TITLE: A Post-Bacc Staple Thesis

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Contents

Preface

I think of my post-bacc phase as this: one day, I realized I missed writing papers, and regretted not engaging with paper-writing in a more meaningful way during my undergraduate years. I graduated from the English department! How did I fail to feel satisfied with my paper-writing? (the answer probably lies buried under the stale beer-sweat of post-adolescent angst)

Here is an archive of my rampage through Carnegie Mellon University's history department, courtsey of my staff tuition benefits. I'm writing this now as part of my transition into what I think will become my pre-doc phase: the period in which I have not yet applied to a graduate program, but am taking much more serious steps in that direction. Also, now I'll have to pay tax on my tuition benefits.

It always felt a little unfair to the other undergraduates when I was doing my post-bacc coursework; not only had I already finished a bachelor's degree, but I finished it from the same university as they were attending. I was hitting far below my weight class, and I knew it. What I'm looking forward to as a pre-doc is that my classmates will have achieved things I haven't yet reached: they've taken their GREs, they've applied to a graduate program, and, more to the point, are actual doctoral candidates. Me? I'm just a non-degree staffer filling up my free time with busywork.

These are presented in chronological order, with one chapter per course; referrenced sources appear at the end of every chapter. I've made a few minor typological and typographical edits for the sake of consistency, but other than that, these essays remain the same as what I turned in to my professors.

Major Topics:

- American Cultural History
- Chinese Power Structures
- Aesthetics/Visual Language

Themes:

- Language, and how it shapes perception
- Delineations/transitions
- Informations transfers

Acknowldegements

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-ian

Chapter 1

American Political Humor

Fall 2012, Dr. Scott Sandage

Full course title: 79-xxx; American Poltical Humor: From Mark Twain to the Daily Show

1.1 The Greyness of Mark Twain

18 September 2012

It is a tempting and simple instinct of humans to divide the world into a series of dichotomies; truth and lies, civilized and savage, sin and morality, black and white. However, it is the spectrum between, the infinite divisibility of the grey area, that provides truly worthwhile things for study. The extremes only exist as notions, ideals that can never be realized, for one requires the context of one side in order to note the existence of the other. Acknowledgment of both reveals a vast and muddled space between, in which travel becomes possible. Throughout his life, Mark Twain embarked on his own journey through this inexplicable grey area, and his discoveries formed the basis of his humor.

In *The Importance of Mark Twain*, Alan Gribben defines Twain as the quintessential American humorist, noting that he exists as a "crucial continuity" and a "common denominator of what we want to perceive to be the American character" (Gribben 48). Indeed, Twain's status in history stands as an almost mythological figure, a strange life bookended by two appearances of an astrological phenomenon. Charles Neider describes him as a living incongruity, both a clown and a tragedian, both an amateur and a competent professional, both an optimist and a pessimist (Neider xv). Twain's inexplicable connection to both the blacks and the whites of the world, an intimate understanding of the existence of dichotomies, allowed him to display the gradient of greys as he dilutes whiteness with black and vice versa.

Twain begins his foray into mass publication with an open editorial to *The Buffalo Express*, in which he declares from the start that he shall be existing in the grey field. In *Salutatory*, he provides the paper's readership with a list

of absolutes, such as confining himself to truth, rebuking all forms of crime, refraining from vulgar speech, etc. except when he won't (Neider 1). This is his initial declaration to the literate public at large, his claim that he will not be adhering to canonically accepted notions of custom and law. In this early period of his life, he has already accepted the grey area that will become the color of his future writings; he starts with the pure whiteness that characterized publications before him and rejects it by adding blackness, pushing his position into issues concerning the space between.

Twain found good company in another figure that occupied a similarly incongruous state. He displayed a certain fascination with the late King Kamehameha V when he wrote *The Sandwich Islands*. There, he outlined the existing dichotomies of Catholic versus heathen, civilized versus savage, the incoming whites versus the existing natives. With those categories of white and black established, he then immediately showed his appreciation for Kamehameha's ability to move between them, how he could "converse like a born Christian gentleman" and then "retire to a cluster of dismal little straw-thatched native huts by the sea-shore, and there for a fortnight he would turn himself into a heathen whom you could not tell from his savage grandfather" (Neider 25). Twain's tone is a bit whimsical, almost envious, of Kamehameha's flexible and confusing status; he wrote with obvious distaste and sadness that such a place would be annexed by America, through a process that was seemingly bringing the "lamp of light" into the darkness (Neider 28). In reality, Twain found that something to be ridiculed, as he sarcastically exclaimed, "We can give them lectures! I will go myself." (Neider 28).

William Keough portrays the particularly American humor that Twain frontiered as a more violent, caustic sort than that of other cultures. Violence, however, exists on a more basic human level than humor, and humor as a response to brutality is a way of removing the blackness of it, bringing a dark situation into the grey field so that it can be more easily viewed in a context with contrast. Twain addressed a "Person Sitting in Darkness" from the position of one who occupies the grey area; he did not write from the lofty tone of one who would banish the darkness entirely by shining the full power of the sun into the shadows, nor does he wish to snuff out the light entirely by covering it with overwhelming shadow. Rather, he straddled the middle, addressing both the voice of light and the listener in the dark.

"To the Person Sitting in Darkness is a dark, bitter essay, one that can hardly be considered humorous so much as it merely contains some elements of humor. Sarcastic comments directed towards Reverend Ament, for example, "the right man in the right place" (Neider 284) serve to muddy the normally pure white image of a man of the cloth; at the same time, sympathetic speech to the listeners in the dark, "too scarce and too shy" (Neider 286), bring them out of the darkness in which they have otherwise been placed. He levels the playing field for them by causing both sides to exist in the same field of grey, one that allows a closer relate-ability once they are all just humans in the world together rather than strict representations of black and white.

He goes further to constantly point out dichotomies in order to highlight the

hypocrisy that occurs when one attempts to adhere to them; his Person Sitting in Darkness begins to learn of the incongruities that Twain denigrates when two kinds of Civilization are pointed out, an externally displayed one, "strictly for Export", and an "Actual Thing that the Customer Sitting in Darkness buys" (Neider 287). The Person is given a voice of his own once he starts to describe the incongruities of so-called civilized societies "with its banner of the Prince of Peace in one hand and its loot basket and butcher knife in the other." (Neider 289). The Person continues to ponder such things for Twain, noting that it is "curious and unaccountable. There must be two Americans; one that sets the captive free and one that takes a once-captive's new freedom away from him, and picks a quarrel with him with nothing to found it on" (Neider 291). Twain's ultimate point is that so long as such dichotomies exist, there will be incongruities, as it is impossible for man to remain firmly in either the black or the white.

The essay's bitter dissection of America's habit of violently conquering native, heathen people comes to a conclusion that is explained to the person; in particular, he states that "we have debauched America's honor and blackened her face before the world" (Neider 295). America has been made a muddied grey through its violent actions, bringing the country into a hypocritical and ironic state that is ripe for Twain's humor to feed upon. The joke is that there isn't a joke, but couched in Twain's sarcastic tone, the mixing of black and white becomes an object of ridicule, a situation that necessitates a humorous interpretation in spite of itself.

Once he travels too far into the black, Twain begins to lose his edge of humor. In *The Damned Human Race*, he writes almost entirely from the black, reaching a point in his travel across the grey space from which he does not see a recovery for mankind. He declares that "Man cannot claim to approach even the meanest of the Higher Animals", and "constitutionally afflicted with a Defect which must make such approach forever impossible, for it is manifest that this defect is permanent in him, indestructible, ineradicable" (DeVoto 228). By both placing man in an unrecoverable darkness and situating himself in a position that no longer acknowledges the grey area, he wrote a piece that does not provide or a way out, nor any sympathy for humanity. In this, the absence of humor is apparent.

To examine Twain's spectrum of writing is to see a full range of the grey spectrum, from his early pieces that add subtle amounts of greyness in order to give some contrast to the world of black and white absolutes, to essays that spell out the grey area entirely, and the final blackness of his later writings that stand as the opposite to his initial editorials. The parts of humor that are visible are ones where the grey area is clearly visible, when both the black and the white boundaries can be seen, and an occupation of the grey space is the only position from which that view is possible.

1.2 The Greyness of Mark Twain (revision)

4 October 2012

It is a tempting and simple instinct of humans to divide the world into a series of dichotomies; truth and lies, civilized and savage, sin and morality, black and white. However, it is the spectrum between, the infinite divisibility of the grey area, that is worth studying. The extremes only exist as notions, ideals that can never be realized, for one requires the context of one side in order to note the existence of the other. Acknowledgment of both reveals a vast and muddled space between, in which travel becomes possible and the hypocrisy of dichotomies can be seen. Throughout his life, Mark Twain embarked on his own journey through this inexplicable grey area, and his discoveries formed the basis of his humor.

