polity Press, 2012).

document to deliver to the embassy secretary, he insisted on meeting with someone. Eventually, he was given a seat with Ernst vom Rath, one of the legation secretaries of the Parisian office.²⁶ During that meeting Grynszpan that meeting Grynszpan would fatally wound vom Rath with a revolver, and it was two days later, at 4:30pm on November 9th, that vom Rath would pass away as a result of his injuries.²⁷ On the morning of the killing, Grynszpan left a note for his uncle, reading, “My heart bleeds when I think about our tragedy... I have to protest in such a way that the whole world hears my protest, and this is what I intend to do.”²⁸

In the preceding month, Grynszpan had received news that new passport regulations, to be instituted on October 30, would prevent his Polish parents



Figure 2. Photo courtesy of Martin Gilbert's work, where the caption reads, "A Berlin street on 10 November 1938, the morning after Kristallnacht."

from traveling.²⁹ They were living in Germany at the time, as were many other Polish Jews.³⁰ Since this would have left them stranded, the Germans proceeded to expel the Jews before then: “On 18 October 1938, on Hitler’s orders, 15,000 Polish-born Jews resident in Germany were declared to be ‘stateless’ and expelled.”³¹ However, Polish border officials would not permit these people into the country, and thus Grynszpan’s parents, and thousands of other Polish Jews, would find themselves stranded in a “no-man’s land” between the two countries without food, shelter, or other basic necessities.³² They would be held there for several weeks.³³

The traditional interpretation of these events has been a causal one, with scholars noting the direct timeline between the expulsions, and the subsequent assassination of vom Rath. Immediately after the German secretary was shot, Hitler sent his personal physician to attend to the wounds, showing his “unfailing instinct for the explosiveness of a



Figure 3. Photo courtesy of the United State Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/gallery/kristallnacht-photographs>. The caption reads, “Interior of a synagogue destroyed during Kristallnacht. Dortmund, Germany, November 1938.”

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Martin Gilbert, *Never Again: A History of the Holocaust* (RosettaBooks, 2015), 138.

32 Ibid.

33 Martin Gilbert, *Never Again: A History of the Holocaust*, 138.

situation.”³⁴ Then, after the secretary’s death, Joseph Goebbels would proceed to communicate with other Nazi party officials, orchestrating the government’s response to the events: “he indicated no police protection was to be given ‘the Jews’ and they were to be left to the mercy of ‘spontaneous’ acts of retribution by everyday Germans and Austrians.”³⁵ Though direct orders were not issued in any public statement, there is general consensus amongst scholars that these events were organized, and that the ensuing, rioting crowds were incited by Nazi officials and their statements.

Julius Streicher, one of Hitler’s most devout followers during the interwar years, and publisher of the anti-Semitic weekly newsletter *Der Stürmer*, presented a speech after the events on November 10th, which includes eerie rhetoric alluding to government involvement:

“We could have killed all the Jews in Germany yesterday, but we did not do it. The demonstrations in Franconia were, in general, disciplined, clear, and farsighted... They showed a world friendly to the Jews that, when necessary, the German people can do whatever has to be done. And National Socialism has proven that when it acts with determination, it is successful.”³⁶

All in all, the magnitude of the destruction was devastating to Jewish business owners, families, communities, and culture across the country. More than 90 Jews were killed during the riots, hundreds of synagogues were burned down, and over 20,000 Jews were “seized and sent” to the concentration camps at Dachau, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen in the days following.³⁷ While there is not enough

34 Uta Gerhardt and Thomas Karlauf, eds., *The Night of Broken Glass: Eyewitness Accounts of Kristallnacht*.

35 “Kristallnacht: The Night of Broken Glass,” The National World War II Museum, New Orleans, accessed on December 13, 2024, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/kristallnacht-night-broken-glass>.

36 Randall L. Bytwerk, *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism* (Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 90.

37 Martin Gilbert, *Never Again: A History of the Holocaust*, 139.

room here to explain this organized chaos in full, there are plenty of eyewitness accounts of these events which corroborate the body of evidence that scholars have based their research around in trying to uncover the layers of detail embedded within this tragedy.³⁸

The Durham Morning Herald

For my analysis of the *Herald* and the *Sun*, I feel it best to start by looking at each paper’s reporting practices in the weeks leading up to Kristallnacht, before immediately diving into their respective responses to the events of November 9th and 10th, 1938. This, I believe, will allow us to better orient ourselves within the framework of these publications’ reporting practices, and to more easily pinpoint where such patterns were maintained or diverged from in the days and weeks following the Nazi riots against Jews, their businesses, and their homes.

