

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Creation of a Politicized Female Reform Culture, 1880-1884.

Sarah Boyle
State University of New York
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In 1879, a group of evangelical churchwomen, all members of the Illinois Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), presented to their state legislature a massive petition asking that Illinois women be granted the right to vote. The architect of this ambitious petition campaign, which resulted in 180,000 signatures of support, was Frances Willard, then president of the Illinois WCTU. In using her position as a prominent WCTU leader to agitate for enfranchisement of women, Willard went against the express commands of the National WCTU and its president, Annie Wittenmeyer, who had made clear only one year earlier that the WCTU would not involve itself in any way with the suffrage movement. Willard's efforts to build support for suffrage within the WCTU were only a part of a larger pattern of change. During the 1880s, WCTU members constructed a highly politicized women's reform culture that supported both women's enfranchisement and political partisanship. This essay looks at the first four years of this culture through some of the people and events that were most crucial to its growth.

Founded in 1874, the late nineteenth century WCTU quickly became one of the most powerful reform organizations in the United States. By the mid-1880s, the WCTU boasted a membership near 100,000 and chapters in every state and territory, making it the first truly national women's organization in the country. The size and influence of the WCTU during this period was unprecedented; no other women's reform organization had

ever had its power and scope. For the first time, tens of thousands of women were entering the public sphere as agitators and reformers with a distinctly female agenda. Because this mass influx of reform-minded women into the public sphere was so unprecedented, WCTU leaders were presented with the difficult task of creating a women's national reform culture literally from scratch. Difficult because, as the early suffrage battles indicated, the membership was as varied as it was large. Many WCTU chapters—especially those in small towns and those in the South—were narrowly focused gospel temperance societies. Using moral suasion (e.g., affecting change through religion and education rather than through politics), these chapters concentrated on ending the sale and manufacture of alcohol at the local level. But other WCTUs—especially those in the North and in urban areas—were highly politicized organizations committed to wide-spread societal reform. WCTU leaders needed to build a national organization that made space for both these extremes.

Between 1874 and 1879, the NWCTU was led by Annie Wittenmyer, an ex-Civil War nurse and a staunch anti-suffragist. During her presidency, WCTU women were encouraged to hold prayer meetings, organize and educate children about the dangers of alcohol, circulate temperance pledges, do “home missionary” work among the poor and supposedly intemperate, and make their own homes more attractive in order to counteract the lure of the saloon.¹ Although Wittenmyer voiced the belief that “the world will halt or move in its onward march towards millennial glory, as *we* [women] halt or march,” she nonetheless cautioned women to be “thoughtful and prayerful” as public agitators and

¹ “Plan of Work” *Minutes of the First Annual Convention of the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union Held in Cleveland, Ohio, November 17, 18, and 19, 1874*. (Chicago: Woman's Temperance Publication Association, 1889), 24-28.

to “walk softly before the Lord.”² Under her leadership, WCTU women were discouraged from straying very far from the accepted women’s sphere of home, religion, and children.

But even in these early years, there were WCTUs engaging in activities that tested the boundaries of temperance women’s activism and suggested the need for a leadership more dynamic than Wittenmyer’s. Although by the end of the century, an impressive array of women’s clubs and organizations had sprung up across the country, in the 1870s, the WCTU was often the only game in town, particularly in the mid and far West. Consequently, the organization was drawing to it talented, educated women with little patience for cautious leadership or “walking softly.” The Portland, Maine WCTU, for example, set up a home for “fallen women.”³ In Cleveland, Ohio, the WCTU founded a “woman’s church,” run by seven “deaconesses” and “no pastor, save the shepardess, who may be delegated by the Union.”⁴ While pastors from other churches were welcome in the woman’s church, “the sermons are within the ‘Woman’s Kingdom.’”⁵ Willard and the Illinois WCTU, meanwhile, embarked on their massive petition drive for suffrage.