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Twain's entry into mass publication with an editorial to *The Buffalo Express* shows his curiosity of the grey field from the start. In "Salutatory", he provides the paper's readership with a list of absolutes, such as confining himself to truth, rebuking all forms of crime, refraining from vulgar speech, etc. except when he won't (Neider 1). This is his initial declaration to the literate public at large, his claim that he will not be adhering to canonically accepted notions of custom and law. In this early period of his life, he has already accepted the grey area that will become the color of his future writings; he starts with the clean light that characterized publications before him, that "custom is law, and custom must be obeyed" (Neider 1) and immediately rejects it by adding a little bit of darkness, pushing his position into issues concerning the space between.

Before he really settled into his position of writing from the grey, Twain studied other figures that appeared in a state of incongruity. He displayed a certain fascination with the late King Kamehameha V when he wrote "The Sandwich Islands". There, he outlined the existing dichotomies of Catholic versus heathen, civilized versus savage, the incoming whites versus the existing natives. With those categories of light and darkness established, he then immediately showed his appreciation for Kamehameha's ability to move between them, how he could "converse like a born Christian gentleman" and then "retire to a cluster of dismal little straw-thatched native huts by the sea-shore, and there for a fortnight he would turn himself into a heathen whom you could not tell from his savage grandfather" (Neider 25). Twain's tone is a bit whimsical, almost

envious, of Kamehameha's flexible and confusing status; he wrote with obvious distaste and sadness that such a place would be annexed by America, through a process that was seemingly bringing the "lamp of light" into the darkness (Neider 28). In reality, Twain found that something to be ridiculed, as he sarcastically exclaimed, "We can give them lectures! I will go myself." (Neider 28). He saw the imperialistic act of assimilating and westernizing the natives as a destruction of culture; rather than criticize it outright, though, he pretended to support the cause with this exaggerated speech that more effectively showed his alarm.

William Keough portrays the particularly American humor that Twain frontiered as a more violent, caustic sort than that of other cultures. Violence, however, exists on a more basic human level than humor; it is the force that ends life while love is the act that creates it, and humor is a response to both. Using humor to address brutality is a way of reducing the darkness of it, bringing it into the grey field so that it can be more easily viewed in a context with contrast. Twain addressed a "Person Sitting in Darkness" from the position of one who occupies the grey area; he did not write from the lofty tone of one who would banish the darkness entirely by shining the full power of the sun into the shadows, nor does he wish to snuff out the light entirely by covering it with overwhelming shadow. Rather, he straddled the middle, addressing both the voice of light and the listener in the dark.

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The core of this essay is an identification of dichotomies, which highlight the hypocrisy that occurs when one attempts to adhere to them; his Person Sitting in Darkness begins to learn of the incongruities that Twain denigrates when two kinds of Civilization are pointed out, an externally displayed one, "strictly for Export", and an "Actual Thing that the Customer Sitting in Darkness buys" (Neider 287). The Person is given a voice of his own once he starts to describe the incongruities of so-called civilized societies "with its banner of the Prince of Peace in one hand and its loot basket and butcher knife in the other." (Neider 289). The Person continues to ponder such things for Twain, noting that it is "curious and unaccountable. There must be two Americans; one that sets the captive free and one that takes a once-captive's new freedom away from him, and picks a quarrel with him with nothing to found it on" (Neider 291). Twain's ultimate point is that so long as such dichotomies exist, there will be incongruities, as it is impossible for man to remain firmly in either absolute state.

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1.3 Mass Culture

TODO: Missing

1.4 The Importance of Being Obnoxious

16 December 2016

The self-publishing platform, lack of regulation, and relatively anonymous means of content distribution provided by the internet allows for certain types of humor to develop that could not flourish under any other circumstance. In particular, the nature of the internet promotes a sort of derisive humor, as it lowers the social risks normally present in making and enjoying distasteful jokes or deliberately offensive commentary. Through the collection of articles on *The Best Page in the Universe*, pseudonymous humorist Maddox demonstrated that on the internet, sometimes it's effective to be an asshole.

The Best Page in the Universe started in 1998, and has remained stylistically unchanged from its original format of bland white text on a black background with no other features other than the occasional colored text for emphasis and badly drawn graphics to illustrate particularly rude points. The only perceptible modernization is the addition of buttons at the bottom of each article that allow the viewer to link that particular page with one's social network of choice. His website followed a common path of websites; it started as a personal space for rants that spread by word of mouth until he reached the status of internet superhero for his unapologeticallly scathing essays about punching women, killing babies, and the depressing stupidity of mankind. Curiously enough, and perhaps indicitive of the egotism and self-awareness frequently seen in high-profile comedians, Maddox pointed out his own fame in the aptly-titled article "How is it possible that a guy with a small penis and a hairy back is more powerful than Pepsi on the Internet?" in which he charted money spent on advertising versus Alexa.com page ranking. Although he never offered an answer to that question, he painted the incongruous image that "corporate sites have promotions, games, and discounts, yet more people come to this site every day and read stupid bullshit about how big my balls are" (Maddox).

Maddox's questioning of his own position on the internet highlights the recurring theme seen in a history of political humorists, that "[t]he humor arises out of the gap between the cultural ideal and the everyday fact, with the ideal shown to be somewhat hollow and hypocritical, and the fact crude and disgusting" (Rubin, 262). In fact, the internet itself may represent the final frontier of Rubin's Great American Joke; it presents a platform where anyone with a computer and a connection can place content in the same space, which often places eloquently worded commentary next to incomprehensibly illiterate babble. Even if a particular website only contains polished, edited, and serious material, there's no stopping a user from having that page open next to pictures of cats that look like Hitler. It is, as Rubin says, "a society based theoretically upon the equality of all men...and the incongruities are likely to be especially observable" (Rubin, 263). In such a world, the fact that Maddox's crude and frivolous articles display a measurably stronger hold on viewers than carefully crafted online brands show that there must be something viewers want that he is providing.

In *Cracking Up*, Paul Lewis points to "an eagerness to provoke and be provoked" as the basis for derisive humor, that jokes have evolved to having a specific target and agenda in mind (Lewis, 6-7). Once this crosses into the realm of aggressive and violent jokes, he asserts that it "bars the butt/victim from joining in the laughter and puts the viewer in the awkward position of laughing with a monster, refusing to do so, or sustaining an uneasy ambivalence" (Lewis, 25). An interesting twist on Lewis's butt wars is that Maddox explicitly targets his readers in his attacks. Following an April Fool's prank in which he drastically altered the format of his website, he posted "How do you dumbasses manage to breathe?" as a response to the flood of bewildered, concerned, and sometimes outraged responses to the appearance of his website. He ends the article with "[a]fter reading a few thousand emails like the ones above,

I seriously considered taking down my site and just posting links to animal porn for you retards. You're all idiots, and I've lost what little respect I've had for you" (Maddox). Despite being constantly openly hostile and degrading to his readers, people keep coming back, as evidenced by the page view counter on that article; it reads over two and a half million visitors eight years after it was originally published.

Perhaps what brings readers back, though, is knowing that they personally were not the ones writing Maddox stupid emails. Despite the fact that Maddox directly addresses the reader and unabashedly generalizes all of his readers to the same label of ignorant twats, any particular reader can enjoy the jokes by knowing that he only really meant people stupid enough to send him stupid emails. Like Lenny Bruce reading court transcripts as part of his stand-up act, Maddox publishes choice examples of hate mail, offering both dismissive commentary and scathing rebuttals. While other writers on the internet will leave open the option to comment on articles directly, Maddox maintains the old-fashioned method of publishing letters-to-the-editor as he sees fit; his audience has no way to verify the authenticity of any submission, and those emails become further props and objects of ridicule.

Despite the generally immature nature of his articles, Maddox often touches on political topics with serious social consequences. At the heart of his articles is an impressive ability to get extremely angry at virtually anything, and he treats political issues that strike him as unforgivingly stupid just as badly as he treats his readers who can't tell when he's pulling an April Fool's joke. Corruption of the police, hypocrisy of activists, partisan hackery, and censorship are frequently recurring topics, particularly as they highlight the incongruities at the base of every Great American Joke.

In addition to just ridiculing politics, though, he has leveraged his readership for calls to action. During the January 2012 web-protests against the Stop Online Piracy Act, he wrote "I hope SOPA passes," an article that, contrary to its title, didn't promote the highly controversial bill, but instead questioned the effectiveness of protests that only raise awareness of issues without making attempts to effect change. His refusal to participate in the protest by blacking out his website for a day was "because it doesn't address any problems, only the symptom" (Maddox), referring to his belief that even defeating one particular bill wouldn't make a difference because lobbyists would just push a new one. Not willing to mark himself a hypocrite for describing problems without offering solutions, he compiled a list of companies known to support the bill, encouraging his readers to boycott them, and additionally opening up discussion for boycotting tactics and other effective ways to fight the greater problem at hand. He asserted that defeating SOPA was "like trying to stop a cold by blowing your nose. It's time we go after the virus" (Maddox).

Peter Robinson explored an ongoing relationship between comedians and politicians through their influences on the public; he concluded that "the political comedians would be invested with the sort of comprehensive sovereignty that presidents and candidates can only dream of: political influence, economic power, and cultural celebrity" (Robinson, 214). In Maddox's case, his status

as a celebrity comes first, and his cult following generates the rest. He directs a naturally abrasive persona towards producing humor that is, on the surface, degrading and offensive to virtually everybody, but he wouldn't have the popularity that he does if there wasn't a current of truth running through his words. His essays are satirical, gross exaggerations of problems in society that people are already aware of, only he challenges how people think about them in addition to pointing out that they exist.