Perhaps a prelude to the later occurrences of isolationist rhetoric, the *Herald*’s October 27th paper, roughly two weeks before Kristallnacht, harkened on the point of President Roosevelt’s latest declarations of contempt against foreign powers who persecuted against Jews, with a headline reading “F.D.R. Lashes Aggressor Nations,” later adding the message in subheadings that he “Deplores Arms Race But Declares America Must Rush Warship Construction.”³⁹ The reports mainly involved quotations from one of Roosevelt’s recent speeches, where he deplored nations who were actively arming “to the teeth.”⁴⁰ The paper’s close

38 For further reading, I recommend examining the accounts made available by Uta Gerhardt and Thomas Karlauf’s, *The Night of Broken Glass: Eyewitness Accounts of Kristallnacht*, which I refer to at various points in my research. In 2018, the BBC also published the results of an interview with Ruth Winkelmann, a woman who witnessed the events unfold in Berlin at the age of 10. The article can be found by visiting <https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-46152567>.

39 *Durham Morning Herald* (Durham, North Carolina), October 27, 1938. *NewsBank: Selected America’s Historical Newspapers*.

40 *Durham Morning Herald* (Durham, North Carolina), October 27, 1938. *NewsBank: Selected America’s Historical Newspapers*.

analysis of Roosevelt's words may not explicitly indicate an isolationist perspective, but its interest in those words, which conveyed a clear desire to stay out of international conflict against the increasing challenge to do so, shows that these topics were very much on the forefront of editors' minds, and thus the public's as well.

Fast-forward to the next day, on October 28th, and we can see this pattern escalate more explicitly. On page eight, an article entitled "Nazi Pressure on Jews Increasing" showcases some of the blame-shifting rhetoric that Lipstadt mentions, in action. Talking of the recent surrendering of passports which was mandated of all Jews in Germany, the editors emphasize how "numerous cases are reported wherein foreign consulates, notably the British, refused to grant visas to holders of "J" passports."⁴¹ The inclusion of this crucial detail, though seemingly insignificant, indicates that there may have been some effort amongst editors, whether conscious or not, to point out the instances in which British immigration officials were unwilling to be supportive of Jewish refugees. Such a notion not only lends support to the idea of a pre-existing isolationist viewpoint, but perhaps the early phases of a fledgling anti-immigration cause as well. As Lipstadt explains, and as we shall soon come to find, "Kristallnacht exemplified the way in which American contempt for German behavior coexisted with an unwavering commitment to isolationism and anti-immigrationism."⁴² These two competing ideologies were clearly in play before Kristallnacht as well. Thus, if they appear in the reports coming in after November 9th and 10th, we may be able to view the post-Kristallnacht reporting practices as an example of continuity in these viewpoints, ones which were thus so deeply seated in American public opinion that they were not abandoned even after reporters bore witness to the persecution carried out during the "night of broken glass."

41 *Durham Morning Herald* (Durham, North Carolina), October 28, 1938. *NewsBank: Selected America's Historical Newspapers*.

42 Deborah Lipstadt. *Beyond belief the American press and the coming of the Holocaust*. 170.

Having laid the groundwork for some of the isolationist perspectives inherent in the *Durham Morning Herald's* reporting practices pre-Kristallnacht, we can now venture into the period of interest to deduce where and how these viewpoints changed or didn't. The first reports directly related to Kristallnacht came through in an article from November 10th where the murder of Ernst Vom Rath, secretary of the German Embassy in France, was detailed. The article included very plain language, and the writers described the occurrence without much analysis, with the article coming out to less than 50 lines in length. What's most noticeable, and perhaps surprising about this article, however, does not relate to its content. Rather, it's the fact that such groundbreaking news was positioned on the fourteenth page of the November 10th publication. Whereas across the country, papers like the *New York Times* and *LA Times* placed the news on their front page, and others like the *Washington Post* put it on the third page, the *Morning Herald* threw its account of Vom Rath's death all the way to the back of its publication on the fourteenth of eighteen pages. Though difficult to prove that the paper's editors were explicitly attempting to bury the article out of an isolationist perspective, the fact that the column was not included farther up in the issue demonstrates the likely notion that the editors certainly weren't attempting to draw any particular attention to this event. Thus, the way that Vom Rath's death was treated by the publication is certainly compatible with the isolationist perspective, as it was seemingly indirectly treated as a foreign issue between the French and the Germans rather than something worthy of American attention.

