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Analyzing the Feminization of the Teaching Profession in the United States from the Perspective of Occupational Choice

In January 1849, the Stow School Committee did something it had never done before. After debating the question of who to hire for the upcoming winter school session, this small, eastern Massachusetts town's educational leaders settled upon a local girl named Sarah Eleveth. Though her considerable teaching experience had undoubtedly influenced the committee's decision, there was one kind of experience that Eleveth lacked. She, like all of Stow's female teachers, had never before taught the winter term. Eleveth was a first.^[1]

Though it may not have seemed like it at the time, Eleveth's hiring was a watershed in the history of Stow's educational system. Before 1849, the town's teacher hiring practices followed a gendered logic: females taught the summer term, males the winter term. The arrangement reflected an assumption common to Victorian America, namely that female teachers were incapable of managing older boys who, freed from farm labor, filled winter classrooms. Thus, in hiring Sarah Eleveth, the Stow School Committee had broken with tradition. Evidently, the board was pleased with its decision, for in subsequent years Stow would come to rely almost solely on female teachers for its winter sessions.^[2]

Stow's 1849 experiment was not an isolated case. Indeed, throughout the 1840s, New England school boards had begun to permit more and more female instructors to teach the winter term. As this development accelerated, observers noted a shift in the composition of the labor market for teaching. "It will be seen that there are now but eight Male Teachers, while there are forty-eight Female Teachers," an 1846 report published by the Salem school committee announced, "a large portion of whom perform the services for which but a few years since Males only were deemed competent."^[3] Such words served as the harbinger of things to come: whereas in 1800 only one in ten American teachers were women, by 1920, this figure had risen to nearly ninety percent.^[4]

Historians refer to the process whereby school-teaching in the United States became women's work "the feminization of the teaching profession."^[5] Noting that the phenomenon developed unevenly across the country between the 1840s and 1920s (beginning earliest in the Northeast, latest in the South), scholars have long been interested in understanding the factors underlying this gendered transformation of the American teacher.^[6] Valuable as their accounts are, existing interpretations of the feminization of teaching in the United States fail to explain adequately this phenomenon. In particular, much of the recent research suffers from one of three closely-related oversights: (1) a failure to acknowledge women's role as historical actors; (2) a failure to consider working women's motives for teaching; (3) a failure to look beyond economic incentives for teaching.

Table 1: Teachers in United States Public Schools, 1870-1930^[7]

In order to understand better the role that women teachers themselves played in the feminization of the profession, this article analyzes the phenomenon from the perspective of occupational choice. Significantly, though since the 1940s social scientists have been interested in assaying the factors that cause people to enter different occupations, historians have largely ignored both their findings and their methodologies. Indeed, while historians have long been engaged in attempts to uncover past people's motives for working, the question of why people entered *particular occupations* has failed to attract much interest. As such, the sociological literature on occupational choice reveals an important gap in historians' understanding of workers' motives. The feminization of the teaching profession serves as an ideal ground for examining the limits of current knowledge regarding this process, as well as pointing to new and promising avenues for future study.

One of the earliest sociological attempts to provide an answer to the question of why people enter different occupations was Peter M. Blau *et al's* "Occupational Choice: A Conceptual Framework." A key finding of this 1956 article was that occupational choice is universal. According to its authors, all people, even those who appear to "simply drift into jobs" without careful deliberation, make choices about what kind of

work to do and where to do it. Regardless of whether these choices were made consciously or unconsciously, Blau determined that “a decision must always be made.”^[8]

Proceeding from the idea that all workers exercise occupational choice, Blau and his team of researchers set forth what they believed to be the key factors informing such decisions. Occupational choice, they concluded, is in part influenced by a person’s “psychological characteristics,” in part by economic constraints (including “conditions of local opportunity” and “changes in the wage structure”), and in part by societal forces, particularly parents’ social status. The effect of these three factors, they reasoned, is to create in a person a sense of “preference” and of “expectation.” In determining “preference,” individuals assess the rewards of various occupational alternatives; in deriving “expectation,” they weigh the chances of being able to realize these alternatives. Typically, the article concluded, a person’s occupational choice reflected “a compromise between his preferences and his expectations.”^[9]

Most accounts of the feminization of teaching cite the various school-related reform movements of the early nineteenth-century, which both expanded women's access to education and created a demand for classroom instructors, as essential to women's dominance of the profession.^[10] As an additional prerequisite, scholars point to shifts in gender conventions that cast teaching as a wholly acceptable form of female employment, one which furthered motherly impulses and existed in harmony with the domestic covenant.^[11] While the feminization of the American teaching profession would doubtless not occurred absent these social and ideological developments, neither women's increased educational opportunities nor a growing acceptance of the idea of teaching as women's work in and of themselves rendered this process a *fait accompli*. Unfortunately, much of the research on female schoolteachers in the United States makes such a leap, utilizing a "top-down" approach which concludes that access explained outcome.

Typically, such analyses absolve female schoolteachers of any responsibility in feminizing their profession. Hence, in a 1978 volume entitled *Motherteacher*, Redding S. Sugg, Jr., confined his interpretation of the phenomenon to a study of how "our patriarchal forebears...consented...to the rapid feminization of the teaching corps." Throughout the work, Sugg stresses the "several factors in the history of the first fifty years of the Republic [that] predisposed Americans to accept the idea of women as teachers." Seeing the gendered transformation of the teaching profession as a matter of *consent* and *predisposition*, *Motherteacher* implies that once various barriers had been removed, its feminization was guaranteed.^[12]

Importantly, *Motherteacher* was not the only interpretation of the feminization of the teaching profession to operate along these lines. "From the mid nineteenth-century

on," declares one recent study on the feminization of work in the United States, "women steadily entered the teaching profession" as "teacher shortages" and budget deficits caused states "to turn increasingly to women."^[13] More recently, Perlmann and Margo have argued that the answer to the question of why women schoolteachers came to dominate the classrooms of the mid-nineteenth century lies in the simple fact that school boards favored them over men. ^[14]

The assumption implicit in such analyses is that women's movement into teaching functioned as a result of a lack of occupational alternatives. As Sugg argued, "in taking over teaching, women" - who "had no other opportunities for gainful employment" - "won largely by default a field that men neglected."^[15] Similarly, in an oft-cited article on female schoolteachers in nineteenth-century Iowa, Thomas Moraine contends that efforts to upgrade the quality of educators in that state functioned to "reduce the appeal of teaching job" for males, particularly because these entailed increased costs for prospective instructors. Increasingly, because they possessed "other occupational choices," men departed the teaching profession. The result, as Moraine concluded, was feminization by default. ^[16]

Adopting a similar line of reasoning, in her pioneering account on female teachers, historian Nancy Hoffman stressed how the industrial era opened "unprecedented choices for men" in terms of occupations, with the result that many left teaching for other pursuits. "Women had only a few choices of occupation," Hoffman contended, "and compared with most - laundering, sewing, cleaning, or working in a factory - teaching offered numerous attractions."^[17]

The conclusions of Moraine, Hoffman, and Sugg present nineteenth-century women as passive accomplices to the feminization of the teaching profession. Contrasting the vast occupational alternatives of men with women's own scant opportunities for employment, they imply that female schoolteachers slid naturally and unproblematically into the classroom. Such explanations raise several important questions. Did these girls simply respond to a growing demand for female teachers? Did nineteenth-century women suffer from a lack of job prospects?

First, from the perspective of nineteenth-century American women, the idea that females suffered from a shortage of labor options would have been of questionable veracity: the increasingly urban, industrial profile of antebellum New England encouraged "women...to participate more broadly in society," as factory workers, teachers, domestic servants, nurses, clerical workers, and in some cases as professionals. ^[18] According to economic historian Claudia Goldin, the result of these expanded opportunities was that between 1820 and 1920, "the participation of young, unmarried women [in the workforce] increased considerably."^[19] Moreover, the fact that most of these women labored not as teachers, but as factory workers; (according

to Goldin, such industries "attract[ed] an enormous proportion of local youth"), suggests that teaching might not have offered the "numerous attractions" cited by Hoffman.^[20] Finally, in an analysis of newspaper advertisements, sociologist Martin Schultz presented data demonstrating "an increase in women's economic participation" between 1800 and 1849, and concluded that "nineteenth-century women were more active in terms of economic pursuits" compared to their eighteenth-century counterparts. Each of these studies casts doubt on what Schultz calls the "long-prevailing notion that free women held unusually high economic status in colonial America."^[21]

It is true that compared to men, nineteenth-century women suffered from a lack of occupational alternatives. Despite this, the findings of Goldin and other economic historians demonstrate what Thomas Dublin called the "range of possibilities" confronting women in the nineteenth-century workforce.^[22] However, the idea that women had occupational alternatives did not inform much of the early scholarship on the feminization of the teaching profession. Even when acknowledged, the notion that women faced limited occupational opportunities informed a general belief that these were too few for the question of occupational choice to enter into any consideration of women's employment outcomes. Such conclusions are inaccurate; as historians have shown, most female laborers - even those at the bottom of the occupational ladder - were "active shapers of their world."^[23]

These were the words of historian Judith A. McGaw, who in an article entitled "A Good Place to Work": Industrial Workers and Occupational Choice" addressed the question of why nineteenth-century American workers entered different occupations. Published in 1979, McGaw's study of some 3,000 employees of a small Massachusetts town's cotton, wool, and paper mills concluded that nineteenth-century industrial workers "had employment alternatives," and more importantly, that they selected jobs reflecting specific desires, needs, and motives. Although largely passed over by the historical profession, McGaw's article validated the historical study of occupational choice.^[24]

Such conclusions derived from a study of the United States 1880 Manuscript Census Schedules for Berkshire County, Massachusetts. Looking at the distribution of women workers across the county's twenty-two woolen mills, twenty-one paper mills, eighteen cotton mills, and seven mixed textile mills, McGaw first discovered that most had a wide variety of firms to choose from. Despite this, the composition of the region's paper mill workforce differed from those of its cotton and woolen mills. Significantly, McGaw realized that female paper mill workers tended on average to be older than workers in either of the other two mills, and were also more likely to be native-born, married, and heads of household than were textile or cotton mill employees. Interpreting these patterns, she contended that "not chance...but choice

determined the presence of women in particular industries in western Massachusetts.”^[25] Those who worked in cotton and textile mills did so because of the superior wages such work offered (between \$270 and \$295 per year, compared to an annual average of \$238 for paper mill employees): “the money motive loomed largest among those with the greatest financial need.”^[26] By contrast, Berkshire County’s paper mill workers sought such work because of the “autonomy and security” it offered; their decisions were driven not so much out of financial need but by their “greater family responsibilities” compared to women employed in cotton and textile work.^[27]

Though few scholars have followed in McGaw's footsteps, her 1979 article was indicative of the historical profession's growing recognition that people, including women, enter different occupations for different reasons.^[28] Advancing from Sugg and Hoffman's unsubstantiated claims that teaching was "more genteel than the alternatives" and "paid reasonably well," in the 1980s, historical accounts of the feminization of the teaching profession began systematically to assess and evaluate the factors that may have contributed to a woman's desire to take up teaching as an occupation.^[29] Explicit in such explanations is an acceptance of an idea that earlier scholars rejected or ignored: nineteenth-century working women both had occupational alternatives and exercised occupational choice. Partly because they proved easy to measure, many of these latter studies examined Hoffman's hypothesis that for women teaching "paid reasonably well." Much of the quantitative research on female schoolteachers' wages has supported such suppositions.