Of all these activities, none made a bigger stir within the WCTU than the Illinois suffrage campaign. In the late 1870s, Americans still viewed woman suffrage as a dangerous and radical reform with the potential to destroy the family and “unsex”

² “President’s Address,” *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, Held in Chicago, Ill. October 24, 25, 26, and 27, 1877* (Chicago: Woman’s Temperance Publishing Association, 1889), 136. Wittenmyer reiterated this position in the closing remarks of her 1879 address. As the delegates “map[ped] out for the year the work of one of the largest societies in the world,” Wittenmyer urged them to “walk softly before the Lord and carefully before the people, lest we mar God’s work and cross His plans, and mark out paths that our co-laborers cannot enter.” “President’s Address,” *Minutes of the Woman’s National Christian Temperance Union, at the Sixth Annual Meeting, in Indianapolis, October 29th to November 3rd, 1879*. (Cleveland: Fairbanks & Co., Printers, 1879), 18.

³ “Corresponding Secretary’s Report” *NWCTU Convention, 1877*, 182.

⁴ “Corresponding Secretary’s Report” *NWCTU Convention, 1877*, 190.

⁵ “Corresponding Secretary’s Report” *NWCTU Convention, 1877*, 191.

women. Willard met these fears and prejudices head on by arguing that women did not seek the vote for their own advancement, but rather to protect their home. This “Home Protection” ballot, as Willard called it, was the key to a more moral, more Christian America. Once enfranchised, according to Willard, women would use their votes to pass prohibition, “blue laws,” and Sunday rest laws, strengthen the public school system, end child labor, raise the age of consent, and otherwise enact legislation they believed would preserve the sanctity of the home and purify society. She also argued that women would vote only for “moral” candidates, thus bringing an end to the corruption and graft that defined Gilded Age politics.

Even before her well-publicized push for Home Protection, Willard was a well-known figure in educational, evangelical, and temperance circles. Before she joined the WCTU, Willard was president of the Northwestern University’s women’s college, one of few women in the country to be appointed to such a post. And for eight months in 1877, she was employed as a lecturer by Dwight Moody, the pre-eminent evangelist of the post-Civil War era. She also served as the NWCTU’s corresponding secretary during the 1870s. As secretary, she was in touch with temperance women across the country, urging them to organize WCTU chapters and providing instruction on how to do it. These duties helped her establish a national network of women who were more familiar with her leadership than with Wittenmyer’s. By the late 1870s, therefore, Willard stood before the NWCTU as a charismatic, energetic leader with significant connections and achievements not only in temperance reform, but in education, women’s suffrage, and evangelicalism as well.

By late fall, 1879, WCTU women were ready to give Willard's innovative leadership a try. With a vote of 99 to 40, delegates at the NWCTU convention chose Willard over Wittenmyer as their new national president. And, in annual landslide elections, they would continue to choose her for the next eighteen years.

From the beginning of her presidency, Willard worked toward three important goals: One, making the WCTU a truly national organization, with chapters in every state and territory in the United States (by the mid-1880s, this goal had become an international one); two, building support within the WCTU for suffrage; and three, committing the WCTU to the Prohibition party, a fledgling third party that endorsed both prohibition and woman suffrage. None of these goals would be easy to achieve. The WCTU was a virtual non-entity in the South in 1879. And a northern organization that encouraged women towards public speaking and political agitation could hardly expect a warm reception from a culture that considered "Yankee" a coarse epithet and regarded outspoken public women as aberrations. Even in the North, suggesting that "respectable" middle-class women become suffragists and political partisans was apt to meet with derision and harsh criticism. But Willard was determined that political partisanship and enfranchisement would be central to the WCTU agenda.

Perhaps the single most important thing Willard did as president was decentralize the NWCTU's power structure. Under her leadership, the only requirements to maintaining a membership in the NWCTU, as Willard was fond of saying, were payment of dues and the signing of a temperance pledge. Other than that, WCTU women were given considerable freedom to shape their state and local WCTUs as they saw fit. The NWCTU did have extensive departments of work that it expected would guide the work

of its auxiliaries, but it did not require them to mimic the national plan of work exactly. This decentralized power structure was important for two main reasons: One, it made the WCTU a highly adaptable organization; North and South, East and West, urban and rural, among immigrants, southern black women, and middle-class, native born white women, unions flourished and grew. Two, it allowed the NWCTU to take bold stands on such issues as political partisanship, labor rights, and suffrage with minimal risk of alienating its auxiliaries. If at any time members expressed apprehension over the National's activities, they would quickly be reminded that the NWCTU spoke only for itself on controversial issues, not for the various state and local unions.