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Chapter 2

Trajectories in Photography

Fall 2013; Dr. Leo Hsu

2.1 Analysis of Wilson Hicks: "What is Photojournalism?"

Hicks occupied a position that gave him a substantial amount of authority on photojournalism; he contributed to the medium in a way that made him a witness to the evolution of photojournalism, just as the photojournalist was a witness to news stories. That said, it also put him in a position of power as a firsthand reporter on something he helped to create. Overall, he writes in concrete, absolute statements, often presenting questions or counter-arguments immediately after his point and then addressing them—an apt reflection of his position as the journalist of photojournalism.

To address the question he posed in his title, Hicks breaks the problem down into two approaches: first, he defines photojournalism from within by excising its components and asserting how each segment functions as part of the whole medium; second, he describes photojournalism externally by providing an overview of the social and technological developments worldwide that needed to occur in order for photojournalism to have a place. Both approaches are necessary for a complete statement on an otherwise complicated medium with many variables and expectations; the initial technical definition comes first as a foothold for the reader to understand the social structure that comes second.

By Hicks's technical definition, photojournalism is a combination of words and pictures; more directly, it is one unit of expression that affects both the eyes and the ears of the reader (words, he states, as a means to stimulate the ears, and pictures to stimulate the eyes). This unit combines with what he calls the 'X-factor'—the ideas, memories, and beliefs carried by the reader—in order to form an experience that is greater than what each of the three segments could have provided alone. With this, then, the existence of an audience is crucial to the success of Hicks's photojournalism. In the production of photojournalism,

he ascribes each piece to a separate role: the writer, the photographer, and the editor, that even if one person holds multiple roles, all three must exist in a balanced, cohesive group in order to achieve success.

Additional to the three segments of a unit of photojournalism, Hicks deconstructs how the photograph itself contributes to the experience. He points out that in reality, human vision is limited, affected by the mind's capacity to observe and process imagery; the camera, in that sense, has a superior perception of the visual world, able to mechanically record images without the burden of emotions. Furthermore, photographs gave people the ability to examine an image free of the immediacy of reality, and thus allows the formation of a new sort of emotional response not previously possible. It's this particular power of photography that Hicks claims as a major contributor to the success of photojournalism.

In tracing the social trajectory of photojournalism, Hicks attributes the turning point to the technological advancements offered by the Leica, a camera that was so small and unobtrusive compared to previous machines. Previously, the presence of a camera unavoidably changed events due to the physical intrusion of a camera and all its related entourage, but once the actual act of photography was simplified, entirely different photographs were possible—rapid sequences, low light, and less arranged shoots, to name a few. Coupled with the ability to distribute photographs in print media, photographs became a more integrated part of journalism, rather than just an illustrative or design element to accompany text. With the Leica, photographers were able to speak to the point that Hicks makes about why photography is effective: the non-intrusive images showed scenes that viewers could interpret as if they were there, but without the problems of faulty perception and memory. Additionally, photographers themselves could hone and rely on their instincts for capturing images with the potential to have this effect.

The interesting part about Hicks's account of the development of photojournalism, specifically with regards to *Life*, is that his syntax does not give away, or even imply, that he was involved heavily with its production. However, the breadth of detail and absolute descriptions give a sense of witness to that development; it's as if he wanted to see photojournalism in the way that the camera saw events, with the ability to record and not judge. That said, the selectivity of the camera applied to Hicks's position as well; the more absolute his statements, the narrower a path he must take, and his perspective did not allow intrusions beyond the definitions he carefully laid out.

2.2 Flakey Imagery

12 December 2013

Humans are visual creatures and scientists are ever hungry for more information. So, when Wilson Bentley, a quiet farm boy from Vermont, presented the world with photographic evidence of something that is now recognizable as the canonical representation of a snowflake, the world accepted his vision as the

ideal that has always been desired. His images were the result of a deep personal obsession with what he believed to be the true, pure form of a snowflake, regardless of what actually fell from the skies. Despite that, the scientific community was willing to overlook flaws in his method for the sake of accessing data they previously did not have, and popular culture enthusiastically received the iconic image that filled a gap in the collective visual vocabulary.

The popular notion of a snowflake is a perfect, symmetrical figure—a flat, six-pointed shape that schoolchildren can cut from a carefully folded piece of paper. This iconic form is used as a universally recognizable symbol for snow, from winter-themed decorations to weather alerts that rely on the concision of pictograms rather than text. However, there was no widely accepted representation of snow prior to the publication of Bentley's photographic work in 1901. A spotty history of snowflake imagery turns up very few instances of recognition of that shape, being mostly drawings rendered from some combination of magnified viewing with the memory and imagination of the artist; snowflakes melted in a fraction of the time it took for a drawing to be made, and thus creating a faithful representation was both tedious and not really possible.

At the age of fifteen, Bentley started his pursuit of the snowflake in 1880 with a microscope that was given to him as a birthday present. He took an approach similar to the snowflake documentarians of the past; he would catch snowflakes as they fell, look for one that seemed properly suited for illustration, then attempt to draw it freehand while observing the rapidly deteriorating form under a microscope (Blanchard 24). He found the process frustrating, especially as it highlighted the fleeting nature of his subjects, which he considered "miracles of beauty; and it seemed a shame that this beauty should not be seen and appreciated by others" (22). Here, though, he had already begun his process of manipulating the image of a snowflake; the sort of crystal he was attracted to was an extremely rare form, produced only under very specific weather conditions, and only through a lot of luck and patience was he able to capture one for his examination. As he was a hobbyist, not a scientist, his culling of ugly snowflakes could hardly be criticized.

Once Bentley started taking photographs of his favorite snowflakes in 1885, his work took a different form; he was still only photographing snowflakes as a hobby, since his primary job was to work on his family farm and he could only entertain his need to document snowflakes as part of his leisure time. Still, he devoted as much time as he could every winter to chase his obsession, keeping detailed notes on weather conditions each day, as well as precise technical information about each exposure he captured (44–45). This level of detail and commitment to the task was a significant advantage to his entry into the world of scientists, even though he had no scientific background himself. Anyone who could manually produce hundreds of individually-captured snowflake photographs, as well as produce such an expansive amount of information about each one, easily gained the respect of the scientific community of his time.

A similar body of work produced just prior to his birth failed to gain serious recognition; an unnamed woman produced a book of drawings and poetry about snowflakes, and submitted them to a Harvard professor for his advice. Even as

he respected the artistic merit of her work, he suggested that she present the drawings in a more scientific tone, "otherwise the whole would be useless to students of nature, and only to be looked at as an elegant toy, fit to excite the curiosity, but not to impart information" (61–62). Her work was apparently not well popularized, perhaps as a combination of not reaching the right audience at the right time, and not having enough appeal as either art or science.

Bentley's work, on the other hand, saw almost instant success once it fell into the hands of meteorologists. Beginning in 1899, he started selling his snowflake photographs to scientists at five cents per print, including his detailed technical notes with each image. The prints were made from duplicate negatives, which he carefully etched in an attempt to improve the appearance of the details of the flake; because it was virtually impossible to capture an entirely clean image of a perfectly symmetrical, unbroken snowflake, he allowed himself to modify the photographs that were ultimately to be shared, just to make sure that his vision of the pure snowflake was sustained. The resulting photographs were so impressive that his modifications were generally overlooked in favor of being able to study the overall body of work.

At this stage, he was very open and forthcoming about his methods, including notes that his photographs neglected to show an average view of snowflakes. In a letter to meteorologist Abbot Rotch included with an order of photographs, he readily admitted that "the average forms are much less perfect & beautiful" (68), and described what sorts of weather conditions produce the more perfect snowflake he sought. Despite this open declaration of his selectivity in providing specimens for scientific study, his images were rapidly acquired by the scientific community. Rotch's response did not even comment on Bentley's obvious bias for aesthetic beauty; he only encouraged Bentley by paying for extra photographs and spreading the images to other people who were studying weather phenomena (68).

By 1902, Bentley became known for his skill in photographing snowflakes, a task that had not been performed so successfully due to the technical challenges with the equipment available at the time. As a result, his work was in demand by multiple publications and studies; on request, he produced a ten page article with 255 photographs of snowflakes for the *Monthly Weather Review*, a scientific journal of meteorology, and thus solidly set himself a place at the scientists' table, despite still being a potato farmer from Vermont. For that article, he understood the need to document a more average selection of snowflakes; despite that, he had a hard time shaking his desire to show only the snowflakes he found worthy. He admitted:

> This proved the most difficult task of all, because the old habit of seeking for the beautiful and interesting, rather than the characteristic types, was very difficult to overcome. For this reason, I fear the winter's photographic record portrays far more fully the general character of the beautiful and interesting than it does the broken or unsymmetrical types. And yet there are few, perhaps, who after viewing the feast of beauty filling these pages will regret our

> shortcomings in this regard (88).