Thus, in their 1986 analysis of "The Feminization of Public School Teaching," Strober and Lanford concluded that women "were attracted to the higher annual salaries" attendant teaching's professionalization. Analyzing the female/male salary ration among schoolteachers employed across the United States between 1850 and 1880, Strober and Lanford uncovered evidence of a decrease in wage differentials as more and more women entered the teaching profession. Lured by the promise of higher earnings, they concluded that women to "flocked to teaching in increasing numbers."^[30]

Despite its drawbacks - particularly the fact that it neglected to compare women's earnings as teachers with those of domestic servants, factory workers, clerks, or other occupations open to nineteenth-century women - Strober and Lanford's article signaled an emerging consensus among quantitatively-minded historians of the 1980s: economic incentives functioned as the dominant motive force behind women's increasing entry into the teaching profession.^[31] Overcoming the restricted focus of their study, in a 1990 book entitled *Ladies, Women, and Wenches*, Jane and William Pease argued that as it provided "a more nearly adequate income than most other options," the promise of high wages pulled women toward schools.^[32] Three years

later, Jo Ann Preston's research on female teachers in antebellum New England pointed toward similar conclusions: "wage offers," she contended, "weighed heavily in [teachers'] deliberations about whether or not to accept teaching positions."^[33] Thus it appeared that in assessing women's rationale for entering the teaching force, the money motive reigned supreme.

Such arguments have not gone uncontested. Responding to Strober and Lanford's claim that "higher annual salaries" lured women into the teaching profession, Mary Hurlbut Cordier contended that although female schoolteachers from mid-century onward earned higher wages, the formalization of the profession meant that both men *and women* had to relinquish more of their salaries to development workshops, summer training institutes, and the like. Thus, gross income improvements may not have ultimately increased the economic incentives of teaching.^[34] Others have uncovered evidence that instead of providing "a more nearly adequate income than most other options," teaching's economic rewards paled in comparison to that offered by other forms of employment. In his study of New Hampshire's nineteenth-century female educators, for example, Thomas Dublin determined that women schoolteachers - most of whom worked only 11-18 weeks/yr. - brought home annual incomes well below that earned by both industrial workers and domestic servants.^[35] Moreover, in her study of female clerical workers, Margery Davies points out that after 1900, many young American girls began taking up stenography instead of teaching, particularly as wages for clerks exceeded those earned by educators.^[36] The fact that the clerical work force's superior growth rate after 1900 compared to teaching did *not* affect the continuing feminization of the latter profession - which peaked in 1920 when women comprised 86% of all public school teachers - muddies the contention that money served as the prime motive for women's entry into the teaching profession.

Buttressing such claims with quantitative evidence, Margaret K. Nelson's study of female schoolteachers in Vermont concluded that the feminization of the teaching profession in that state coincided with a period of time (1840-1870) in which wages for factory work exceeded that of female educators.^[37] Finally, in their study of female schoolteachers in antebellum Massachusetts, Richard M. Bernhard and Maris A. Vinovskis discovered that "school committees often lamented that many women were leaving the teaching profession in order to obtain higher wages in the textile mills."^[38]

As studies like Nelson's demonstrate, though economic motives may have influenced the occupational choices of female schoolteachers in some areas of the United States, wage-centered explanations of the feminization of teaching cannot fully account for a phenomenon that encompassed the entire nation. Moreover, accounts of this process that cite money as a factor influencing women's occupational choices typically derive

from a focus on atypical individuals. Thus, part of the reason Polly Welts Kaufman cited "personal economic need" as a factor informing mid-western women's decisions to teach derived from the fact that many of the educators examined in her study made a career of teaching, and thus had to be entirely self-supporting.^[39] Similarly, in *Woman's "True" Profession*, Hoffman maintains a focus on the exceptional female educator, including those who traveled South after the Civil War and made a career of teaching. Like Kaufman, she tends to highlight the experiences of those teachers "choosing work and independence over a married life."^[40] Finally, in a much more recent study on female schoolteachers in New York and North Carolina, Tolley and Beadie argue that "teacher wages compared favorably with other forms of paid work." While compelling their conclusions, like those of Kaufman, Hoffman, and others in part flow from the exceptional nature of the women surveyed in their study.^[41]

If the women studied by scholars such as Hoffman, Kaufman, and Tolley and Beadie were not the norm as far as female schoolteachers were concerned, then who was? Current research suggests that the common female teacher was young and unmarried. According to Dublin, the typical New Hampshire schoolmistress worked an average of 4.5 years, after which she married and took up the job of a fulltime homemaker.^[42] Agreeing with this assessment, Nelson added that the typical nineteenth-century female teacher in Vermont worked between the ages of nineteen and twenty-five. Moreover, each of these studies concluded that the typical female educator lived either with or in close proximity to her parents. Both determined that the average women instructor hailed from a relatively prosperous family.^[43] Most importantly, as their wages "typically afforded a precarious living," Dublin pointed to other than economic motives as the basis for women's decisions to enter teaching.^[44]

Figure 1: Weekly Wages, Vermont Schoolteachers v. Female Textile Employees, 1840-1890^[45]

Thus it may be that the "money motive" applied only to the atypical female teacher, those who made a living and a career of work in the classroom. However, even women belonging to this minority of the total female teaching force had to consider more than pecuniary matters when deciding upon a line of employment. What much of the quantitative literature on the feminization of teaching has ignored are the various social dynamics - the pressures and requirements of different occupations, the status or prestige that accompanied them, etc. - operating in nineteenth-century America. Additionally, the contentions of Hoffman and others that teaching was "genteel" and offered "economic security" fail to consider the many ways in which teaching placed unique demands on those who took up the occupation.

One particularly onerous restriction was the practice of "boarding around," in which women instructors lived in the homes of the families' whose children attended their school.^[46] Beyond "boarding around," school boards often regulated the behavior of female schoolteachers in a way that other employers did not. For example, one Massachusetts school department manual's "Rules for Female Teachers" levied the following restrictions on all women employees:

- i. Do not get married.
- ii. Do not leave town at any time without permission of the school board.

- iii. Do not keep company with men.
- iv. Be home between the hours of eight PM and six AM.
- v. Do not loiter downtown in ice cream stores.
- vi. Do not smoke.
- vii. Do not get into a carriage with any man except your father or brother.
- viii. Do not dress in bright colors.
- ix. Do not dye your hair.
- x. Do not wear any dress more than two inches above the ankle.^[47]

Writing of the early twentieth century, historian Elizabeth Baker noted how after 1900, the share of women working as clerks greatly exceeded those seeking classroom employment. According to Baker, "women may have preferred clerical work to teaching because of the severe restrictions placed on the personal and social life of teachers."^[48]

Wage-centered explanations of female schoolteachers' motives fail to recognize how the social realities of work in the educational sector may have impacted women's occupational choices. However, the obvious social disincentives to teaching evident in the aforementioned examples notwithstanding, much of the qualitative literature on female schoolteachers suggests that rather than being drawn to the profession by the promise of high wages, women's motives were of the social sort. Though it has not been studied in a systematic fashion, existing scholarship on female schoolteachers suggests that social incentives may have outweighed economic ones.

As several scholars have noted, teaching was a high status job. According to Thomas Dublin, New Hampshire's female educators comprised a kind of "occupational elite;" fleshing out these ideas, Nancy Hoffman contends that teaching "allowed a woman to travel, to live independently...and to attain economic security and a modest social status."^[49] As these claims suggest, there is evidence that nineteenth-century Americans considered teaching an "honorable independency" for women.^[50] Its prestige cemented by the writings of Catharine Beecher, who contrasted the nobility and honor of educational employment with lowly and victimizing factory work on one hand and unwomanly professional pursuits - which "belong to the other sex" - on the other, for many young American women, teaching had social cachet.^[51]

For women of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, much of teaching's cachet revolved around its ability to enhance prospects for marriage. While the practice of "boarding around" placed women under the supervision of a town's families, it also afforded them a "high degree of visibility" untarnished by associations with immodesty. As Nelson points out, such visibility often resulted in the attraction of potential husbands. Additionally, some female schoolteachers saved their wages so as to enhance dowries.^[52]

Even for those less concerned with finding marriage partners, teaching's compatibility with existing ideas about "woman's proper role" afforded female schoolteachers a certain independence; even if unable to find a husband, the occupation of teacher provided young women "a suitable cover for surveying other territories."^[53] Indeed, the promise of independence appears to have loomed large in the minds of the tens of thousands of frontier women who headed the classrooms of the nineteenth-century West. Representative of those examined in Mary Hurlbut Cordier's study of "Prairie Schoolwomen" were women like Agnes Briggs Olmstead, an Iowa educator who in the 1870s remarked how "not the least of my pleasures was the sense of boundless freedom of being no longer shut in. Here was elbow room, breathing space." According to Cordier, what Olmstead and her colleagues saw in educational employment was "the way by which young women could leave home."^[54] In his study of nineteenth-century female schoolteachers in Wyoming, Rankin concurred, explaining that "compared to such alternatives as nursing, seamstressing, and domestic service, teaching conferred greater status and independence than many young women had known before."^[55]

Though women's control of the public school classroom continued in the late nineteenth-century, in the years after the Civil War the female labor market for teaching became more ethnically diverse. According to one study, by 1910 "the native-born daughters of the foreign-born were already 27 percent of all women teachers"; the 1920 census listed teaching in the top five of all occupations held by women of foreign or mixed parentage.^[56] Though the wages of a factory operative or a stenographer exceeded those of a female school teacher, the promise of social mobility evident in educational employment lured many working-class girls into the classroom, notes Michael Apple.^[57]

Evidence from early twentieth-century fiction suggests that first-generation American girls frequently pinned their hopes for social mobility to teaching. In a short story published in a 1907 issue of *Outlook* magazine, Miriam Finn Scott told the story of a Jewish immigrant couple and their native-born daughter, who saw in teaching the possibilities of "another world...where one had comfort and could grow."^[58] If fiction is any indication of mentality, turn-of-the-century female schoolteachers saw in their profession the promise of status and also of independence.^[59]