The ideological distance the national union maintained from its auxiliaries was especially important when Willard began to push for NWCTU endorsement of the Prohibition party. In the Gilded Age United States, party politics was an unqualified masculine institution. In large part, the genderization of politics occurred for practical reasons: as disfranchised citizens, women were necessarily outsiders to the political process. But there were other reasons why politics was viewed as an exclusively masculine province. By the 1870s, corruption and spoils were common features of partisan politics, remarkable only in their most egregious form (e.g. the scandals of the Grant administration, or the flagrant patronage of urban political machines). Many Americans simply accepted that party politics were, by their nature, a rough-and-tumble world of compromise and shady morality. As such, partisanship was considered altogether unsuitable for women, who, according to Victorian gender conventions, were naturally moral, religious, and pure.

But Willard did not accept that party politics were intrinsically unprincipled or immoral, although she was unstinting in her criticism of the two mainstream parties. The Republican party was “degenerate”; the Democratic party was an “anathema maranatha”⁶; both were hopelessly corrupt and controlled by “that Cerberus of perdition, the saloon.”⁷ But the Prohibition party, Willard argued, opposed the liquor industry and its questionable lobbying practices. It opposed “the practical surrender of the souls and bodies of children to the saloon-keeper in return for their votes.” It fought to bring true democracy to America by advocating the full enfranchisement of women. And in doing all this, Willard declared, it became the true embodiment of political party: “the mould into which God pours the principles that are to bless humanity.”⁸ Thus, in Willard’s construction, partisan wrangling for constituents and elective offices became an epic battle between the servants of Cerberus and the mould of God for the preservation of democracy and the home.

By infusing partisan politics with the grandeur of a holy crusade, Willard could then easily argue that partisanship—in the form of endorsing the Prohibition party—was every woman’s Christian duty. And when the Illinois WCTU endorsed the Prohibition party in 1881, Willard declared that they were filled with “the power of the Highest manifest,” and she challenged all WCTU women to “falter who must, follow who dare!”⁹

Taken as a whole, Willard’s arguments were a bold re-visioning of women’s political power. When Willard began her campaign for the Prohibition party, it was a

⁶ “President’s Annual Address,” *Minutes of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, At the Twelfth Annual Meeting In Philadelphia, PA., October 30th, 31st and November 2nd and 3rd*. (Brooklyn: Martin & Niper, Steam Printers, 1885), 67. “Anathema maranatha” is a biblical phrase taken from 1Cor. 16:22, referring to nonbelievers.

⁷ “President’s Address,” *Tenth Annual Report of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union of the State of Illinois. For the Year ending October 23, 1883*. (Chicago: Union Signal Print, 1883), 23.

⁸ “Annual Address,” *NWCTU Convention, 1881*, lxxvii-lxxviii.

small third party of negligible importance. But it supported both suffrage and prohibition, and it was in desperate need of a large number of dedicated workers who could distribute literature, give speeches, run campaigns, and otherwise raise the party's profile throughout the country. Willard theorized that WCTU women would be drawn to the party's platform and the party would welcome the support of a rapidly growing organization of like-minded, politically-active citizens, even if they were all disfranchised. As they worked to increase the Prohibition party's influence, WCTU women would gain valuable experience as political partisans, all loyal to the same party. In turn, the Prohibition party, once it gained the necessary strength and numbers, would make good on its promise to enfranchise women. Thus, the end result of the WCTU's endorsement of the Prohibition party would be not only full citizenship rights for women and national prohibition, but also a powerful political party controlled by savvy women voters and, not incidentally, Frances E. Willard.

But as Willard began her presidency in 1880, such a sweeping victory must have seemed very far away, and even the achievement of the first step—WCTU endorsement of the Prohibition party—was uncertain. Despite her unflagging encouragement, NWCTU delegates to the annual national conventions remained reluctant to take a stand on partisanship. And even when they did take a stand in 1883, in the form of a resolution (popularly called the “Detroit resolution” after the city that had hosted that year's convention), they failed to mention the Prohibition party by name, committing themselves only to “lend[ing] our influence to that party, by whatever name called,” that endorsed prohibition. But in 1883, with a presidential election looming just over a year away, Willard took a more aggressive stance in fostering ties between the WCTU and the

⁹ “Annual Address,” *NWCTU Convention, 1881*, lxxvii-lxxviii.