In the current standards of scientific publication, it seems implausible that such obviously aeshetically-driven work produced by someone with no training in scientific process should be published as legitimate research.

Bentley was producing his photographs at a time when the role of photography was not yet well defined in any field—artists looked at photography with great skepticism, scientists had yet to understand its potential utility, and no real commercial venture existed. In that respect, the fact that Bentley's background did not have any obvious ties to the current modes of photography might not even have mattered. At the time, no one knew how to categorize the act of photography; all that was relevant was that someone had managed to cheaply mass-produce images of something that previously hadn't been easily seen with such clarity, and for the sake of scientific and cultural progress, that work was accepted regardless of its haphazard provenance. In other words, he filled a need that society had, during a time when both images and information were insatiably consumed in a post Industrial Revolution era.

There's a relationship that exists between the photographic process and the notion of objectivity. An attractive belief is that the camera's inability to create a falsehood and photography's reliance on the visual existence of the actual object being photographed implies an indisputable source of objectivity. In Bentley's case, he attempted to capture an objective representation of a subjective beauty—that being snowflakes in a state of purity, untainted by their existence in the real world. Rather than document the specimens he considered faulty and unworthy, he distilled his vision by not even allowing those natural faults to make it onto film at all. However, the reality of snow does not lie in what he decided to show; it lies in a more average, realistic selection of snowflakes that never appeared in his portrait of snow. Furthermore, the images that he chose to share were individually manipulated to display his belief of each snowflake's ideal beauty; even though he made unmodified, original negatives available for inspection, the point is moot because only modified images ever entered the popular view.

Regardless of what real snow actually looks like, the process of making a recognizable illustrative image necessitates an abstraction of the original form into a simpler, more appealing shape. Ideography is just that—turning ideas into simple pictures. The picture only needs to bear a slight resemblance to the original, and also needs enough pervasion in popular use to become accepted as a canonical graphic. Manipulated or not, Bentley's photographs provided a crisp graphic form that was easily mimicked in illustrations, and also experienced the pervasion through cultural media that allowed the form to become popularized. Art does not require objectivity in order to be successful; Bentley's photographs as just works of art were accepted because he was able to show objects of beauty in a way that were never seen before. Conveniently, his photographs showed snowflakes in a way that made for an obvious ideograph.

Bentley's work was only successful because it came during a period of shifting standards of objectivity. In current scientific communities, his work wouldn't

stand a chance at gaining recognition as a rigorous documentation of a natural phenomenon due to his selection bias and manipulation of captured images. However, at the time he was producing his work, such a body of images did not yet exist, and there were no facilities capable of creating them. The fact that there was such a sheer volume of images that no one had seen before, coupled with his detailed technical notes and willingness to practically give the work away, created exactly the sort of situation for his work to become popular. His obsession with the pursuit of cataloguing his own notion of beauty and perfection resulted in the canonical snowflake image today.

References

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Chapter 3

China and its Neighbors

Spring 2014; Dr. Donald Sutton

3.1 The Disputes of Grey Areas

10 February 2014

An examination of boundary areas often provides insight into issues that occur on one side of the divide or the other. The fuzzy transitional zone between the grasslands used by mobile Mongolian herders and China's stationary agricultural settlements is one instance of such a space. The physical landscape of that area is characterized by a combination of constantly shifting ecological borders as the sand dunes of the desert-steppe environment encroach onto arable farmlands. This changing landscape created disparate ways of life that engendered different cultural ideologies towards the usage of space. One group was the pastoral nomads who valued the flexibility of following the lands that provided for their sustenance; the other, sedentary farmers whose carefully organized cultivation of the land required a clear delineation of the world around them. Ultimately, the proximity of these two disjoint cultures demonstrated some of the problems that came from such an adjacency.

The Han had a sense of space that defined emptiness as a negative concept [1], an attitude that was reflected in the very language they used to refer to bounded versus unbounded areas. As a civilization that frequently needed to defend itself against invading forces, they developed a culture of maintaining walls and explicit boundaries in order to better identify the separation between themselves and some sort of other. Since it is difficult to fight against the nebulous and unbounded void, empty space became a fearful object, something that the Chinese needed to harness and tame in order to maintain control over their borders, both physical and psychological. As a result, the very existence of delineated space became a marker of Chinese sovereignty, reflected in highly structured urban planning, border defense, and agricultural practice.

As a result of these deep-seated needs for the explicit delineations of space,

unbounded territories seemed intolerably disorganized to the Han; disorder meant a lack of control, a lack of control meant unproductivity, and unproductivity was wasteful. Thus, they saw the unmodified grasslands to the north as an area of waste, but also containing potential, capable of conversion to productive work through a process of land cultivation and the civilizing of its inhabitants. Regardless of the actual usage of that land, the Han needed to organize it into something that they recognized as valuable.

Furthermore, the fact that such wasted land was occupied by other peoples proved a challenge to the Han. It was difficult for them to view the nomadic Mongols as anything other than aimless wanderers of the grasslands, taking up space that could otherwise be put to better use if they instantiated a systematic cultivation of the area. Since the herders were benefiting from land that they had not worked to cultivate themselves, the Han saw their existence as an affront to their values of labor [2]. In other words, they thought of the Mongols as primitive, lazy squatters, and the way to fix this problem was to impose order onto the chaos by organizing the wandering nomads into a structure that could produce measurable amounts of work. Through this structure, the Chinese sought to demonstrate their status as a more modern, developed civilization, bringing all people under its rule into a high standard of organized and productive living.

From those attitudes, the Chinese government made a series of policy decisions to impose a Han-centric sense of structure and organization onto the northern grasslands region. The primary effect of these policies was to decollectivize the Mongol way of life; where the herders once shared the open grasslands as one continuous area, the land was instead divided into discrete parcels. An enclosure policy was instituted to prevent livestock from grazing freely on areas that the Chinese agricultural scientists identified as vulnerable to erosion, as well as provide a system to track the work value of each parcel. The smaller plots of land could, in theory, be more easily monitored for levels of productivity and stop potential damage resulting from overgrazing of the grassland. Livestock and plots of land were then assigned to individual households depending on the number of animals a particular plot could support, and families were given incentives to adhere to these boundaries [3].

As part of the enclosure policy, households that were more productive were given subsidies by the central government. Though the subsidies were intended to encourage adherence to the new order of cultivation, they had the side effect of creating a wealth gap, as families that produced more could buy more fencing materials, secure their own plots against their neighbors' livestock, and let their own animals graze on unsecured land. So, the policy in practice allowed households to enclose their land to stock up good grazing areas, saving that grass for when the rest of the pastures grew thin. In addition to causing more land erosion by allowing the open grazing that the enclosure policy was supposed to restrict, feuds often resulted from disputes over unclear property lines and animals that strayed too far into the wrong plot [4]. Eventually, earning work points and subsidies became the main motivating factor for the Mongol herders who wanted to survive ; in order to protect their own interests, each household had to find ways to be more productive than their neighbors, rather than tend

to their flocks in the cooperative traditions.

Clearly, such sweeping changes could not have happened without resistance, as was demonstrated by the students in *Wolf Totem*. They grew to sympathize with the Mongol way of life and lamented its destruction by Chinese policies. When the main characters returned to the grasslands after being away for thirty years, they were struck by the changes of the landscape when they saw fenced-off and untouched grass pastures, dried rivers, and ragged-looking animals [5]. The effect of the enclosure policy was obvious to them; parcelization of the land had disrupted the normal grazing patterns that had allowed the grasslands to remain sustainable. Chen commented bitterly on the transformation and noted the short-sightedness of sacrificing the land for a quick economic boost, since he understood that "the grassland could not return even if the subsidies continued for the next century." [6] In their time of living with the Mongols, they knew that the survival of the grass was the key to the survival of the people, so when the land suffered, so did its inhabitants.

Beyond the ecological disruption that Jiang's characters condemned, they witnessed a cultural shift that came from the imposition of the new Chinese order. As youths, they drew a parallel from the differences between Mongol and Chinese horses to the differences between Mongol and Chinese society. Even though they were Chinese from the city, they recognized and valued the spirit of the Mongol horses, which they considered an untamed strength that could defeat even the greatest acts of labor. They called the Chinese workhorses "stupid", and regarded them as slaves that could only work and provide service to their masters, ultimately unable to defend themselves from abuse; these characteristics quickly became a reflection of the Chinese people who raised those horses [7]. When they returned to the grasslands thirty years later, they found great disappointment in the fenced pastures. "In the past, who would dare build a fence on a grassland famous for its Ujimchinn warhorses?" asked Chen [8]. The irony was that they once believed that the spirit of the Mongol warhorse could overcome any attempts of domestication into a sedentary, labor-based lifestyle, but the wild horses of their youth had been wiped out by modernization.