In a recent work on *The Feminization of Work in the United States*, historian Julia Kirk Blackwelder reached many of the same conclusions. According to Blackwelder, non-economic factors dominated the occupational decisions of the daughters of immigrants, who after 1900 comprised an increasing share of the female teaching force. For these working-class girls, she contends, classroom employment "conferred benefits more alluring than income, for it affirmed women's middle-class status even though teachers...often earned less than skilled factory workers."^[60]

The novelty of Blackwelder's study lies in the way it weighs social incentives against economic ones, something that most investigations of worker motivation neglect. That the most recent manuscript on the feminization of the teaching profession, Perlmann and Margo's *Women's Work?*, downplays the importance of the money motive in explaining female schoolteachers' occupational rationale suggests that more than an inkling of truth lies in Blackwelder's argument.^[61] However, for most scholars, even those who purport to examine "socioeconomic incentives to teaching," examination of female teachers' motives tend to focus either on wages or on non-pecuniary awards. Such a disconnect is indicative of the more general divide between quantitative and qualitative research.^[62] Studies like Blackwelder's point to the necessity of combining the sociological and the economic, a task that might be facilitated by greater incorporation of the rich sociological literature on occupational choice. As it stands now, wage-centered explanations continue to dominate interpretations of the feminization of the teaching profession. Since the late 1970s, historians' understandings of this process have become more complete. Remediating the oversights of the "top-down" approach evident in many of the first analyses of the gendered transformation of the American teacher, scholars have gained a sense of how the decisions of female teachers themselves impacted this process. Despite these advancements, the prevalence of wage-centered examinations of the feminization of teaching has prevented historians from placing the process within the social context of nineteenth and early-twentieth century American history.^[63] Thus, until scholars achieve a true welding of the social and economic, our knowledge of how working women of the past exercised occupational choice will remain incomplete. Incorporating sociological analyses of occupational choice into historical examinations of such gendered processes provides an exciting point of departure for future study.

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^[1] This account of the Stow School Committee's hiring of Sarah Eleveth comes from Madelyn Holmes, Beverly J. Weiss, *Lives of Women Public Schoolteachers: Scenes from American Educational History* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995).

^[2] In explaining their rationale, a local historian writing in 1850 noted how "the committee, elated with the improvement of the school, consented to allow the same [female] teacher to take the winter term, notwithstanding [the fact that] there were eight 'big boys' between sixteen and twenty years of age" in that year's winter class. Holmes and Weiss, *Lives of Women Public Schoolteachers*, 136.

[3] Holmes and Weiss, *Lives of Women Public Schoolteachers*, 14.

[4] Nancy Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession: Voices from the History of Teaching* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981): xv.

[5] Using 80 percent as an "index of feminization," Jo Anne Preston determined that teaching became feminized in Massachusetts by 1861, New Hampshire in 1864, Connecticut in 1865, and Rhode Island in 1866. Feminization occurred slightly later in the Mountain West; according to Charles Rankin, "women...constituted 70 percent of the teaching force in 1870...and 82 percent in 1930." Jo Anne Preston, "Domestic Ideology, School Reformers, and Female Teachers: Schoolteaching Becomes Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century New England," *The New England Quarterly* 66:4 (December 1993): 531; Charles E. Rankin, "Teaching: Opportunity and Limitation for Wyoming Women," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 21:2 (1990): 148.

[6] "Women accounted for four out of five public teachers in every region of the country except the South by 1910," note Joel Perlman and Robert A. Margo in a recent volume. Yet while in 1885 only thirty-six percent of the South's public school teachers were women, by 1915 the figure had increased to seventy-three percent, much closer to the national average. Joel Perlmann and Robert A. Margo, *Women's Work? American Schoolteachers, 1650-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001): 91.

[7] Michael W. Apple, "Teaching and 'Women's Work': A Comparative Historical and Ideological Analysis," *Journal of Education* 167:1 (Winter 1985): 460.

[8] Peter M. Blau *et al*, "Occupational Choice: A Conceptual Framework," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 9, 4 (July 1956): 533. For additional early studies of occupational choice, see Eli Ginzberg, *Occupational Choice: An Approach to a General Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951); Basil Sherlock and Alan Cohen, "The Strategy of Occupational Choice: Recruitment to Dentistry," *Vocational Behavior: Readings in Theory and Research*, ed. Donald G. Zytowski (New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1968): 341-353.

[9] Blau, "Occupational Choice," 531-33.

[10] Indeed, since the late eighteenth century, educational opportunities had expanded significantly for New England girls. In 1807, the town of Pittsfield, Massachusetts became the site of the "first academy incorporated for girls alone." In subsequent years, similar establishments appeared in Byfield (1818), Boston (1823), and Saugus (1824). In the 1820s, the success of these smaller institutions spurred the creation of

their larger sisters, of which Troy Female Seminary (1821), Hartford Female Seminary (1823), and Mt. Holyoke Seminary (1837) are the most well-known. As the spread of such female-only schools suggests, early nineteenth century New England demonstrated "a growing concern for [the] education [of] girls and women." Holmes and Weiss, *Lives of Women Public Schoolteachers*, 5. Just as academies for older students proliferated in early-nineteenth century New England, so too did common schools. Indeed, according to one study, antebellum Boston devoted "as much as a quarter of its city budget to provide an elementary education free to all." Additionally, the nation's westward expansion provided abundant opportunities for trained teachers: between 1849 and 1895, the number of enrolled students in public schools in Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska increased from about 17,000 to over 1.2 million, as the number of schools grew from a few hundred to nearly 30,000. Because the United States' economic growth during the nineteenth century depended in large part on a "knowledgeable labor force," the educational sector expanded significantly, resulting in increased opportunities for teachers. Importantly, from the mid-nineteenth century onward these openings came increasingly to be filled by women. In the case of the three mid-western states cited above, whereas between 1849 and 1895, the number of male instructors in this region increased from 336 to 12,261, the growth of the female teaching force dwarfed this rate of expansion, increasing from a meager 245 to nearly 37,000. Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *Ladies, Women and Wenches: Choice and Constraint in Antebellum Boston and Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990): 87; Mary Hurlbut Cordier, "Prairie Schoolwomen, Mid-1850s to 1920s, in Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska," *Great Plains Quarterly* 8:2 (1988): 102-4. See also David F. Allmendinger, Jr., "Mount Holyoke Students Encounter the Need for Life-Planning, 1837-1850," *History of Education Society* 19:1 (Spring 1979): 27-46; Perlmann and Margo, *Women's Work?*, 17-32.

[11] Beginning in the 1840s and 1850s, historian Nancy Hoffman notes, "the teacher was portrayed as a woman." A central force in this shift was Catharine Beecher, the prominent nineteenth-century pseudo-feminist writer who promoted the idea of female schoolteachers as a "high and honorable" alternative to factory work. According to Beecher, as paragons of moral virtue, women possessed a superior stock of benevolence, sacrifice, and grace, all of which were essential for teaching. Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession*, 8, 11, 51-2. See also Preston, "Domestic Ideology," 531-51; Katherine Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973).

[12] Redding S. Sugg, Jr., *Motherteacher: The Feminization of American Education* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1978): 3.

[13] Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1955* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997): 50.

[14] Perlmann and Margo, *Women's Work?*, 103-5.

[15] Sugg, Jr., *Motherteacher*, 38.

[16] Thomas Moraine, "The Departure of Males from the Teaching Profession in Nineteenth Century Iowa," *Civil War History* 26:2 (1980): 166, 170. Such a conclusion also informs the narrative crafted in a more recent work on women public schoolteachers in the United States. Finding the 1860s to be the critical decade in the feminization of the teaching profession, its authors write that with young men "leaving school to enlist in the army," throughout the Civil War "young women were needed increasingly as teachers." Holmes and Weiss, *Lives of Women Public Schoolteachers*, 82.

[17] Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession*, xvii.

[18] Holmes and Weiss, *Lives of Women Public Schoolteachers*, 14.

[19] Claudia Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990): 4.

[20] Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap*, 51. According to one study of female educators in Massachusetts, at no point in the antebellum period did teachers represent more than two percent of the white female labor force. Richard M. Bernard and Maris A. Vinovskis, "The Female School Teacher in Ante-Bellum Massachusetts," *The Journal of Social History* 10 (March 1977): 332-3.

[21] Martin Schultz, "Occupational Pursuits of Free American Women: An Analysis of Newspaper Ads," *Sociological Forum* 7:4 (1992): 604, 587.

[22] Thomas Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994): 24.

[23] Judith A. McGaw, "'A Good Place to Work': Industrial Workers and Occupational Choice: The Case of Berkshire Women," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* X:2 (Autumn 1979): 248.

[24] McGaw, "'A Good Place to Work,'" 248. According to Google Scholar and ISI Web of Knowledge, McGaw's article has been cited a total of five times.

[25] McGaw, "'A Good Place to Work,'" 234.

[26] *Ibid.*, 242.

[27] Ibid., 243, 246.

[28] For two well-known examples of this, see Margery W. Davies, *Woman's Place Is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982): 51-78; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford, 1992): 127-38. Questions pertaining to "occupational choice" in historical societies remain the purview of non-historians; see for example, Francesca A. Florey and Avery M. Guest, "Coming of Age Among U.S. Farm Boys in the Late 1800s: Occupational and Residential Choices," *Journal of Family History* 13:2 (1988): 233-49.

[29] Sugg, *Motherteacher*, 40; Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession*, xvii.

[30] Myra H. Strober, Audri-Gordon Lanford, "The Feminization of Public School Teaching: Cross-Sectional Analysis, 1850-1880," *Signs* 11:2 (Winter 1986): 218-19.

[31] Acknowledging this shortcoming, Strober and Lanford write that "The data, particularly with respect to wages in occupational alternatives to teaching, are simply not available." Strober and Lanford, "The Feminization of Public School Teaching," 221.

[32] Looking at wage levels for working women in nineteenth-century Boston, the Peases concluded that the \$250 female schoolteachers took home every year represented an annual income four times greater than that earned by domestic workers and "somewhat better than the wages generally paid skilled female workers in the city." Pease and Pease, *Ladies, Women and Wenches*, 85.

[33] Preston, "Domestic Ideology," 545.

[34] Cordier, "Prairie Schoolwomen," 107.

[35] Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work*, 207-15.

[36] Davies looks to the advice offered in 1912 by the superintendent of schools in Council Bluffs, Iowa for evidence of the superior pay offered by clerical work. According to him, teaching salaries for women "could not have been more than fifty dollars per month for nine months, or \$450 per year." By contrast, "the average pupil (female) who graduated from the business department of the high school would have received for the same year an annual salary of slightly over \$840. You may judge for yourself of the economic efficiency from the standpoint of salary," he concluded. Davies, *Woman's Place*, 71.