One alternative explanation to this reality could have to do with the paper's production schedule, as it wouldn't be difficult to imagine that perhaps the front few pages had simply already been designed, and thus the only place to fit the breaking news of the Kristallnacht story was at the back. However, it should be noted that international news had an exceptionally difficult time making it onto the front page of *The Durham Morning Herald* in the week prior to Kristallnacht, which might lend support to my proposed theory that this story placement was

intentional. For example, on November 1st, the articles that received the largest headings on the front page read, “Durham Democrats Split Over Teague’s Successor; Committee is Deadlocked,” and “Wallace and Van Zeeland to Head 10 Speakers of Duke Symposium” respectively.⁴³ Clearly, the Herald was predominantly concerned with reporting on local news, and it wasn’t for a lack of supply of the international variety. On that very same day, The New York Times included multiple columns pertaining to international news on its front page: “France Bars Foreigners Wounded in Spanish War,” “Slovak Plan Casts Reich in Chief Role in Central Europe,” and “U.S. Warned to Gird for Economic War” all made appearances.⁴⁴ Though most would agree that The New York Times was likely a far more cosmopolitan and global-reaching publication than the Herald, even so, examples that showcase such a large discrepancy in international news coverage seem to support my prediction.

Looking ahead, on November 11th, the Herald interestingly provided a much more in-depth report, with the events covering two columns on the front page. In-line with Lipstadt’s analysis, the paper included plenty of quotations from other officials, as well as its own statements, which vehemently deplored the actions taken against Jews. There is no questioning the fact that the Morning Herald thus fell in line with most of the rest of the country in their condemnation of the Nazi regime. They quoted the executive committee of the world Jewish congress, who firmly stated that “the real culprit is the stupid and criminal persecution in Germany, where all the Jews are condemned without investigation by those who never cease to preach the priority of might over right, of violence and hate.”⁴⁵ In quoting this group so extensively, the paper inadvertently lent its page space as a platform for Jewish voices in condemnation of these so-called “reprisals” for the killing of Vom Rath, which was done by

43 *Durham Morning Herald* (Durham, North Carolina), November 1, 1938. *NewsBank: Selected America’s Historical Newspapers*.

44 *The New York Times* (New York, New York), November 1, 1938. *The New York Times*.

45 *Durham Morning Herald* (Durham, North Carolina), November 11, 1938. *NewsBank: Selected America’s Historical Newspapers*.

a seventeen year-old Polish Jew. What stands out amongst this lash back, however, is the inclusion of the Pope’s condemnation of Jewish persecution. This theme of relying on church officials will appear in later articles, and thus may be an identifiable characteristic of the Morning Herald’s journalistic pattern of practice, one that stands out as distinct amongst the way in which other papers went about reporting on these events.

On November 12th, the Herald took the approach of essentially regurgitating statements made by Joseph Goebbels. Among these, one stands out in particular which may provide insight into the paper’s unique perception of Kristallnacht as an organized event, one which was comprised of state involvement rather than, as other papers mischaracterized it, a supposed mixture of popular discontent, which resulted in the widespread riots. With the subheading of “Denies it Was Organized,” the article proceeds by quoting Goebbels, who proclaimed that “if I had organized it, it would have been more successful, more radical, and the result would have been quite different.”⁴⁶ Even by mentioning Goebbels’ push back against the thought of organized violence, the Morning Herald places a particular emphasis on this phenomenon in ways that other papers simply did not. Conversely, the paper also seems to leave the event’s level of organization open to interpretation insofar as it refers to Kristallnacht as “Germany’s sudden nation-wide outburst of anti-Semitism.” The “suddenness” with which the event occurred would likely indicate a low level of organization, though not completely eradicate the possibility of it. Thus, we can see that Morning Herald was actively trying to understand the cause of these events, a trend that Lipstadt points out as widespread, and which is easily observed here.⁴⁷

As promised, I must take the time to adequately address the November 14th issue of the publication, where various Church officials – and their respective

46 *Durham Morning Herald* (Durham, North Carolina), November 12, 1938. *NewsBank: Selected America’s Historical Newspapers*.