Though a work of fiction cannot be relied upon as a statement of historical accuracy, observable cultural damages and practical ecological disruption did result from the act of decollectivizing the northern grasslands. These were highlighted by some of the ramifications of enclosure policies on the grasslands; instead of keeping livestock confined to specific grazing areas, herders used enclosures to preserve the pastures assigned to them and allowed their livestock to overgraze unenclosed areas into severe erosion [9]. Additionally, the power imbalance created by introducing subsidy incentives allowed some families to prosper and others to fail, and generated conflict and disputes over property boundaries between groups that would otherwise have lived in peaceful cooperation [10]. These issues were compounded by the drastically different cultures attempting to survive on the same piece of land, as their incompatible ideologies made it difficult for them to reconcile their respective needs.

Despite the numerous problems caused by Chinese policy decisions regarding the use of the northern grasslands, it is difficult to see whether or not there

were other options to address the needs of the Han society. The Chinese could not tolerate a grey area that was neither clearly Mongol nor Han, thus Inner Mongolia had to be brought into the Chinese status quo in order to satisfy the Han cultural preference for clearly delineated spaces. Although the landscape itself was a shifting environment, because it was a Chinese territory, the people there needed to function with the Chinese way of life, which meant highly organized agricultural practices, fenced plots, and measurable work.

Ultimately, the practical needs of a growing population required more land dedicated to producing food and resources; the steppes were seen as an area that could provide for the Chinese, if only it could be tamed and organized. The proximity of Beijing to the steppes region meant that the central government was very much affected by the ecological changes of the Gobi Desert; continual desertifcation and destruction of the northern farmlands presented noticeable problems to the Chinese, from raging sandstorms that buffeted the capital city to wide-ranging droughts that starved their crops. The preservation of as much farmland as possible was crucial to their survival. This necessitated agricultural practices that could be measured, studied, and adjusted according to a strict scientific rigor. Things could not be studied unless they were held in place and monitored, thus the enclosure policy presented an implementable solution to move the region into a more modernized status.

3.2 A Culture of Disunity

As a nation with an expansive territory, China's borders contain a necessarily diverse collection of cultures. This presents obvious difficulties for creating and maintaining a unified state; the further from China's geographical and cultural center, the more complicated this issue becomes. The Uyghurs and the Mongols are very different groups, both in their semantic distinctions from the Han center and their syntactic differences as ethnic groups. However, they have the shared experience of being peripheral groups that have undergone policies and reforms instituted by the Chinese government in an attempt to bring them under a unified national identity. How either group responded to this force of change depended on their respective cultural backgrounds.

The geography of the Mongol region favored the development of communal, migratory societies. Harsh steppe landscape meant a delicate ecology, with grasslands that were prone to damage from overgrazing and erosion. As a result, the Mongol lifestyle followed an annual migration pattern that allowed them to raise livestock carefully without causing great disruption to the land. This necessitated a strong community spirit and awareness of the overall health of the region, which promoted bonds across the steppes that solidified the Mongol identity. In spite of their mobile lifestyle, the Mongol social structure developed as collaborative and homogeneous once they achieved a unified state.

In addition to geography, the symbolism of Chinggis Khan throughout history contributed to the collective Mongol identity. Almaz Khan describes this as "one of the basic identity symbols for both the Inner and Outer Mongols"[11].

He goes on to trace the early period of the region, when there did not yet exist a strong sense of Mongol unity, until Chinggis Khan's invocation as a revered ancestor of the people in the region served as a way to legitimize the claims of power among different tribes [12]. In more modern times, Chinggis Khan represents the Mongol people's struggle for status within the Chinese state; it exists both as a common thread of identity for the Mongols themselves, and as an object that the central government either revered or suppressed depending on its relationship with minority cultures [13].

Regardless of how Chinggis Khan has been utilized to represent the Mongols, the important thing to note is that such a symbol exists at all; the existence of a commonly-accepted cultural hero speaks to the existence of a commonly-accepted cultural identity. Without that identity, there would be no hero. The strength of such a symbol feeds into the strength of the ethnic consciousness, and vice versa. So long as the symbol of Chinggis Khan existed, the Mongols were able to relate to a sense of unity springing from a single foundational icon of their history, no matter how the mythology of that icon was treated.

Regarding the Uyghurs, such a united identity did not exist prior to the PRC designation of the Uyghur ethnic group. The Xinjiang region is mainly uninhabitable desert, across which travel is a great hardship. Settlements flourished around individual oases, which could more easily sustain life; communication to other oases occurred less frequently the longer the distance. Social and family groups remained very tightly bound to local areas, as pride for one's home oasis came from the practical matter of survival; without a large, geographically close network of connections, one was unlikely to prosper. Due to the distances between oases, trade and cultural mixing happened more often across the border into neighboring countries than within the Xinjiang region [14].

Due to such disparate cultural values and isolated communities, the Uyghurs never felt a sense of unity with other people called Uyghurs. Even as the Uyghurs must address their unavoidable status as a people united under the Chinese designation, they still found difficulty reconciling their disparate histories, and maintained loyalties to their home oases above their connection to the idea of a larger ethnic group [15]. In addition to the problems of cross-oases identities, the Uyghurs experienced distinction between classes that presented even stronger disconnects of cultural values and self-identity. The intellectuals considered themselves as Turks before any other group, the merchants as pan-Chinese, and peasants as Muslims [16]. Most notably, no group considered themselves primarily Uyghur, the term that the Han assigned to all three groups.

With the lack of a homogenous identity, the Uyghurs also have not maintained a common cultural hero. Rudelson identifies a number of historical figures that have maintained some status as Uyghur cultural heroes, but none of them managed to take hold of a universal position as something all the Uyghurs identify with. The poet Abdukhaliq "Uyghur" mostly resonated with intellectual nationalists[17], eleventh-century scholar Mahmud Qasqari represented thestrong Islamic identity among the Uyghurs[18], the former Xinjiang leader Saypidin Azizi fell out of favor with the majority of Uyghurs for sympathizing too much with the Han[19]. Even if one particular figure received heavy support from one

group during one period, the disparity between the self-identification of each group resulted in highly polarized responses across the region.

Thus, as individual ethnic groups, the Mongols and the Uyghurs differ not only in the specifics of their language and cultural values, but also in how they fit into the syntax of their designation as ethnic groups. Most notably, the Mongols present a more homogenous identity, while the Uyghurs span multiple groups of people who are not yet able to relate to each other under a common identity. In part, this is owed to the relatively new status of the Uyghurs as one designated group, as the Mongols were similarly scattered before they were unified under Chinggis Khan. However, the syntactical differences of the two groups provided a logistical challenge for the Han, whose unification policies toward ethnic minorities seemed to assume a universal and homogenous application.

As part of establishing a system of minority unification, the Chinese central government developed an educational system to both preserve ethnic boundaries and enforce national unity. A national standard education in such a diverse country has two major boundaries to overcome: linguistic variance, and cultural incompatibility. To address those boundaries, primary education in areas with a high population of ethnic minorities included language-specific schools meant to enforce the usage of Mandarin as the standard language for the Chinese nation[20], and study programs emphasizing the values and histories of the Han people[21]. They also allowed special provisions for students with particular dietary and lifestyle requirements, such as separate dining areas and options for language education.

For both the Monols and the Uyghurs, an education system that emphasized Mandarin meant that in order to succeed, students must learn Mandarin as their primary language; however, in both cases, this was often at the cost of losing their own culture. Somewhat ironically, by increasing their connection to the Han group, it hurt their connection with their own group; Mongol stuents who attended a special ethnic boarding school "felt that it lowered their otherwise equal social status with the Han and other ethnic groups" [22] and Uyghur intellectuals seeking to improve secular education and modernization "struggle to preserve their Uyghur culture and language while maintining and developing the ability to compete on a national level" [23].

In addition to the negative effects of pushing the Mandarin language onto ethnic minority students, the creation of special ethnic schools increased the awareness of those groups, both within the groups themselves, and from the Han that encountered them. A mixed Mongolian-Han boarding school saw that "students of each group formed a separate cultural circle, within which they gradually built up mutual trust by sharing similar experiences of language, ethnicity, and economic status" [24]. Rather than building cross-cultural connections, the mixed schools emphasized the differences between ethnic groups, effectively alienating one group from another.

Among the Uyghur intellectuals, a split was created solely due to the introduction of Mandarin-based education; students were permitted to choose schools in either Uyghur or Han, resulting in the creation of separate cultures

within the intellectual class depending on which language one used throughout school. Those who studied in Mandarin were viewed as not true Uyghurs, while those who studied in Uyghur were considered to have recieved a poorer education[25]. This internal division would not have existed if not for the ethnic eductation system imposed on the Uyghurs; even though the literacy and success rates for students who studied in the Han language increased, the conflict introduced into the region as a result bred distrust and arrogance within the Uyghurs themselves.

Ultimately, though the Mongols and the Uyghurs are noticeably disparate groups, they shared the experience of the effects of being defined as ethnic minorites by the Chinese central government. The Han provided them with a system that rewarded those who favored a pan-Chinese nation, as those willing to participate in the educational and economical systems of the center would prosper, while those who resisted found hardships. However, to accept that system meant accepting an ethnic designation imposed from an outsider; this was an easier thing for the Mongols, who had a unified identity on which that designation was based, but still presents a problem to the Uyghurs, who are only developing their identity as this proccess occurs.