[37] "Some Vermont schoolmistresses," Nelson notes, "apparently viewed millwork as a preferable means of earning a living. The *Vermont School Report* in 1864 acknowledged that the mill option (especially during the Civil War) threatened the stability of the labor supply. In fact in the years before 1865, the women had good reason to choose factory work over teaching: the pay was better; one could escape the daily duties of family life; and one could live with others of the same age." Margaret K. Nelson, "Vermont Female Schoolteachers in the Nineteenth Century," *Vermont History* 49:1 (1981): 26.

[38] Bernhard and Vinovskis, "The Female School Teacher," 338. According to Apple, "teaching, especially elementary-school teaching, was not all that well paid. Women teachers earned somewhat more than a factory operative but still only the equivalent of a stenographer's wages in the United States or England." Apple, "Teaching and 'Women's Work,'" 466.

[39] "More than two-thirds" of the six-hundred New England teachers studied by Kaufman "were already on their own, self-supporting by necessity." Polly Welts Kaufman, *Women Teachers on the Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984): 15.

[40] Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession*, 92-3, xviii.

[41] Embodying their argument are women like Susan Davis Nye, a rural upstate New York teacher who traveled to North Carolina "to earn a better living." While Nye's motives were undoubtedly financial in origin, elements of her biography - especially the fact "she taught for nearly thirty-five years" - make clear the fact that she (like many of the teachers Tolley and Beadie examined) represented anything but the typical female schoolteacher. These scholars note two limitations of their study: (1) female academy teachers comprised a minority of the overall female teaching force; (2) it remains difficult to compare the wages of teachers, factory workers, and domestics. What their tables on wage rates for working women does not take into account is the fact that though teachers' monthly wages exceeded those of shoe binders, seamstresses, and hatmakers, in terms of *annual* incomes teachers probably fared worse than non-teachers, who "presumably could work longer." "It is no doubt true," they make clear, "that well-paid female academy teachers represented a small portion of the female teaching force." Kim Tolley and Nancy Beadie, "Socioeconomic Incentives to Teach in New York and North Carolina: Toward a More Complex Model of Teacher Labor Markets, 1800-1850," *History of Education Quarterly* 46:1 (2006): 70, 36, 52, 60.

[42] Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work*, 220.

[43] As Nelson put it, "the common schoolmistresses...were predominately young, unmarried daughters of respectable farmers 'drawn from the bright young people of the neighborhood.'" Nelson, "Vermont Female Schoolteachers," 16.

[44] Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work*, 227.

[45] Nelson, "Vermont Female Schoolteachers," 13.

[46] Nelson, "Vermont Female Schoolteachers," 23-4.

[47] Barbara Mayer Wertheimer, *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977): 248.

[48] Cited in Davies, *Woman's Place*, 71.

[49] Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work*, 218; Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession*, xviii.

[50] The phrase comes from an 1838 in which James Petigro informed his sister that "to be the governess of a respectable female school...although not the highest prize in the lottery of life...is nevertheless after all depreciating considerations of that kind, still an honorable independency." Pease and Pease, *Ladies, Women and Wenches*, 87.

[51] Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession*, 10, 51.

[52] Nelson, "Vermont Female Schoolteachers," 20, 26.

[53] Rankin, "Teaching," 150, Nelson, "Vermont Female Schoolteachers," 20.

[54] Cordier, "Prairie Schoolwomen," 109, 108.

[55] Rankin, "Teaching," 150.

[56] Geraldine Joncich Clifford, "'Daughters into Teachers': Educational and Demographic Influences on the Transformation of Teaching into 'Women's Work,'" in *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching*, ed. Alison Prentice, Marjorie R. Theobald (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991): 119.

[57] Apple, "Teaching and 'Women's Work,'" 466-7.

[58] Davies, *Woman's Place*, 66.

[59] Thus, in an 1892 short story entitled "The Schoolmarm," novelist Anna Fuller told the story of Mary William Pratt, who "reveled in the independence" her occupation afforded - especially independence from matrimony, which she considered "a state of bondage to be avoided at any cost." Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession*, 17.

[60] Blackwelder, *Now Hiring*, 67.

[61] Throughout their study, Perlmann and Margo test a number of economic hypotheses concerning the feminization of the teaching profession - including the financial strains placed on the public school system by increased enrollments and regional differences in teachers' wages - only to conclude that non-economic factors like "long-established norms" and "changes in social life" more accurately explain the phenomenon. Perlmann and Margo, *Women's Work?*, 84, 107.

[62] For more on this, see Robert W. Fogel, "'Scientific' History and Traditional History," in *Which Road to the Past?*, ed. Robert Fogel and Geoffrey Elton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983): 7-70.

[63] One example of the historical absent-mindedness of some economic approaches to the feminization of the teaching profession can be seen in a 1987 article on "The Changing Appeal of Teaching." Penned by Michael Sedlak and Steven Schlossman, the piece attempted to answer the question of "Who Will Teach?" from a national perspective. Comparing data on teacher's mean annual incomes to those of factory workers, government employees, and a variety of professions, Sedlak and Schlossman contend that "the desirability of teaching...has been shaped to a large degree by economic incentives." Addressing the feminization of the profession, these scholars observe that whereas male teachers have generally earned 70-90% of the salaries earned by all male professional workers, female teachers have "customarily earned from 150-200% more than the female civilian labor force in general." While compelling, these figures apply only to the period 1950-1980. Entirely neglected in their analysis is the fact that since 1920, the percentage of women comprising the public schoolteaching force has declined. Though "teaching salaries have increased steadily in absolute terms since the early twentieth century," compared to males, since 1920 females have increasingly opted out of the profession. After 1930, Sedlak and Schlossman note, "the percentage of male teachers increased quickly, climbing to 25 percent by 1940, leveling off through the 1960s, and reaching nearly 30 percent in 1970." Such internal inconsistencies mar Sedlak and Schlossman's economically-grounded analysis of the feminization of teaching. Michael Sedlak and Steven Schlossman, "Who Will Teach? Historical Perspectives on the Changing Appeal of Teaching," *Review of Research in Education* 14 (1987): 96, 112, 107.

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The Devil and the Magistrate: Elite theory and popular beliefs in European witch trials.

The age of European witchcraft persecution, a period spanning roughly the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries, has been a perennial subject of both academic and popular curiosity. Over the last few decades, however, an influx of archival research and original analysis has opened a fundamentally new chapter in the scholarly treatment of this phenomenon, and the ongoing project of ‘witchcraft studies,’ now a sub-field of early modern history in its own right, has increasingly been to problematize and re-examine the various traditional interpretations of the ‘great European witch-hunt.’ A key component in this revision concerns the function – and the culpability – of learned demonological theory in the proceedings against suspected witches. Exemplified by the notoriously misogynistic *Malleus Maleficarum*, this vitriolic discourse contributes to a model of European witch persecution that still dominates the popular imagination – one in which Church-sanctioned demonological literature served as the motive force behind a centralized and arbitrary campaign of oppression, ultimately claiming the lives of millions of unsuspecting women. At the very least, these clichés misrepresent both the body count and the gender-specificity of witchcraft persecution: most scholars now cite more realistic (though nonetheless disturbing) estimates in the range of 50,000 killed, with men comprising twenty to twenty-five percent of the total.^[1]

More than just an exaggeration of scale, however, this notion of an immense, pan-European witch-hunt rooted in the machinations of the Church has drawn criticism for another reason: namely, for having been unduly colored by the writings of a small and deeply invested minority. Elite early modern theorists and proponents of witchcraft persecution – Krämer, Bodin, and de Lancre, among others – may have hoped that their works would instigate a broad, purging sweep of the continent, but the fact that these texts were in wide circulation cannot definitively establish their level of influence in the average trial. Witchcraft historian Robin Briggs places particular emphasis on this point, noting in his 1996 book *Witches and Neighbors* that it is “very important not to confuse the rhetoric of justifications with the real motives for action,” and criticizing what he identifies as a tendency to “give vastly exaggerated significance to the theories of demonologists, attributing to them a causal role that they simply did not possess.”^[2] Now, scholars have expanded their body of evidence beyond the erudite treatises, resulting in a variety of new approaches that focus on suspicions and accusations of witchcraft as sociological phenomena – often attributable to the uncertainties, hardships, and difficult-to-resolve neighborhood

conflicts that characterized life in an early modern village. Some historians, notably Wolfgang Behringer and Brian Levack, have even begun to include non-European witchcraft in their analyses, emphasizing the apparent ubiquity in pre-industrial cultures of the belief in *maleficium*, or malicious magic.^[3] Rather than mere victims of clerical fantasy, the ‘average’ European witch that emerges from this new research is a person who had suffered the folkish suspicions of his or her neighbors for years or even decades before any judicial processes were set into motion.

But there remains a problem. While the details of these suspicions – usually involving the attribution of common misfortunes, like sickness or infertility, to the work of local witches – are familiar to scholars of worldwide folk beliefs, the interrogation transcripts and confessions from European trials are steeped in concepts distinctly characteristic of Christian demonology, and increasingly so as the typical trial progressed. The result is a strange pattern: witches seem to have been indicted for *maleficium*, but ultimately convicted of apostasy and collusion with the Devil. Does the presence of these latter concepts – usually matters of clerical more than municipal interest – indicate a pressing concern on the part of local authorities with rooting out diabolic influence? This is not a necessary conclusion: it may have also been that the function of demonological theory in this arena was more passive, providing a stamp of legitimacy or justification on judicial activities that had more to do with keeping the peace than with combating evil.

The issue is complicated further by the fact that the presence (if not the character) of witch beliefs can likely be taken as roughly uniform across Europe – certainly there were no universally ‘skeptical’ villages, in the modern, rationalistic sense of the word – whereas persecution levels were spotty and highly variable. This means that factors other than social structure and popular culture, like the initiative of local judges and magistrates, must be taken into account. Clearly, witchcraft suspicions in some areas maintained a kind of static equilibrium: always present but rarely prosecuted. Could the infamous demonological treatises like the *Malleus Maleficarum*, in the hands of certain individuals, have indeed been responsible for bridging the “crucial gap”^[4] between rumor and trial in those areas that did experience persecution? Undoubtedly this was the case in some exceptional instances, but the true impetus for legal action in the typical, village-level trial is more difficult to pinpoint.

The answers to these questions remain elusive, but four relatively recent books shed a great deal of light on the relevant evidence and arguments. The first of these is a unique source. Edited by Peter Morton, *The Trial of Tempel Anneke* contains a full reproduction, translated and annotated, of almost every transcript and record pertaining to a single witchcraft trial that took place in Brunswick, Germany in 1663. This format not only allows the reader a rare, holistic glimpse of the witch trial

process in general, it also makes it possible to discern, at least in this one case, the precise point at which demonological concepts were inserted into the proceedings.