47 Deborah Lipstadt. *Beyond belief the American press and the coming of the Holocaust*. 73.

responses to Kristallnacht – are mentioned. I found these quotations to be of particular intrigue for a few reasons. Firstly, by dedicating so much space in the paper to these comments, the Morning Herald implicitly indicated that there was something important about the fact that this particular group of people was condemning the persecutions. Surely, there were many people at the time with opinions on what was taking place in Germany. However, to include only these comments shows that perhaps the Morning Herald felt that condemnation from Christian officials proved how bad these atrocities truly were, and in a way supported the Nazi condemnation that weaved its way through the Morning Herald's publications for weeks to come. With reference to The Right Reverend Mr. Manning, the Protestant Episcopal bishop of New York, the man stated that "Such action as that which is now taking place in Germany is an open defiance of God and a shame to humanity."⁴⁸ Later, the comments of Reverend Harry Emerson Fosdick, a pastor in the Riverside church of New York, were included: "The appalling persecution of the Jews in Germany is an outrage to the conscience of the civilized world."⁴⁹ In addition to the two reverends' comments, many others were included, from Rev. Dr. E. W. Barnes, bishop of Birmingham, and John Haynes Holms of the Nonsectarian Community church of New York. What's most interesting about these reports is that there doesn't seem to be any geographic rhyme or reason to whose sermons were mentioned. Though my previous examples highlight bishops and pastors from New York, the article also mentioned Rev. Dr. Clarence Edward Macartney of Pittsburgh, Archbishop Samuel A. Stritch of Milwaukee, and Dr. Daniel Poling of Philadelphia.⁵⁰

With the editors clearly willing to devote an entire article to these denouncements, any onlooker would be hard-pressed to argue that the Morning Herald's reporting did not constitute a condemnation of Nazi activities. Of course,

48 *Durham Morning Herald* (Durham, North Carolina), November 14, 1938. *NewsBank: Selected America's Historical Newspapers*.

49 *Ibid.*

50 *Ibid.*

many other articles make reference to the words of Joseph Goebbels, amongst other party leaders and members. However, the dissemination of that type of information was so widespread amongst American newspapers, that it would hardly suffice to categorize it as anti-condemnation on these sorts of grounds; rather, it would more likely fall under the category of information which was reported to provide insight into the party's response to these events and the subsequent condemnation they faced in its aftermath.

Using the quotations from these church officials, however, we not only are provided with insight into where the Morning Herald stood in terms of its sentiment towards Jewish persecution, nor do we only come to the conclusion that the editors valued the opinions of these religious figures; we also can make the observation that these comments were simply that: comments. None of these religious figures called for any sort of action on behalf of the American people, government, or military. As such, this type of reporting seemed to fit within the pre-existing isolationist framework that constituted the tone of previous articles, and which would continue to permeate future reports from the Morning Herald.

The Durham Sun

Once again looking at papers from the weeks leading up to Kristallnacht, we can recognize a staunchly different approach to reporting on Nazi affairs than the one we recognized in the Herald. Many of these reports on Nazi activity dealt with Hitler's ever-increasing presence on the global stage, with the editors identifying and expanding upon the German Chancellor's pushes into Czechoslovakia and even the Philippines.⁵¹ One can notice this in the sub headers, "Czechs Declare Nazi Troops Overstepped Frontier in Occupying New Village," and "Hitler Indicates Attention Turned Upon Philippines."⁵² While one could certainly deduce from these reports that these issues were becoming increasingly prominent in other parts

51 *Durham Sun* (Durham, North Carolina), October 20, 1938: 1. *NewsBank: Selected America's Historical Newspapers*.

52 *Ibid.*

of the world, the natural conclusion could just as easily be that Nazi influence was spreading rapidly and could soon involve even more countries, including America. If we are to interpret the Sun's reports and their potential to have such an effect on public opinion in this way, it's easy to differentiate this lack of isolationism from the Herald, where the opposite seems to be the case. We will come back to this possibility when analyzing the reports that came through after Kristallnacht, but for now, these considerations are important to keep in my mind as we think about the ways in which the two publications differed from one another in subtle but observable ways.