3.3 The Assimilation Question

23 April 2014

Minority groups generally live under the rule of a state run by a central majority group; because of this, they face the decision to either maintain their separation in order to preserve their cultural distinctions, or assimilate into the dominant culture in order to access status and privileges that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. As an examination of these issues, we can follow the trajectories of three well-documented minorities: the Hui, the Amish, and the Manchu. These three groups share the traits of self-identification as a unique group with a common history, show visible cultural markers, and are recognized by their respective ruling states as distinct community with shared values and interests.

In modern times, all three live in close proximity to the majority center, inhabiting areas that, if not explicitly mixed with the majority, are at least not separated by significant geographic features. All three also engage economically and politically with the ruling state, with representation in occupations that allow them to trade and interact with outsiders, as well as participating in government and bureaucratic concerns. This has provided them ample opportunity to assimilate, yet they still exist as separate groups.

Dru Gladney refers to the Hui as a nationality created during the census projects of the late 1900s, combining the historical knowledge of foreign Muslims who traveled to China as merchants during the Tang dynasty with the establishing of a nationality-based hierarchy during the Yuan dynasty by the Mongols [26]. The modern notion of the Hui shows both a sense of this foreign origin and adherence to traditional Islamic living practices; while some commu-

nities align more with their Arabic ancestors and others are more devout in their religious practice, the ethnonym of *Hui* nonetheless calls on an identity that the Hui are capable of identifying with. In short, even though explicit definition of the Hui minority group in terms of common traits and cultulral markers proves problematic, no one doubts that the group exists.

A curious feature of the Hui, in contrast with most other ethnic minorities in China, is that their population is noticeably dispersed across the country, occupying more areas and forming a larger percentage of the minority population in those areas than other groups [27]. In addition to their geographical distribution, the Hui do not have their own language or dialect, and instead adopt the linguistic traits of their neighbors. Gladney mentions a specific group of Hui he interviewed who were "culturally indistinguishable from the minority group with whom they live, but they identify themselves as Hui and are recognized by the state as members of the Hui nationality" [28]. While some Hui wear head coverings that indicate their religious beliefs, many Hui do not, and instead dress as their neighbors do. The Hui, then, somehow manage to maintain their status as a distinct group, regardless of circumstances that make it difficult for an outsider to determine what makes them different.

One of the main things that sets the Hui apart from non-Hui is their notion of *qingzhen*, an ethnoreligious concept of purity and truth that is difficult to identify outside of daily practical living. In some areas, *qingzhen* manifests as an abstention from pork products, attending Islamic prayer services, recognizing ancestral lineage from historically documented Muslims, and maintaining traditional Islamic dress. Not all of the Hui adhere to all of these characteristics, but recognizing *qingzhen* , regardless of its actual practice, is a cultural marker of the Hui that both gives the group a self-identification and allows outsiders to see what makes the Hui different in terms of the social ideals of the group. Additionally, by giving themselves this ideological definition, the Hui make it easy for then to refer to things that are not Hui—namely, things that are not *qingzhen* could not be Hui. Adhering to *qingzhen* gives the Hui a tangible practice to preserve, which they maintain through their marriage habits, living spaces, and dietary practices.

Similar to the Hui in this regard, the Amish live according to an *Ordnung* that defines acceptable living practices that maintain a limited amount of contact with things that are worldly and sinful [29]. They maintain a lifestyle that separates them, ideologically and physically, from that which is not what they are, and thus hold a very clear boundary between themselves and the other. In practical terms, this can be seen in an avoidance of electricity and other modern conveniences, a moderation of behavior and emotion, plain dress and hair as regulated by one's church, and a commitment to maintaining the community [30]. The Amish are easily identified in modern American society by observing those cultural markers.

Although the Amish strive to hold themselves apart from things they consider worldly, they accept that it is both impractical and unnecessary to live in a completely isolated state. Different levels of interaction apply for different levels of worldliness; for example, "interaction with other Amish, with Mennonite and

related groups, or with other religious groups is different from interaction with the world" [31]. As a necessary part of their survival, they partake in trade with the outside world for groceries such as sugar, salt, and flour, and sell their excess production of grain and hay on the market [32]. Additionally, as they do not own automotive forms of transportation, they rely on trains and buses for travel over distances that they cannot practically cover with their buggies. Specific limitations vary between invididual churches and communities, but in general, their *Ordnung* dictates acceptable interactions as is needed for their survival. As a result, they inevitably come in contact with the outside world in social and economic contexts.

From those interactions, as well as existing within a larger state as a small minority group, the Amish have encountered problems of maintaining their *Ordnung*. Hostetler describes them as "suspended between competing value systems, subjected to enticements from the external world...confronted with special problems of coping with regulations and bureaucracies" [33]. It becomes impossible for the Amish to ignore the social and technological changes of the world beyond their community, which induces them to examine their own lifestyles; since they cannot possibly sustain their separation from worldliness while still holding on to their Amish identity, they have no way to assimilate without ultimately losing their value system.

In addition to the temptations of modern living, the Amish have to contend with a legal system that is not always well-suited to their beliefs. Regulations from the American government most significantly affect their educational practices; the Amish generally do not school their children beyond eighth grade, as after that age, children are expected to remain with their families and develop good relationships with work and familial responsibilities [34]. Pennsylvania law, on the other hand, required school up to age seventeen, with an exception for children from farming families that lowered the age to fifteen; frequently, Amish were barred from this exception until the formation of an Amish vocational school that allowed a compromise [35].

Despite the problems the Amish face by maintaining their separate way of living as minorities, the overall Amish community continues to flourish with an increasing population growth owed to a high birth rate and low attrition. The ideals of their community give them a distinct living space that is incompatible with outsiders, and they preserve this community by holding a high amount of value to the very existence of their community. Amish do not marry out to non-Amish [36], provide their own education to their children, and refrain from using technology or services that are antithetical to their belief system.

At a glance through the history of the Manchus, there exist similar features in their status as a minority group. The Manchus maintained an explicitly segregated living space, as well as a roster of all members of their group within the established banner system; like the Hui and the Amish, the Manchus knew who was part of them and who was the other. However, their existence as a group depended mostly on their assertion of their group, without any larger ideological beliefs supporting their segretation; they used the Manchu name as "a highly poliicized ethnic label" that referred to the notion of the Manchu,

rather than identifying distinct lineages or cultural markers [37]. The existence of the Manchu label implied almost exclusively social distinctions, such as their status as a ruling class and membership within the banner system.

It can then be argued that the Manchu identity was far more of a political contruct than that of the Hui and the Amish, and for that reason, the modern view of the Manchu makes them harder to distinguish as a noticeable minority group outside of that official designation. The main aspect of the identity that set them apart was the banner system itself, which carried the Manchu intoo the Qing dynasty while the militaristic and linguistic aspects of their lifestyle faded [38]. The downside to holding the institution itself as central to a one's group identity, though, is that once the institution was removed from the collape of the banner system, the main aspect of Manchuness went with it. Following the Qing dynasty, the Manchus had difficulty maintaining a strong sense of identity, once they became too far removed from the shared history of the banner institution [39].

In summary, the Manchus were less successful at maintaining their status as a separate minority group when compared with the Hui and the Amish. The religious purity and dedication to an ideal that transcended a material existence gave the Amish and the Hui a greater sense of importance to their separateness; it wasn't just that they needed to preserve their community values, but that they *had* values to preserve at all that set them apart from the Manchus. The Hui encountered social friction for maintaining their pork abstention amidst a society favored pork products as a primary protein source, and the Amish face constant temptation to modern conveniences and political pressure to conform, but both groups place their committment to their identity at a higher value than accepting assimilation. For the Manchu, their acculturation seems to lead to an inevitable assimilation; within the Chinese ethnic minority designation, they still exist as a valid ethnic group, but as the distance from the period of the banner system grows, those distinctions become more of a formality than a recognition of identifiable cultural differences.

Notes

[1]Williams, 671-672; connotations of the terms 'huang', 'ye', etc.
[2]Williams, 672–673; discussion the Han ecological identity
[3]Williams, 680; enclosure policy details
[4]Williams, 684–685; some of the practical responses to the appearance of fences
[5]Jiang, 507–511 of *Epilogue*
[6]Jiang, 510
[7]Jiang, 305–306; in a conversation between Yang, Chen, and Zhang as they observed horse mating fights
[8]Jiang, 510
[9]Williams, 680–681; noting the expansion of fenced land versus large herds overgrazing unfenced land
[10]Williams, 684; notes on violent incidences regarding fences
[11]Khan, 248
[12]Khan, 252
[13]Khan, 267

[14]Rudelson, 40
[15]Rudelson, 143
[16]Rudelson, 118
[17]Rudelson 145
[18]Rudelson, 153
[19]Rudelson, 155
[20]Borchigud, 282
[21]Borchigud, 293–294
[22]Borchigud, 286
[23]Rudelson, 122
[24]Borchigud, 288
[25]Rudellson, 127–129
[26]Gladney, 17–18
[27]Gladney, 27–28
[28]Gladney, 33
[29]Hostetler, 82–83
[30]Hostetler, 84
[31]Hostetler, 111
[32]Hostetler, 113
[33]Hostetler, 255
[34]Hostetler, 188
[35]Hostetler, 262–263
[36]Hostetler, 145
[37]Elliott, 353
[38]Elliott, 354
[39]Rigger, 211

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Chapter 4

Capitalism and Individualism

Fall 2014; Dr. Scott Sandage

Also known as, there's no such thing as the American Dream; we'll all kill ourselves trying.