The remaining three works to be considered are standard scholarly monographs, representing a range of substantively different interpretations of the role that demonology played for local-level prosecutors of witchcraft. Brian Levack's comprehensive account, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, for example, foregrounds the intellectual and legal foundations of his subject matter, which he calls "essentially a judicial operation."^[5] Carefully tracing the development of the "cumulative concept" of witchcraft, Levack emphasizes the fear that local authorities must have experienced once the demonological concept of a massive diabolic conspiracy, poised to infiltrate their communities, gained sufficient purchase on their minds.^[6] In contrast, Robin Briggs, a pioneer in the exposition of the 'social context' of witchcraft trials, emphasizes in *Witches and Neighbors* the role of village dynamics and popular beliefs, and regards with skepticism the idea that demonological theory played any kind of active role in inciting persecution. A third important voice in this discussion is Lyndal Roper, whose 2004 study *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* delves into the psychology – if not the pathology – of witch-hunting, exploring the ways in which knowledge of 'high' demonology instilled in prosecutors a sense of authority, superiority, and dire purpose, as well as detailing the ways in which this may have manifested itself in their interactions with suspects.

The Trial of Tempel Anneke, more than just a source of insight into the workings of a typical witch trial, provides an intimate and fascinating window into the daily lives of the ordinary early modern Europeans – particularly the accused herself – who were called on to testify, and who would otherwise have left little mark on the historical record. Anna Roleffes, known to her neighbors in the Brunswick satellite village of Harxbüttel as Tempel Anneke, was elderly, widowed, dependent on her relatives, and known locally as a purveyor of folk remedies and divination – all frequently recurring characteristics of those who faced prosecution for witchcraft in the course of the 'great hunt.'^[7] The extant records of her case include testimony both from fellow villagers and expert witnesses, in addition to detailed interrogation transcripts that include descriptions of the methods of torture to which she was subjected. The duration of the trial, also not unusual, was approximately six months, from Anneke's arrest on 25 June, 1663, to her execution on 30 December. Morton includes an introduction that provides necessary background information and regional historical context, but he steers conscientiously clear of interpretation, citing a desire not to let his own theories "come between the reader and the text." He notes that in procedural terms Anneke's trial was a fairly typical one, adhering to the appropriate legal

protocols and lacking the exceptional characteristics of the larger, faster-moving ‘witch crazes’ that sometimes plagued German cities. From among other, similarly representative and detailed case files, he chose hers for publication simply for “its vividness.” [8]

It is unfortunately difficult to tell how exactly Anneke first came to the attention of local authorities; neither of the witnesses in the incident for which she was initially charged appear to have been the source of the complaint, and both of them were in fact fined by the court for having solicited her divination services. Moreover, the file contains additional documents, dated nearly a year before her arrest, that describe previous accusations of witchcraft against her as well as “careful enquires” that were already being conducted “into what different kinds of suspicious business... what many evils she had both accomplished and started.” [9] This at least suggests that the authorities of the Brunswick region did not tend to make arrests at the first whiff of witchcraft, but it is unclear how long they had been aware of Anneke’s reputation prior to initiating charges against her. The particular incident that led to her arrest involved divination and a harmful spell that she was said to have perpetrated against a local thief the previous year, but subsequent witnesses reported suspicions they had harbored against her for as long as a decade. Over the course of the trial, Tempel Anneke is accused by her neighbors of, among other things, causing a five-year-old to cry for two days, curing sick sheep with a mysterious powder, magically causing “holes... as long as fingers” to appear in a man’s leg, injuring another man by throwing the “half decomposed head of an animal” into the river, sickening a child by giving him an enchanted pear, and “conjur[ing] the evil things into the head of [a neighbor] so that he turned completely dense from it.” [10] But it also appears that the residents of Harxbüttel frequently called upon her services, apparently without much concern for their supposed reliance on demonic power. As one witness reported matter-of-factly, “[e]veryone in the village takes Tempel Anneke for a witch and a sorceress. She knows how to bring back lost things and cures animals with magical potions.” [11]

All of this testimony is telling because it is concerned entirely with *maleficium* – simple, harmful folk magic – and has very little to do with religion at all, let alone the specific claims or theories of Christian demonologists. The villagers seem merely to have believed that Anneke possessed some form of arcane knowledge that allowed her to influence the physical world in ways that they could not. In the popular understanding, the moral implications of this power appear to have depended mostly on its wielder’s intent – an ambiguity that made the defendant both a common source of advice when livestock or household objects went missing and a ready explanation for any mundane misfortune.

Once the officials conducting the trial had a chance to reformulate the testimony of Anneke's neighbors into questions for her interrogation, however, the Devil made a swift entrance. According to one man's testimony, Anneke had attacked another villager by "pegg[ing] the poor fellow into a hole so that the same had squeaked inside it like a heap of mice," referring apparently to a form of harmful sympathetic magic in which a scrap of the victim's clothing is inserted into a hole drilled into a post.^[12] The question posed later by her interrogators, however, is explicitly "whether she didn't plug the thief into a drilled hole *in the name of the Evil Enemy*, so that the fellow squeaked inside it like a heap of mice" (emphasis added).^[13] The transition from a *maleficium* emphasis to a diabolic one accelerated quickly thereafter, with Anneke ultimately being questioned as to whether she learned her forbidden trade from the Devil personally, fornicated with him "in unnatural ways" and formed a pact with him, "handled the Holy Communion and the Host indecently," and met with other witches at a yearly dance, to name only a few of the increasingly specific and elaborate accusations that her interrogators pursued. None of these accusations had any discernable basis in the testimony presented by the accused or by local witnesses, and by the end of the trial they had taken on the unmistakable tone of Christian demonology. To make sense of this transition, it is necessary first to clarify the various concepts of witchcraft that were circulating among educated Europeans at that time, a purpose which Brian Levack's book *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* serves admirably.

Of all the recent books devoted to early modern witchcraft persecution, Levack's is likely the most comprehensive, and is referred to frequently as an ideal introduction to the topic. Generally speaking, his approach (though no less valuable) might be considered the most traditional among those reviewed here. This is illustrated by his frequent casting of European witchcraft persecution in language that implies a single, if protracted, event: the 'great European witch-hunt,' for example, is a phrase that many writers now tend to qualify or avoid. Indeed, much of the recent literature conveys the impression of a collective scholarly attempt to atomize this 'great hunt,' and to reconceptualize witch persecution as something that arose – and continues to arise – organically and independently, in villages and neighborhoods around the world. Levack, while sensitive to the social context of witchcraft persecution and conscientious in exploring it, does not for the most part follow this trend, and states characteristically on the first page of his introduction that "[a]lthough the number of witches who were tried varied from place to place and from time to time, all of these witchcraft persecutions can be considered parts of one very large judicial operation that took place only in Europe and only during the early modern period."^[14]

Levack begins his book with an explanation of the oddly bifurcated concept of the crime of witchcraft that is so evident in *Tempel Anneke*. The connection

between *maleficium* and Devil worship, or diabolism, he explains, “derived from the writings of theologians, who ever since the fourth century had argued that magic could only be performed by demonic power.”^[15] After continued development at the hands of various patristic and scholastic thinkers, this idea eventually led to the widespread conviction that because they had acquired their power by association with the Devil, witches were “not simply felons, similar to murderers and thieves, but heretics and apostates, intrinsically evil individuals who had rejected their Christian faith and had decided instead to serve God’s enemy.”^[16] To explain the intense levels of persecution that occurred between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, Levack points to further theological developments that began to take place at that time. Notably, the figure of the Devil was undergoing significant changes during the fifteenth century. “Throughout the Middle Ages,” Levack explains, “the Devil had been described as the enemy and anti-type of Christ, teaching hatred rather than love. Now, however, he was increasingly depicted as the anti-type of God the Father, the source and object of idolatry and false religion.”^[17] The Protestant and Catholic Reformations also had the effect of turning the Devil into a more looming threat, both as a result of their explicit theological innovations and in the increased concern that these movements must have inspired on the part of many Europeans for the religious integrity of their communities.^[18]

Overall, Levack grants a fairly high degree of influence to the ideas of educated Europeans. Having outlined the development of the ‘cumulative concept of witchcraft,’ he emphasizes the role that certain specific components of this concept played in enabling and encouraging witchcraft persecution, the most important of these being the pact that witches were said to have made with Satan and the diabolical ceremonies, or sabbats, that they were thought to celebrate in the company of other witches. In Levack’s approximation, the diabolical pact not only provided “the basis of the legal definition of the crime of witchcraft in many jurisdictions,” but also “served as the main link between the practice of harmful magic and the alleged worship of the Devil.”^[19] The idea of the sabbat may have helped perpetuate the practice of witch-hunting to an even greater extent, because when prosecutors were convinced that suspected witches had attended a gathering of this kind they were likely more inclined to persist in forcing them to name the accomplices they had seen there. These two elements, the pact and the sabbat, are indeed among the first purely diabolism-related accusations that Tempel Anneke’s interrogators brought up during the course of her trial, and it seems clear that Levack would interpret this fact as an indication of the effectiveness of demonological theory in inspiring persecution. “The great European witch-hunt,” he writes, “could not have taken place until the members of the ruling elites of European countries, especially those men who controlled the operation of the judicial machinery, subscribed to... various beliefs [including the sabbat and the pact] regarding the diabolical activities of witches.”^[20]

A somewhat different interpretation is put forward by Robin Briggs in *Witches and Neighbors*, a work that is distinctive for its emphasis less on the judicial and intellectual aspects of persecution than on the conditions that gave rise to witchcraft accusations in the first place. The most important element in this process, Briggs maintains, lay in the social structure of the small, rural communities where witch persecution found its most frequent expression. He explains that in this environment, communal farming practices and economic uncertainty made cooperation and mutual aid a necessary part of daily life, but also bred countless opportunities for minor conflict or resentment. The refusal of charity, for example, surfaces repeatedly in trial documents as the first occurrence of suspicion, with the petitioner's reaction to being turned away interpreted as a sign of hostility. In conjunction with a demon-haunted cosmology, these imputations of ill-will were easily translated into suspicions of malicious magic, although most suspicions appear to have remained largely passive, festering for years or decades before they resulted in legal action. If suspicion did crystallize into a trial, however, Briggs asserts that it was generally the result of pressure from below, not above. While he calls the intellectual factors "admittedly vital," the author is fairly adamant in his assertion that witchcraft persecution was fundamentally "a social and political phenomenon."^[21] His interpretation furthermore admits of a less perfectly dichotomous relationship between elite and popular ideas of witchcraft than does Levack's, and he stresses that these two categories "were of course far from being wholly distinct; at every stage it is vital to remember that such distinctions are an interpretive convenience."^[22]