On October 22nd we can observe articles which, although composed of extremely different content, similarly lead us to believe that the Sun was less interested in pushing an isolationist agenda. Providing a report from Louis Lochner, the Associated Press's head correspondent in Berlin, the Sun inserted an account of the ongoing discussions between the U.S., Britain, and Nazi Germany in attempting "to devise a triangular agreement to supplant or supplement the proposed Anglo-American trade treaty... One of their tasks, it was suggested would be to restore confidence among business leaders of the three countries involved."⁵³ This talk of U.S. involvement in international affairs, especially those directly concerning Britain and Germany, two countries between which tensions were escalating, would logically contradict an argument supporting the notion that the Sun maintained an isolationist rhetoric similar to that of the Morning Herald. Of course, it must be noted that a paper, even one of an isolationist-leaning editorial board, would likely be compelled to report on these events regardless of their biases given the implications this information has regarding U.S. business interests. Nevertheless, the fact that we see such reports appear in the Sun and not the Morning Herald supports my argument that isolationist rhetoric was more blatantly contraposed in the former paper.

Looking now to the reporting practices of the

53 *Durham Sun* (Durham, North Carolina), October 22, 1938: 1. *NewsBank: Selected America's Historical Newspapers*.

Sun during and in the immediate aftermath of Kristallnacht, we can see how these pre-existing themes continued to manifest themselves across multiple articles amidst other concurrent patterns, which together will demonstrate how the Sun's reaction to the "night of broken glass" can provide historians with considerable insight into the paper's reporting biases. The Durham Sun first broke the news of the events in the Third Reich on November 10 with the headline, "Anti-Jewish Violence Sweeps Germany," a fairly standard articulation of the atrocities. However, for the rest of the article, it would hardly be appropriate to describe its account as such. Just a few lines into the report, the writers explained how "Only after more than 12 hours of nationwide violence did propaganda Minister Paul Joseph Goebbels call a halt, in a brief appeal to the people to desist from further demonstrations."⁵⁴ Using distinctive language like "only" and "brief" to describe the length of time it took to respond, and the minimalism of said response, the Sun clearly demonstrated its contempt for such violence. Similarly, it indirectly conveyed its comprehension of the level of organization behind the attacks, insofar as the government's lack of intervention until the twelfth hour constituted a level of complicity which couldn't be ignored. Later, the writers more explicitly identified the likelihood of government involvement / organization in these widespread riots, noting how "The reports indicated that the campaign was conducted with a thoroughness and precision that left little to chance."⁵⁵

As previously mentioned, this cognizance was unique amongst American newspapers. Aside from showcasing the paper's contempt for the Third Reich and their campaign against the Jews, this effort to go beyond merely scraping the surface of these foreign reports demonstrates that editors at the Sun may have felt a certain urgency in clearly emphasizing the depth of Nazi government involvement in anti-Jewish activity in Germany. This, taken in tandem with what we saw in the Morning Herald, where an

54 *Durham Sun* (Durham, North Carolina), November 10, 1938: 1. *NewsBank: Selected America's Historical Newspapers*.

55 *Ibid.*

isolationist rhetoric may have been more prevalent, it's possible too that the Sun's unique response and emphasis on government involvement could have been at least partially in response to their neighbor's biases (even if, as I previously mentioned, the Herald was able to hint at government involvement/organization in their own way). Equally distinct from the Herald's method of reporting, was the way in which the Sun went about detailing the telephoned reports which were disseminated from cities across Germany, collected by the Associated Press, and distributed to outlets like the Sun. Citing how in Munich, "All Jews were told they must leave the country," how in Cologne "Crowds broke windows in nearly every Jewish shop," and in Salzburg "shops of small Jewish tradesmen were invaded, demolished and looted," the Durham Sun went the extra mile in emphasizing the "nationwide extent," as they referred to it, of these anti-Jewish attacks.⁵⁶ By not only harping on the point of organization embedded within these seemingly spontaneous riots, but subsequently detailing concrete examples of such assaults and persecution across various cities, it seems increasingly probable that the Sun was dedicated to defending this notion as a result of some deep, unknown, but nevertheless logically deducible reasons pertaining, to some extent, to their devotion to holding the Nazi government accountable, and for distinguishing their paper from the Herald in their more explicit denunciations – perhaps as a result of their lesser commitment to isolationism.