A notable side pursuit: while reading Benjamin Franklin, I happened to travel near his grave, so I took a selfie with i and sent it to the professor. Later in the semester, I ended up passing past the graves of multiple other authors, so I made a map of every grave of authors from that class, and started collecting them on road trips.

4.1 The Bootstrapping Factor

8 October 2014

Max Weber builds a model of the particular flavor of American capitalism that depends on a baked-in sense of duty, that all should adhere to a divine order for everyone to fulfill his potential and duty towards an economically-viable calling. I argue that he's missing a key point in his analysis: a defining feature of the workaholic drive that separates Americans from other modern capitalist cultures is the feeling of necessity that derives from building something out of less than nothing. This extends to the belief that failure is unacceptable, a lack of progress is tantamount to failure, and, in extreme cases, that failure can mean death. It is not only economics that motivates Americans to work harder than they are expected to, but a culture that develops out of being forced to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, or die.

If we remove money from the equation, Weber's framework collapses. When he credits the "devotion to a 'calling' of moneymaking" [1] as a major factor in the successes of notable American cultural heroes, he neglects to understand that the moneymaking was only incidental to the way in which they conducted their lives. It happened to be that Benjamin Franklin, Andrew Carnegie, and

others were *highly talented* at generating massive quantities of wealth, but their deeper motivations came from a driving need for self-improvement.

A better example illustrating the bootstrapping factor comes from examining Frederick Douglass's trajectory throughout his life. It wasn't until later in his life that money even entered into his calculus; prior to that point, he pursued a desire for self-improvement and knowledge acquisition before he even understood what implications and opportunities that would give him. He would not have realized the power of earning his own wages [2] if he had never realized the possibility of being a free man. He would not have realized the possibility of being a free man if he had not learned to read [3]. He would not have learned to read if he did not get the sense that it would somehow *improve* his status as a person [4]. Because the events happened in such a sequence, it could not possibly have been an economic motivation that drove Douglass to better himself.

As Douglass develops a further self-awareness of his own peculiarity, he recognizes that it was in fact his encounter with adversity that provided him the circumstances that made him more than what he was born into. He defines similar 'self-made men' as ones who "are obliged to come up...in open and derisive defiance of all the efforts of society and the tendency of circumstances to repress, retard, and keep them down." [5] Money had nothing to do with it; Douglass *had* to raise himself out of his circumstances because it was what he needed to do in order to survive. Progress, for him, meant life, while failure to progress would have killed him. In his case, it was quite literal; once his self-education progressed to a point at which he could no longer accept slavery as an option, he decided that he would rather risk the punishment of death as a result of striking back against a white man than allow himself the inhumanity of being whipped as a slave [6].

Douglass doesn't credit only adverse circumstances for his success, though; he knows that his status as a black man and former slave means he had much more to work against [7]. For that matter, he identifies that great men are ones who work without regard to anything other than work [8], and the best way to incite work in an individual is to put him in a situation that seemingly prevents him from getting what he wants [9]. When he tells us that we should measure a man's success "not by the heights others have obtained, but from the depths from which he has come" [10], he wants us to acknowledge that the lower someone starts, the greater their path of accomplishment can be; it is not enough for a man to live with what life has given him, but that the *process* of achievement shows more about his character.

You could say that one of Weber's points is that the money itself is not the sole motivating factor for the spirit of modern capitalism [11], and thus I am deliberately skewing his argument, but his framework deals primarily with the sense that there is something about the economic pressure of capitalism as a strictly unavoidable part of one's environment [12] that fostered the mindset we are trying to understand. I claim that he has oversimplified the problem; the driving force behind the spirit of capitalism is the need to create something out of almost nothing, and money just happens to exist as a metric by which we can measure the amount that one has succeeded. Douglass's life, while

an extreme example of the bootstrapping factor, reflects a larger pattern of early American culture; in order to survive and prove themselves capable of existing as a legitimate nation, they had to overcome a lack of infrastructure and established roots that their European spectators had long solved.

4.2 Misunderstanding the Misunderstood

9 October 2014

Through his living experiment detailed in *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau calls into question the cultural expectations of a capitalist work environment. In spite of the fact that he spent that period of his life living physically and socially separated from the community, he placed himself in a position to uniquely observe and cogitate on the pressures to acquire capital. *Walden* provides a viewpoint that challenges ideals about work held by the people who frustrated Thoreau, and why they participate in a society that perpetuates that particular culture. He wrote from the only perspective that such observations were possible, and that was a perspective that made it equally hard for people to understand him.

While describing his day-to-day life at Walden Pond, Thoreau constantly demonstrates his reliance on the existence of a community beyond himself, such as borrowing an axe to build his house, [13] buying shoes from the town store [14], even seeking shelter at a neighbor's house in a storm [15]. In doing so, he communicates that he is not in fact just some hermit in the woods, but aware of commerce and industry outside of his personal bubble and willing to interact with such. Yet, he also claims that he spent his Walden time living only by his own labor [16]. This is a paradox that comes off as hypocritical, and a confusing front for the reader to process.

Thus, *Walden* provides a viewpoint that is difficult to discuss or reconcile. Thoreau comes right off the bat saying that readers of his book are poor, ignorant, dishonest [17], and that not all of Walden will be relevant to all people [18]. By doing this, he's setting himself up to be misunderstood from the very beginning—a fact of which he is clearly aware, and often reiterates. He even gives an entire case study of meeting someone who is not at all equipped to take on his lifestyle [19], as if the reader required an explicit illustration of how at-odds with the status quo Thoreau's life presents.

Despite detailing how he has avoided a majority of gainful employment, Thoreau does not order the reader to reject work, but to work carefully, in a way that does not damage others. He is convinced of the ability of everyone to provide for themselves in a way that uses less of everything—money, energy, food, etc.—and that the economic system of capitalism leans on the fact that people don't, and instead are wasteful and have mindless approaches to work. In essence, this is a direct response to what the sociologist Max Weber later defined as the spirit of capitalism. In reference to the mindset required to sustain a capitalistic system, Weber asserts that " [b]ecause these ethical qualities were of a specifically different type from those adequate to the economic traditionalism

of the past, they could not be reconciled with the comfortable enjoyment of life."[20]. Thoreau believed that the capitalist work ethic damaged some core sense of the human condition.

"I have made some sacrifices to a sense of duty" [21], he responds to accusations of selfishness in his rejection of capitalism. This is the duty that others have imposed on him, to work hard in order to earn capital and use that capital to contribute to the greater well-being of society. In doing so, he defies what Weber later observed as a dependence that the capitalist order has on a "devotion to a 'calling' of moneymaking". [22] That same duty is responsible for much of the social problems he is trying to make his readers aware of, but in superficial ways, he comes off as a freeloader, someone who manages to get by with at least as much (if not significantly more) appreciation for life as someone who 'works' far harder. He does not dispute this; it's the most important part of his point that he wants to get across, even at the risk of appearing selfish and irresponsible.

The difficulty with all of this is that Thoreau already provides a rebuttal for any criticism one could possibly give him, and builds himself a careful world in which he cannot possibly be wrong. By already anticipating criticism, he removes the reader's agency in reacting, such that *Walden* comes off as one long-winded ramble with no real ground for a critic to stand on. He doesn't ask for a conversation, and he claims that he's not telling anyone how to live their lives, but by stating his observations as if they are so blatantly obvious, he makes people angry with the same stroke that removes their ability to defend themselves. There is no way to argue with someone who has already set up all possible arguments. Ultimately, the challenge he presents readers is impossible to ignore.

4.3 A Collective Dreaming

14 November 2014

The American Dream is a vague concept that combines an unavoidable status quo with the expectation that anyone who manages to rise up from the crowd will achieve some sort of success. In order for that Dream to stand, a harmony must be struck between the ideal of universal self-fulfillment and the practical needs of a collaborative society. We can witness this struggle through the dramatization of fictional stories in which characters who try to set themselves apart are mowed down for, ironically, trying to achieve their version of the American Dream. On one hand, we have Edna Pontillier of Kate Chopin's "The Awakening", whose attempt to engage with her discovery of the Dream from a position of its infrastructure ended in failure; on the other, Linda Loman of Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" presents us an option for a woman to succeed in a context where only the achievement of men seem to matter.

For the purposes of this analysis, I will first clarify my usage of the words 'success' and 'failure'. In describing characters, I use these terms based on their final states within the narrative work. Specifically, I refer to Edna's ending as

a failure because in taking her own life, she has made it impossible for her to ever achieve anything further. On the other hand, I describe Linda as having succeeded in that she survived the course of the play, and thus her character is allowed the potential of progress beyond the narrative. In a bit of an over-simplification, we can also view either story as a morality tale, through which the authors show us that characters live and die as a consequence of how they choose to accept their places within the framework of the American Dream.