Briggs makes another unique contribution to this field of study by engaging directly with the claims of the demonological treatises themselves, particularly with regard to their frequent assumption that witches were almost always female. Like nearly all historians who discuss the *Malleus Maleficarum*, he notes the profound misogyny evident in this text and others like it – and especially in the case of the *Malleus*, the degree of this misogyny would be difficult to overstate. "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust," claimed author Heinrich Krämer, "which in women is insatiable."^[23] Briggs also refers to the work of Jean Bodin, a widely-known French political theorist who asserted similarly in his 1581 treatise *La Démonomanie des Sorciers* that "it is the power of bestial desire which has reduced women to extremities to indulge these appetites, or to avenge themselves... For the internal organs are seen to be larger in women than in men, whose desires are not so violent: by contrast, the heads of men are much larger, and in consequence they have more brains and prudence than women."^[24] But for all their shrill declarations, Briggs observes, these writers often grossly overestimated the ratio of women to men among those accused of witchcraft even in their own districts, and both the tone and content of many of these books are "very misleading as a guide to what happened in typical trials."^[25]

Briggs' efforts in exploring the very 'local' roots of witchcraft persecution are invaluable for the depth and nuance that they have added to our understanding of this extraordinarily complex subject. At the same time, his focus on the social context of witch trials tends at times to obscure certain elements of these phenomena. In *Witches and Neighbors*, the individuals who actually did the persecuting – the judges, magistrates, and other local officials who oversaw the trials and carried out the torture and executions – remain relatively silent. While he brings them into the picture on occasion, it is often to clarify what they did *not* do, as part of his commendable effort to debunk the persistent mythologized view of witch-hunting as a top-down practice, sponsored and guided by elite interests. Briggs is right to muddy the line between the concepts of witchcraft subscribed to by defendants and prosecutors in an average witch trial, but even in the cases he cites it is clear that certain allegations – notably those more consistent with demonological theory – tended to make an appearance only after the proceedings were well underway, and testimony from local witnesses had already been heard. This at least suggests a special role for these officials and the doctrines to which they adhered, even if those doctrines constituted only a slightly more systematized conception of witchcraft than that of their fellow villagers. Furthermore, it is important to note (as Levack does) that adding the charge of diabolism to accusations of *maleficium* certainly would have made the crimes of the suspected witch more serious in the eyes of local officials, and the need to extirpate such threats to their community more dire.

On the other hand, Levack's attribution of such a clear and necessary causal role to the specific demonological beliefs of "educated Europeans" borders at times on the kind of assumption that Briggs rightly warns against. In his 2004 book *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History*, Wolfgang Behringer cites an estimate by University of Dar-es-Salaam anthropologist Simeon Mesaki that 3,692 extralegal witch killings took place in Tanzania between 1970 and 1984 alone,^[26] a figure that rivals the number of executions estimated to have taken place in most European countries over the entire early modern period.^[27] This proves nothing categorically, as any direct comparison of early modern European and twentieth-century African witch persecution carries obvious limitations. But it does at least indicate that suspicions of *maleficium* can lead to widespread violence even without the help of a judicial apparatus steeped in the tenets of Christian demonology. To understand, then, the role that local officials clearly did play in the European case, it seems prudent to seek a balance between the picture of these figures as imagined by Briggs, whose magistrates and *prévôts* seem to have functioned mostly as the incarnate persecutory will of the witch's neighbors, and that of Levack, for whom they served largely as carriers for learned theories of witchcraft and diabolism. For this, it is helpful to turn to the analysis of Lyndal Roper, who grants the mindset and motivations of these officials a sustained exposition in her 2004 book *Witch Craze*.

Roper, like Briggs, devotes considerable attention to the social context of witchcraft – indeed, it may have been the *Salon.com* reviewer of Roper’s book who explained this context most succinctly, with her wry observation that “it takes a village” to burn a witch.^[28] It is Roper’s psychoanalytic approach to witch persecution, however, that has been lauded as her most important and innovative contribution to the field of witchcraft studies,^[29] particularly her exploration of the strange process of ‘negotiation’ that seems to have occurred between a suspected witch and her interrogators. Since the amount of personal information demanded during interrogation was considerable, and often required the accused to remember events that had occurred many years before his or her arrest, this dialogue may have constituted a unique moment in the defendant’s life: a period of intense and emotional self-reflection. Given the dire circumstances, and considering that the methods of questioning and torture were “designed to bring the accused witch to a crisis,” the results of this self-assessment must frequently have been negative, which would in turn have contributed to a suspect’s eventual decision to surrender to the label of ‘witch’ and make a detailed confession.^[30] Indications of this can be found in the trial transcripts of Tempel Anneke, who engaged her interrogators with relative confidence and assertiveness in the initial stages of her trial, but seemed more inclined to make negative statements about herself as the process continued. When describing her sexual encounters with the Devil, for example, Anneke went out of her way to explain that the “Evil Spirit” had always found her alone in bed because “[e]ven though she wanted to have a maid with her, nobody wanted to sleep with her.”^[31]

When Roper turns her psychoanalytic lens toward the other party in this negotiation, the witch’s persecutors, the result is a rich account of the influence that demonological theory (and the license that it granted these individuals) may have had on their mindsets. This necessarily involves a great deal of speculation, as the interrogators of witches obviously did not have reason to volunteer much personal information about themselves in the course of a trial, but Roper makes a convincing reconstruction of the psychology of witch-hunting based on the few personal writings of known witch persecutors that do still exist in addition to her own extrapolations from trial transcripts. As might be expected, one of the most prominent characteristics of the ‘witch-hunter mentality’ was a broad sense of superiority and divine purpose. “The interrogator had a high view of his sacred office, which was to save the soul of the witch by bringing her to renounce Satan and confess her sins.”^[32] More interestingly, however, Roper also suggests that an element of perverse fascination, or even glee, may have been at work in these proceedings – one that bordered on voyeurism when the subject turned to the witch’s alleged sexual involvement with demonic entities. Moreover, these two elements appear to have been oddly complementary. Roper explains that “in the psychology of the persecutors, lurid emotions were overlaid with a rigid moralism; their inner worlds were peopled with agents of divine

authority like angels and just judges. Only ceaseless struggle against the forces of evil could maintain the precarious psychological balance. In this moral universe, the mixture of good and evil, an inherent part of social relations, could simply not be tolerated.”[\[33\]](#) While such things are of course difficult to verify, the idea that the position of witch prosecutor came with an appealing array of psychic perquisites – and that these may have been a strong motivating factor for some individuals – seems entirely probable.

If there is one feature that all of the works surveyed here have in common, it is a careful exposition of the incredibly complex and variegated nature of their subject matter. It is telling that the first few pages of many recent historical studies devoted to European witchcraft persecution, including all of those discussed above, contain a laundry list of now-effete theories once put forward to explain this phenomenon, all of which most historians have discarded as overly simple or simply inaccurate. The role of scholarly and ecclesiastical demonology, or, more generally, the interaction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture in the context of witch persecution, has particularly been an area for revision, as the current diversity of viewpoints on this topic suggests. Taken together, the efforts of Levack, Briggs, and Roper shed light on the European witch trial as a unique theater in which abstruse theology and elite legal doctrine combined with superstition, fear, envy, fantasy, and ego in countless permutations. The exploration of these deadly dynamics is a worthwhile project merely for the insight it can yield into the social landscape of Renaissance and Reformation Europe, but the many tens of thousands of casualties that resulted from them make it a necessary one. Fortunately, thanks to Peter Morton’s publication of the Tempel Anneke trial records, it is now possible to appreciate the tragic dimensions of early modern witch persecution in personal as well as statistical terms.

The proliferation of new research and interpretation in this field, however, does more than just deepen our understanding of a sad episode in Europe’s past. With recent literature increasingly focused on the presence of witchcraft beliefs and persecution worldwide and throughout history, there is a strong trend toward understanding these phenomena to be innately human, perhaps even with an evolutionary basis. Undoubtedly, as historians and anthropologists undertake further research in this vein, it will become increasingly clear that an understanding of the figure of the witch – and perhaps more importantly, of his or her persecutors – can find practical, sociological application in this century just as easily as it can in the field of history. As Robin Briggs concludes in the final chapter of his book, “the witch may be the other, but witchcraft beliefs are in ourselves.”[\[34\]](#)

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[1] Wolfgang Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2004), 149; Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Viking, 1996), 8; Brian Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Ltd, 2006), 23; Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 18.

[2] Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, 263.

[3] Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts*, 1-46, 196-228; Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 299-305.

[4] Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, 273.

[5] Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 74.

[6] Ibid., 30-67.

[7] Peter Morton, ed., *The Trial of Tempel Anneke: Records of a Witchcraft Trial in Brunswick, Germany, 1663*, trans. Barbara Dähms (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2005), xiii.

[8] Morton, *Trial of Tempel Anneke*, x.

[9] Ibid., 3-6.

[10] Ibid., 4-13, 51.

[11] Ibid., 8.

[12] Ibid., 7.

[13] Ibid., 10.

[14] Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 1.

[15] Ibid., 7-8.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 36.

[18] Ibid., 109-33.

[19] Ibid., 37.

[20] Ibid., 30-1.

[21] Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, 398.

[22] Ibid., 399.

[23] Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters, eds., *Witchcraft in Europe, 1100-1700: a documentary history* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 127.

[24] Quoted in Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, 259.

[25] Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, 259.

[26] Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts*, 212-3.

[27] *Ibid.*, 150.

[28] Laura Miller, "Who burned the witches?" *Salon.com* (2005),
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[29] Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts*, 41.

[30] Roper, *Witch Craze*, 47.

[31] Morton, *Tempel Anneke*, 110.

[32] Roper, *Witch Craze*, 57.

[33] *Ibid.*, 63.

[34] Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, 411.

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“Possible Questions and Suggested Answers’: *On the Beach*, the Eisenhower Administration, ‘The Bomb.’”

Looking back on the Cold War era in American history, perhaps the most central and enduring legacy of that period that has survived into modern popular and political culture is that of ‘the bomb.’ The phrase itself has become a cliché representation of Cold War hysteria, emphasizing the sickening, destructive, and suicidal aspects of armed nuclear conflict. The meaning of ‘the bomb’ during the early Cold War, however, was quite different. ‘The bomb’ was initially portrayed in American popular culture as the protector of western civilization against communist influence, glorified as the crucial component of the nuclear ‘umbrella’ that protected the west from Soviet military actions. Popular perceptions regarding the atomic bomb would change during the mid and late 1950s, transforming ‘the bomb’ from the benign protector of America to the ‘destroyer of worlds.’ A new wave of ‘nuclear apocalyptic’ fiction sprung up in America, works that emphasized the destructive and ultimately suicidal nature of nuclear warfare. The new focus on the effects of radiation questioned the effectiveness of the U.S. Government’s civil defense policies at a time when the Cold War was about to reach its hottest points.