The Sun's staunch commitment to pushback on misinformation, misinterpretations of foreign events, and in particular false reports conveyed by Nazi officials, is once again on full display in the following day's article. On November 11th, the paper produced an article wherein they published a number of Joseph Goebbels' statements following the events of Kristallnacht, of which they summarily responded to with indirect indignation and calculated pushback. For example, the paper mentions how, according to Goebbels,

⁵⁶ *Durham Sun* (Durham, North Carolina), November 10, 1938: 1. *NewsBank: Selected America's Historical Newspapers*.

the "dynamiting of synagogues and destruction of Jewish shops, was spontaneous... He insisted there was no looting."⁵⁷ Immediately after, however, the paper then details how "Trustworthy eyewitnesses yesterday said they had seen shops in the Arcade between Friedrichstrasse and Under Den Linden and in other part[s] of the city looted."⁵⁸ Though not directly conveying a rebuttal to Goebbels' reports, the Sun utilizes an evidence-based approach in making claims that do in fact directly contradict the information conveyed by the Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. In this way, the editors almost let the information speak for itself. This recurring theme of indirect commentary, it should be noted, is one which may provide us with considerable insight regarding the evidently limited extent to which American newspapers, even ones so clearly against the Nazi persecution of Jews, were willing to directly condemn German authorities for the atrocities of Kristallnacht, versus the more common way in which they indirectly undermined Nazi reports through effective journalistic practices, such as reliance on eyewitness accounts. Thus, despite the Sun's considerably larger steps in the direction of denouncement, anti-isolationism, and fuller comprehension of the exact level of government involvement in the social unrest and hatred which accompanied Kristallnacht, the paper may nevertheless be guilty of falling into this category of indirect reporting. Such a conclusion, when taken in conjunction with our analysis of the Morning Herald, could have profound ramifications for our understanding of the types of limitations placed on newspapers and their reporting practices when writing about unique events like Kristallnacht, in which standard reporting practices cannot effectively deal with a regime's or ruler's level of misinformation. Perhaps, too, this inability to directly speak out has to do with the standards of professionalism and flexible definition for

⁵⁷ *Durham Sun* (Durham, North Carolina), November 11, 1938: 1. *NewsBank: Selected America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁵⁸ *Durham Sun* (Durham, North Carolina), November 11, 1938: 1. *NewsBank: Selected America's Historical Newspapers*.

objectivity which I previously touched on.

Conclusion

What we find in analyzing these articles is not something that we can easily point to and define as “isolationist” or “anti-immigration”. Rather, by analyzing articles over a given period of time and around a particular event, we can begin to recognize patterns of practice which allude to potential biases inherent within a paper’s articles, perhaps based on editorial opinion, local pressures, or a seemingly infinite number of other possibilities. However, if we can take these observations and compare them to what we know about the historical context of the community in which a paper is based, as well as compare these biases to those of a nation as a whole, we can begin to formulate predictions about a newspaper’s subliminal messaging that are likely to be more accurate than they would otherwise be.

This is precisely the approach which I have attempted to take here, and I believe that my resulting research has produced a number of insights which have the potential to tell us something useful about American reporting on the events of Kristallnacht on the whole. Firstly, the differing levels of isolationist rhetoric utilized in each of the papers exemplifies the fact that geographic location need not directly impact a paper’s perspective in this arena. Thus, it is plausible that some other reason must have contributed to the Herald’s preference for isolationist rhetoric, and the Sun’s comparative lack of such language and ideas. Second, newspapers in America collectively responded to these atrocities with a unified front of condemnation. However, that distaste often came across through indirect means, which may say something about the industry-specific limitations imposed on newspapers when it comes to speaking out on world issues, even those of which entire countries can be seemingly unified in their opinions. Finally, I came to find that there is still much to uncover in the words, contexts, and intentions embedded in each of the articles I analyzed. A newspaper article is not an obvious, easy, or straightforward source to examine. There are layers of complexity, which I have attempted

to weed out through my analysis, which make it difficult to formulate concrete conclusions. Nevertheless, such is the interpretive nature of this work, and the reason why scholars continue to revisit these questions.

One way to better understand where a piece of journalism, an author, an editor, or even a media company as a whole is coming from when reporting on high profile stories like Kristallnacht, is to engage in studies such as this one. I believe that by using my strategies of analysis, we can apply these techniques of informed dissection to approach any article with a critical lens and an eye for better understanding. Moving forward, this will be a crucial skill for individuals of any society that consumes media to develop, in order to combat misinformation and to understand the contexts, pressures, and biases impacting journalistic expression at every level.

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