As a concept, then, the Dream is something with both a theoretical ideal and a practical reality. The ideal is that all people shall achieve a status and recognition based on the fulfillment of their human potential, as James Truslow Adams defines in his historic analysis of the American condition [23]. In reality, though, people still need to adhere to some sense of social structure and organized positions, because there is no guarantee that every person will always end up with both the potential *and* desire to reach a state that allows them to exist harmoniously with other people. That framework forms a status quo in which all participants are unavoidably involved; Chopin and Miller, then, explore the possibilities that lay within individual human interactions with that framework.

With all this in mind, an obvious question appears: Why did Linda succeed, while Edna failed? We can examine how each author set up their characters; as a narrative device, both characters started in a situation that seemed the opposite of their result. Edna was placed in a life designed to succeed, with a husband more than capable of financially supporting her [24] [25], friends and children that mostly adored her, and a support network of people to take care of her immediate physical needs [26] [27]. Linda, on the other hand, seemed doomed to fail from the start, as her husband doesn't respect her [28], their financial situation is in dire straits [29], and both sons seem destined to be useless louts.

In both women's cases, though, they occupied a position within their context as just part of the infrastructure of someone else's Dream; neither of them were expected to engage in pursuits independent of their family unit's best interests. At a superficial level, it seems as if the women of men were excluded from pursuing the Dream at all, but I offer that the American Dream is one that is pursued as a collective whole. The fulfillment of the Dream depends on the strength of its framework, which means there is no room for someone to step outside of their role.

This brings me to a secondary definition of 'success' and 'failure'; one who succeeds has accepted their place within the American Dream, and works towards filling just that potential and nothing more, while one who cannot accept their position will ultimately fail in the process of trying to escape. There's a bitter irony in this interpretation in that the Dream itself encourages stand-out, individualistic pursuits, but for these two women characters, their starting points are locked into place, and their only freedom is to decide whether or not they can accept that.

We can answer the question posed earlier by taking both of these definitions together; Edna, as the character who failed, did not accept that she must exist as just another leg propping up a society she could not even understand, while Linda allowed herself to become the tireless supporter of the burden of a failing

family. The irony of both situations further highlights the tragedy of these women's roles within the American Dream: Edna refused to accept her success, and thus she failed; Linda unconditionally accepted her failure, so she succeeded.

If the heroic position is occupied by a man on the path to win at life, women exist as part of the implicit infrastructure for the American Dream. By allowing Linda to survive through the tragedy of Willy Loman, Arthur Miller shows us that there is a way for women to succeed in the fulfillment of the American Dream. Chopin shows us the other option, as Edna's failure stems from the fact that she had entered into a position that required her adherence to a framework that depends on its own self-perpetuating existence. The American Dream is not one of individuals, but one shared with everyone who dreams it, and it cannot support itself without the cooperation of its component parts.

4.4 The Immigrant Ethic and the Spirit of Escapism

14 December 2014

At the core of Americanism is a dream, described by James Truslow Adams as the belief that all people have the capacity for self-fulfillment [30]. This is an ideal built out of the demands a culture places on itself when one of the parameters of its founding is to choose to escape from an unacceptable lifestyle and take on the risks that come from plunging into the unknown. It is a paradoxical belief that still manages to sustain itself, because its very structure dictates that to reject it is to reinforce it. In short, the American Dream is a self-propagating concept that rewrites the fear of failure into the desire for success.

In the 1990 Nintendo game *Super Mario World*, each level is a linear maze with an explicit entrance and exit. Some levels have secondary exits that require the player to notice an abnormality in the map and exercise some creativity to exploit it. Towards the end of the game, though, one of the key levels breaks this model; the obvious exit does not unlock any forward progress, and there are no visual clues to hint the location of a secondary exit. The only way to move beyond this level is to fly far off the edge of the screen, out of the visible playing field, and wait to land on a small island that contains a hidden door.

At age eight, I had little ability to deal with this; I only found the secret exit because someone who watched me struggle with the level insisted I try flying off the screen. "If you die, you die, so what do you have to lose?" I was assured, and I followed those instructions because my only other choice was to fail to beat the game. Later, I understood that this approach was what immigrants, including my own parents, needed to believe in order to stake everything on their dreams and start a life in a new world.

Prior to the founding of America, Benjamin Franklin already presented a success story—arguably, the first great American success story. His timeline is one that glorifies working ceaselessly, whether or not he even did the same himself. That narrative of declaring one's starting circumstances as undesirable

and finding the means to escape is one that has been repeated and romanticized through countless historical figures and fictional heroes in American lore. It's an obsession that stems from the subtext presented in Franklin's way of life—it's not just that working hard is the true path to success, but that it requires a preceding step: first, you must choose to change your circumstances.

Obviously, not everyone makes that decision, or at least not at the magnitude that Franklin did. It is simple to come up with an explanation; most people fear failure, described by Sennott as "the most uncomfortable phenomenon of American life" [31] in his study of problems imposed by American class divisions, and most people do not experience a level of desperation in their lives that is sufficient to demand change. However, this just emphasizes the effects of those who do decide that the only way forward is to stake everything on a leap of faith.

Such a drastic decision fuels the momentum of immigrants, who are perhaps a stronger product of this Dream than those with much longer generations' worth of history tied to America. Regardless of their originating culture, the immigrant narrative shares a common thread: failure is an impossibility, because it is simply not an option to not make it in the new world. You fly off the edge of the screen, or you die trying. Immigration is a radical form of escapism, a nuclear decision to up sticks and start over in a place that categorically *must* be an improvement. With that much at stake, there is no looking back.

The assertion, then, is that by choosing to escape, one must have already chosen success. This is clearly not an objective fact—the possibility of failure is, of course, always there. However, once the stakes become high enough, it's no longer meaningful to consider outcomes of failure, because only success matters. Specifically for immigrants, the conditions of success lay in establishing a secure life outside of their originating country, which means that failure results in returning to the old country; by deciding to immigrate, the decision has already been made to never fail. It's a redirection of the terms of success outlined by the status quo that means as long as you never return, you've made it. This is the step that counteracts the anxiety Sennott ties to the American view of failure [32]; when failure has been removed from consideration, the only paths in view lead to success.

As a culture founded on escapism, the value system shifts from outcomes to actions. If failure is removed from view, success as a concept loses meaning as well. Since it's always a possibility to throw everything out and start over, people must then derive value from something other than the results produced by work; an unavoidable fact is that there is always work, so why not base a value system on the work itself, rather than its products? Performing work is an expression of agency; making choices is an expression of freedom. What comes afterward is immaterial, because the process of those actions in and of themselves reinforces their value. In other words, it no longer matters where you go in life, but how you get there.

Thoreau says of a life, "meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are." [33] He bases the value of a life on how it is lived, not what it achieves, a conclusion he draws only by rejecting the

standard success model of the status quo and searching for a more reliable path of self-fulfilment. This model of escapism is no different from Franklin's, only it dictates working exactly as much as one should, not to excess. The immigrant ethic is to speak Franklin, while living Thoreau.

This is the nature of the American Dream. It is a dream that demands a constant challenging of circumstances, even if such circumstances were a direct result of pursuing the dream itself. A doctrine that requires rejection of itself as a core tenet can only persist through this state of self-denial; a cultural rejection of unfavorable circumstances similarly self-perpetuates through the ideals formed by the desire to escape.

Notes

[1]Weber, p. 32
[2]Douglass, *Narrative* p. 95–97
[3]Douglass, *Narrative* p. 63–64
[4]Douglass, *Narrative* p. 60
[5]Douglass, "Self-Made Men" p. 550
[6]Douglass, *Narrative* p. 79
[7]Douglass, "Self-Made Men" p. 557
[8]Douglass, "Self-Made Men" p. 556, 560
[9]Douglass, "Self-Made Men" p. 558
[10]Douglass, "Self-Made Men" p. 557
[11]Weber, 20–21
[12]Weber, p. 18
[13]Walden, p. 36
[14]Walden, p. 153
[15]Walden, p. 181
[16]Walden, p. 4, p. 61
[17]Walden, p. 6
[18]Walden, p. 4
[19]Walden, "Baker Farm"
[20]Weber, p. 30
[21]Walden, p. 64
[22]Weber, p. 32
[23]Adams, p. 404
[24]Chopin, p. 83 "I'll let Leonce pay the bills"
[25]Chopin, p. 79, as Edna describes the house and money as all belonging to her husband
[26]Chopin, p. 83, the maid that comes in to pick up a broken vase
[27]Chopin, p. 72, her mother-in-law and quadroon take the children off her hands
[28]Miller, p. 64–65
[29]Miller, p. 54–56
[30]Adams, 404
[31]Sennott, 183
[32]Sennott, 183
[33]Thoreau, 290

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Chapter 5

Modern China

Chapter 6

China's Environmental Crisis

Chapter 7

Art, Anthropology, and Empire