While books and films such as *Fail Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* would be popularly remembered as the pinnacle of nuclear apocalyptic fiction, it was actually Nevil Shute’s novel and Stanley Kramer’s subsequent film *On the Beach* that represented the vanguard of this shift in popular imagination. Positioned at the leading edge of fiction that brought about new concerns over the effects of fallout radiation, *On the Beach* was the first major Hollywood film to question U.S. Government policies with regards to civil defense, leaving Eisenhower Administration officials bewildered as to what actions they should take to minimize the damage to their own policies. The production of and governmental response to *On the Beach* acted as a barometer measuring the cultural, intellectual, and political forces at work during the late 1950s and early 1960s that were changing the United States. From these changes, a new American zeitgeist would coalesce; one that challenged many of the traditionally held notions about the role of the American citizen and the government. *On the Beach* became part of struggle over the meaning

of 'the bomb' and the narrative of the Cold War in the United States Government, as new ways of dealing with unflattering films would have to be developed both by the department of defense and the Eisenhower administration for media that challenged the efficacy of US policy.

Shute's *On the Beach*: 'Nuclear Apocalyptic'

Kenneth D. Rose, in his work *One Nation Underground*, describes the cultural forces of Cold War anxiety that was expressed in literature, film, and the mass media as the "nuclear apocalyptic."^[1] He goes on to write that the "flowering of the nuclear apocalyptic...was a remarkable development in the history of the Cold War." Of all the 'nuclear apocalyptic' works created during the early Cold War era, the late 1940s through the mid 1960s, Nevil Shute's book *On the Beach*, published in 1957, was one of the first popular novels to deal with the threat of nuclear annihilation in a very frightening and realistic manner. While discussions over the destructiveness of 'the bomb' had been around since its inception, and fears over radiation had become prominent in scientific circles, *On the Beach* was a unique cultural and political force, one that helped bridge these issues into the popular mainstream, where questions over the usefulness over nuclear deterrence and civil defense had rarely been questioned before.

Although a work of fiction, Shute's book was grounded in enough 'real' elements to cause concern. The plot of the book involved an accidental nuclear war that destroys the northern hemisphere, leaving Australia as one of the last habitable areas left on Earth. The story revolves around a group of people aware that the radiation would soon overtake Australia, and their different struggles coping with the reality that the human race would soon be extinct. The book sold 100,000 copies in its first six weeks and was widely reproduced as a serial in over forty newspapers.^[2] As the book gained notoriety, questions about the efficacy of civil defense programs and the logic of nuclear deterrence began to emerge. An article in Harper's Magazine published shortly after the book's release, entitled "The Civil Defense Fiasco," referred to Shute's novel and its critique of civil defense, acknowledging that the author was "right in ignoring the possibility of a shelter program."^[3] As plans for an adaptation of Shute's novel into a motion picture moved forward, it became clear that the wider appeal of a film would only amplify these lingering questions. The pressure to reassure the American public forced the U.S. Government initially to distance itself from the film, but would eventually draw the highest levels of the Eisenhower administration into position where they thought they had to defend both civil defense and nuclear deterrence, policies that were considered vital to American national security interests during the Cold War.

Production and the Government

Stanley Kramer's *On the Beach* stood apart from the vast array of other 'nuclear-apocalyptic' films of the era. The reaction it stirred among the Eisenhower administration in Washington D.C. during and after its production was much different than earlier Government dealings with filmmakers. "*On the Beach*," says Joyce A. Evens in her work *Celluloid Mushroom Clouds*, "stands as one of the earliest confrontations with the Pentagon over film content."^[4] The 'confrontation' by the U.S. Government during the production of *On the Beach* was a process of unsure vacillation between grudging support and disavowal.

This vacillation occurred because *On the Beach* existed between two distinct eras in American film-making: one that was formed during the 'blacklist' era of communist and 'anti-American' hysteria in Hollywood, where filmmakers made movies that reinforced U.S. Cold War national security policies and a largely independent post-'blacklist' Hollywood that questioned the U.S. Government, the military, and national security policies. The film was one of the first negative portrayals of nuclear weapons brought to bear on the popular imagination causing Americans, many for the first time, to think critically about government policies such as civil defense and nuclear deterrence. As Lawrence Suid remarks in his work *Guts and Glory: the Making of the American Military Image on Film*, "*On the Beach*, not the Vietnam War, marked the real beginning, albeit in a very limited way, of a greater scrutiny of the U.S. military establishment by the mass media and the cultural community."^[5]

The film *On the Beach* was certainly not the only film made about nuclear war during the early Cold War. Previous films made during the height of the Cold War, from early 1950s to the mid 1960s, addressed 'the bomb,' but these films possessed very different views of it. As Tony Shaw has pointed out in his book *Hollywood's Cold War*, earlier films concerning nuclear conflict, such as *Above and Beyond* (1952), *Strategic Air Command* (1955), and *Bombers B-52* (1957), portrayed nuclear weapons as "benign protectors of democracy."^[6] These films were given support from the U.S. Government during production as they reinforced the usefulness, and even the necessity, of nuclear weapons to both U.S. and global movie audiences.

These earlier films were created and produced during the paranoia that gripped the U.S. during the 'Red Scare' of the late 1940s and mid 1950s. Hollywood studios had already been battered by House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) inquiries into suspected communist sympathies. With many writers, directors, actors, and other entertainers 'blacklisted,' the risk to studio executives was too great to make films that could be potentially situated within the wide spectrum of what could be considered 'Un-American'. By the late 1950s, with the grip of the old Hollywood 'studio system' broken and the *Red Channels* hysteria subsiding, filmmakers found it much easier to tackle new subject matter and find financial backing.^[7] Within this

new environment, Stanley Kramer, a filmmaker and producer with a reputation for making films with 'a message,' attained the necessary financial backing to produce and direct a movie that would implicitly challenge some of the U.S. Government's Cold War policies.

While Kramer was sure of message he wanted his film to disseminate, officials within the U.S. Government were unsure of how they should respond. Officials within the Department of Defense, who had furnished filmmakers with technical assistance previously, were indecisive about involvement with *On the Beach*. Kramer had initially approached the U.S. Navy for information about the layout of a U.S. Nuclear Submarine as well as the use of stock footage. The Navy initially rejected this request, responding that the film could in no way "enhance the U.S. Naval Service" and would only be giving "an official blessing to the possibility of such an impending disaster."^[8] Likewise the United States Information Agency (USIA) felt the film did "not deserve any cooperation" citing its "negative" theme and what was perceived as a "blame America" slant.^[9] Unsure as to its role, the Navy relented, furnishing some interior photos and stock footage. After production commenced, the Defense Department became increasingly worried about the content of the film, asking Kramer for script alterations (such as the Russians starting the war) in return for additional help. Kramer largely ignored the Defense Department's recommendations and filmed the original script.^[10] With no sizable script alterations made, the Department of Defense asked Kramer to remove acknowledgement of their help from the final credits of the film, to which he complied.^[11]

The Defense Department's vacillation from reluctance, to hesitant cooperation, to severing all links with the film displayed how unsure officials within the Defense Department were when confronted with the changing realities of popular filmmaking. During the end of the film's production until months before its release, the U.S. Government decided on distancing themselves as much as possible from *On the Beach*. This would serve them for a time, but tough questions regarding the themes of the film would force officials in Washington to adapt a new strategy upon its release.

Government Reactions to Release

On the Beach challenged the earlier cinematic representations of nuclear weapons as benign protectors of America (and the Western world) that had been helpful in bolstering national security policy, replacing them instead with a sense of dread, fatalism, and possible extinction. The depiction of 'the bomb' as 'friend' would now turn to 'foe.' For Eisenhower officials, this transformation caused an emotional and intellectual response within America that would become 'an obstacle' to civil defense and the policy of nuclear deterrence. The film, centered on the idea that armed nuclear

deterrence was a suicidal option due to lethal resultant radiation, challenged the primary defense policy that the Eisenhower administration had pursued in safeguarding against the threat of the U.S.S.R. Criticism of these policies, from the Eisenhower Administration's point of view, would undermine national security and U.S. power both at home and abroad. The threat *On the Beach* posed, while not catastrophic to the Government, was sufficient to warrant concern among the highest levels of White House and the administration, forcing their hands in confronting the issue.

While the Department of Defense had distanced itself from the film during its production after some initial dalliances, the focus within the Eisenhower administration quickly shifted from 'distancing' to 'damage control.' By early November, 1959, the Eisenhower administration was becoming increasingly concerned about *On the Beach* as the film reached the end of post-production and was readied for release. The minutes of the Cabinet meeting from November 6, make brief mention of the film in regards to its upcoming premiere. The film was brought up as part of a discussion on civil defense that ostensibly dealt with the release of the pamphlet, "The Family and the Fallout Shelter." Secretary of State Christian A. Herter brought up the impending release of *On the Beach* and how he construed it as a "tremendous bit of anti-nuclear propaganda."^[12] Leo Hoegh, Director of the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (OCDM), then commented that the film constituted "an obstacle to the shelter program" as he believed the movie left the viewer feeling "hopeless."^[13] No definite course of action was agreed upon during the meeting, but it was clear that Kramer's film was emerging as a problem that the Cabinet would have to confront.

Throughout November 1959, the Administration maintained its policy of distancing itself from the film, but influential people from outside the White House were beginning to ask questions. Shortly after the November 6 Cabinet meeting, Mrs. Robert Low Bacon wrote a letter seeking support for the American National Theater Association from the Cabinet and the Administration for the Washington premiere of *On the beach*. A letter dated November 17, 1959, from the Special Assistant to the Secretary of State, William W. Scranton, to Secretary of State Herter informs the Secretary of Mrs. Bacon's inquiry and that it had been "turned down" due to concern within the White House over "its implications for civil defense."^[14] Worried about further public prying, Scranton recommended that the film, and issues regarding it, be discussed at an upcoming Cabinet meeting. He instructed Administration officials to do "everything diplomatically possible to discourage Ambassadorial support."^[15]

As anticipated, more questions were addressed to the Eisenhower Administration concerning *On the Beach*. In a letter dated November 23, Edouard Morot-Sir from the French Consulate in New York asked the Press Secretary, James Hagarty, whether

President Eisenhower had granted his approval of *On the Beach*. The responding letter dated four days later from Secretary Hagarty explains in diplomatic terms that "the President does not grant patronage to any commercial film," but later heavily emphasizes the point with an unequivocal "no."[\[16\]](#) The Administration officials' reaction to public requests was to continue the policy of passively distance themselves from the film, but unresolved questions remained as to if, and how, the Administration would confront the themes of the film that they felt undermined their own defense policies. In the wake of these two incidents, the need for the administration to form a more cohesive and comprehensive response to the content of the film became a priority.

By late November, 1959, the upcoming release of *On the Beach* was exerting increased pressure on Eisenhower's Cabinet. The Administration had tried to disassociate itself from the film, but lingering concerns over civil defense and the nature of nuclear deterrence would render 'distancing' themselves from the film ineffective, forcing the Eisenhower Administration into a more active role. This would require an active response by the Administration to the apocalyptic themes and timely questions posed by the film.

Early on, the Administration officials knew they would have to meter their response. One of the early courses decided upon by the Operation Coordinating Board (OCB) was that the Government should not become overtly involved in any attempts to censor or openly criticize the film. An OCB memo dated November 25 warns of the possible negative effects of *On the Beach*, suggesting that steps might be taken in order that the "adverse effects (of the film) might be minimized."[\[17\]](#) Additional handwriting in the margins of the draft memo recommends that the U.S. Government "avoid becoming involved" directly, but consider a list of possible answers to questions regarding the movie.[\[18\]](#) Unlike the previous informational statements made during the November 6 Cabinet meeting, the OCB memo of November 25 suggested the Government take a more active role in 'spinning' the information presented in the film more favorably towards U.S. Government civil defense and nuclear deterrence policies.

During the first week of December, 1959, a private screening of *On the Beach* was held for the Cabinet officials.[\[19\]](#) A few Cabinet members, including Defense Secretary Robert Anderson, suggested different ways in which they might publicly discredit the film.[\[20\]](#) By December 7, the Cabinet Secretary Robert Gray had put out a preliminary information guide for *On the Beach*.[\[21\]](#) The primary directive of the 'INFOGUIDE' was not to give the film additional publicity by appearing overly interested in the film. It instructed Cabinet members and other Government officials abroad to maintain an attitude of "matter-of-fact interest, showing no special concern," acknowledging that public criticism by government officials would be counter-

productive and would only serve to give the film further publicity.^[22] Instead, the officials were instructed to seek out "opinion leaders" to discuss the film with and perhaps persuade them to seeing the Government's argument concerning the film; that firstly, the movie was scientifically inaccurate in terms of the lethality of fallout radiation and the inadequacy of Civil Defense; that secondly, "real" disarmament, both nuclear and conventional, was possible through "safeguarded" and gradual reductions by the U.S. and the Soviets; and lastly, that the film "grossly misconstrues the basic nature of man," asserting that the idea of mass suicide was "not only unnecessary but also wholly fatalistic."^[23] A rhetorical flourish concludes the second point, that "war itself is the real evil" and since all weapons kill, "morally there is no distinction" between conventional and nuclear weapons.^[24] Instead of distancing itself the film as it had done previously, the Eisenhower administration decided to aggressively counter the idea that 'the bomb' was the problem, using the various rationales presented in the 'INFOGUIDE' to protect their heavy investment in the theory of deterrence. The basic arguments laid out in the 'INFOGUIDE' would serve as a guideline for further administration actions regarding *On the Beach*.

As the release date of the film approached, tensions regarding the themes present in *On the Beach* heightened within the Eisenhower administration. In a Cabinet agenda memo to Vice President Nixon, Karl Harr, Vice Chairman of the OCB, suggested that a section of the next day's Cabinet meeting be portioned for creating a dedicated list of questions and answers to the film *On the Beach* that could be disseminated to Administration officials both at home and abroad. Mr. Harr was extremely concerned that the "film's message lends itself to extreme pacifist and 'Ban-the-Bomb' propaganda," worried that this mentality could be "counterproductive...for the public understanding and support which this administration is trying to generate for adequate civil defense measures."^[25] Harr's concern was acknowledged and *On the Beach* was added to the official agenda for the next day's Cabinet meeting.^[26] He repeated his concerns during the Cabinet meeting on December 11, to which Leo Hoegh, director of OCDM, repeated Harr's concern that the film was "undermining OCDM's efforts to encourage preparedness on the part of all citizens."^[27] A plan of action was formulated by the Cabinet during this meeting to counter the message of the film, but these steps were eventually scrapped by Vice President Nixon, who amended the Cabinet 'Record of Action' to be "Informational Only," consequently meaning that the few instructions that were formulated for the Cabinet to follow were not put into action but kept as an information source.^[28]

While Vice President Nixon had put an end to direct actions by Herter at the State Department and Karl Harr at the OCDM, lower echelon defense and informational organizations, such as the United States Information Agency (USIA) and members of the Defense Department's Defense Atomic Support Agency (DASA) pushed forward

with an informational guideline that could still be used to answer the publics' questions and sway the 'opinion leaders' outside of the White House.

The basis for the file that would eventually become known as "Possible Questions and Suggested Answers on the Film *On the Beach*" stemmed from the 'INFOGUIDE' presented to the Cabinet on December 7. Using the three basic arguments from the document, a series of questions and answers were developed with the intention of being used by domestic and foreign officials that might have been sought out to comment on the film and its themes. A preliminary list of questions and answers was created and sent to the Assistant Secretary of Atomic Energy Herbert Loper by DASA on December 15, 1959. The memo attached to the preliminary questions and answers instructs Assistant Secretary Loper to distribute the document, instructing those who would deal with the public and 'opinion leaders' to, above all, emphasize the point that *On the Beach* was "a work of science fiction" that could not occur in the 'real world.' The majority of the questions posed in DASA's short document dealt with the concepts at the heart of civil defense programs: fallout, radiation, decontamination, and protection. One question directly addressed if radiation sickness could "induce melancholia or suicidal tendencies." Another asks if the U.S. Government had ever considered issuing "suicide pills." In both cases, the document instructed the respondent to exclaim "no!"^[29] The Defense Department's DASA created a 'question and answer' sheet for its officials, but it remained a rudimentary nine questions and answers. Morse Salisbury, Director of the USIA, decided that a more comprehensive question and answer document was still needed, one that could deal with the film in a more comprehensive and elaborate manner than DASA's short two pages.

Since the beginning of December, the USIA and the Division of Information Services (DIS) had been working on its own file titled "Possible Questions and Suggested Answers on the Film, *On the Beach*."^[30] In cooperation with the OCB, the compiled "Possible Questions" file had become much larger and much more complex than the basic preliminary questions and answers compiled by the Defense Department. "Possible Questions" dealt with many of the political realities as well as the civil defense issues. Unlike the DASA questions and answers, the DIS file was laced with facts (as they perceived them) from the Atomic Energy Commission's (AEC) Radiation Subcommittee's Hearings before congress earlier that year regarding radiation, fallout, and how the weather would affect both. The findings of the committee on the "Biological and Environmental Effects of Nuclear War" form the bulk of the scientific refutations found in "Possible Questions," positing the impossibility of complete human extinction by means of nuclear weapons due to a myriad of factors.

"Possible Questions" was distributed to Eisenhower Cabinet and Diplomatic officials just prior to the theatrical release date of December 17, 1959.^[31] For the most part,

the content of "Possible Questions" was only mentioned in response to direct questioning by individuals or the media. In a few cases, however, the strategy of influencing "opinion leaders" was utilized. Some of the answers found in "Possible Questions" made their way into negative film reviews and other newspaper articles that appeared the week of the film's release.^[32] In the December 18 edition of *The New York Times*, an article entitled "'On the Beach' scored by Civil Defense Head" ran beside Bosley Crowther's review of the film.^[33] In the article, New York Civil Defense Director Clarence R. Huebner released a statement that castigated the film for its lack of "scientific basis for some of its notions of radioactive phenomena," further commenting that the film "overlook(s) the possibility of defense against radioactive fall-out [sic] after a nuclear explosion."^[34] The insistence on the usefulness of civil defense and the fact that the film lacked any real scientific basis (Huebner calls it "fantasy") read almost word for word from "Possible Questions." While "Possible Questions" may not have been implemented on a very large scale, by reassuring the public of U.S. policy while avoiding direct criticism of the film, the Eisenhower administration achieved many of its objectives.

The speedy compilation of the findings and 'facts,' along with the rather comprehensive nature of the six page document, "Possible Questions and Suggested Answers on the Film, *On the Beach*" demonstrated the resolve of the Eisenhower administration to safeguard its national security policies of nuclear deterrence and civil defense by actively countering the contentious themes of the film. The threat that *On the Beach* posed to Cold War national security interests forced the administration, at various levels, to counter actively its bleak and sobering message.

Conclusion

While certainly not the last, Kramer's *On the Beach* was, arguably, the first major Hollywood film to be openly critical of Washington's national security policies during the Cold War. Kramer's *On the Beach* would become a rallying cry for anti-nuclear weapon activists to rally around for the next thirty years. The film would make a sizable resurgence in the late 1970s and early 1980s and a new round of questions were posed regarding U.S. national security policies of nuclear deterrence and how people could protect themselves from the effects of fallout radiation. Until the breakup of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the 'nuclear apocalyptic' film *On the Beach* served as a cautionary tale about the suicidal nature of the 'the bomb.'

The film *On the Beach* stood at the interface between two eras in American film-making. The previous era of films that reassured U.S. Cold War national security policies, such as *Above and Beyond* and *Bombers B-52's*, waned as a new era of films that questioned national security policies, such as Sidney Lumet's highly successful *Fail-Safe* (1964) and Stanley Kubrick's black comedy *Dr. Strangelove or:*

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1964), were beginning to be made by Hollywood studios, films that would have had their directors, writers, and actors 'blacklisted' less than a decade previously.

In part due to the controversy surrounding *On the Beach*, a new political culture was emerging, one where U.S. Government officials were becoming increasingly sensitive to their negative portrayal in popular media. Likewise, a new intellectual consciousness was also emerging, one that embraced the debates over the usefulness of civil defense programs and the logic of nuclear deterrence. While it is true that *On the Beach* was not singlehandedly responsible for the emergence of these trends in American history, the film did encapsulate this historical moment when a nascent strain of a new American consciousness embedded itself within the popular imagination. The critique of the U.S. Government and its military policies that the film presented represented the vanguard of popular media that would do the same throughout the Cold War, Vietnam, and into twenty-first century. The legacy of Stanley Kramer's *On the Beach* is one of a film that challenged and complicated the relationship between Americans and their government; a relationship that would continue to be elaborated upon, but not created, by the filmmakers of the late 1960s and 1970s.

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[\[31\]](#) Shaw, *Hollywood's Cold War*, 157.

[\[32\]](#) Ibid., 156.

[\[33\]](#) "'On the Beach' Scored by Civil Defense Head," *The New York Times*, (18 Dec 1959), 34. The article ran 1 column away from Crowther's review of the film.

[\[34\]](#) Ibid.

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