Prohibition party. That year, Willard introduced the “Great Petition campaign,” which, over the course of the following year, would help build support for the Prohibition party within the WCTU.

As Willard initially conceived the campaign, the NWCTU would print up and distribute to all the state unions petitions for a national prohibition amendment. This “plea for Home, Sweet Home” would be circulated throughout the states for signatures by local union members, then presented first to the presidential nominating conventions and finally to Congress by the national officers. By the 1883, the mainstream political parties had rejected stringent prohibition not once but several times. The Democratic party was unapologetically wet, while the Republican party relied on vague language and license laws to avoid the issue. Neither party seemed inclined to alter its position on the controversial subject, especially with a presidential election approaching. The Great Petition campaign, which would bring the national representatives of the WCTU into contact with the national representatives of the respective political parties over the issue of prohibition was a perfect way for Willard to call attention to the intractability of the Democrats and the indecisiveness of the Republicans, while simultaneously gaining support for the Prohibitionists.¹⁰

¹⁰ The Great Petition campaign hit a serious snag early on when some delegates, including delegates from Illinois, objected to the petition being generally circulated throughout the states before being presented to the parties’ nominating conventions and to Congress. The delegates declared that they had voted in favor of a *memorial* to be signed by the national officers, and not a *petition* to be signed by as many people as possible. The confusion lasted for several months, and although Willard and other national officers ultimately concluded that the majority of the delegates had voted for a petition and not a memorial, too much time had elapsed to undertake the time-consuming task of full petition campaign. Thus, to Willard’s considerable disappointment, instead of presenting a petition consisting of hundreds of rolls of paper and hundreds of thousands of names, as she had envisioned, the national officers presented the various parties’ nominating conventions with a much smaller memorial bearing the signatures of the national officers, state presidents, and national superintendents, altogether a little over one hundred names.

In the summer of 1884, Willard and the other national officers began the presentation of the petition to the presidential nominating conventions. That year, four parties held conventions: the Democrats, the Republicans, the Prohibitionists, and the Greenbackers. At each convention, the officers, usually led by Willard, made a formal presentation of their petition to the delegates. The reactions of the conventions to the petition and the women themselves were recorded and appeared in the NWCTU newspaper, the *Union Signal*, throughout the spring and summer of 1884.

Willard wrote the report of the Greenback convention, describing the delegates as “thoughtful, earnest men,” a far cry from the “fools or fanatics” described in the “partisan press.” She noted approvingly that at least a dozen of the delegates were women, most of whom gave speeches and all of whom were “models of deportment.” The Greenbackers, Willard wrote, “are friendly to our cause and appreciative toward the work and potentiality of American womanhood.” Upon being presented with the petition, the delegates passed a resolution “in favor of submitting to a vote of the people” amendments for both prohibition and woman suffrage. However, Willard’s general good-will toward the Greenback convention was tempered with some displeasure at the occasional rowdiness of the gathering. “[W]ild gesticulations...seemed a requisite of utterance in the average (masculine) delegate,” and at one point, the convention became “a momentary mob,” with delegates “standing in chairs, waving hats, [and] screaming” for the attention of the Chair.¹¹ No doubt an unsettling image for *Union Signal* readers, most of whom were women used to the more sedate proceedings of a WCTU convention.

¹¹ “The Women’s Memorial for National Prohibition at the Greenback Convention,” *Union Signal*, June 5, 1884, 8.

“Fresh from [the] triumphs in the Greenback convention,” the petitioners next traveled to the Republican national convention. The writer of this report, probably not Willard, was only identified as “One Who Was There.” She described how the delegates grudgingly accepted the petition (an attempt to refer it to committee without reading was ultimately unsuccessful), but that they did vote to extend to Willard fifteen minutes rather than five to address the convention. In the course of her remarks, which the *Union Signal* printed in full, Willard cautioned her audience that “some political party will respond to this plea from the hearts of women,” and it will be this party for which women will “pray and work, circulate literature, convene assemblies, and do all in our power to secure its success.”¹²

“And now what was the result” of the Republican convention? asked the *Union Signal* correspondent. She directed her readers to read the approved platform and note

how respectfully this party doffs its hat to the great labor interests of the country, how it bows with servile devotion to manufacturing corporations, agricultural industries, speaks out with no uncertain sound against ‘Chinese cheap labor’ and makes a brave thrust at Mormonism.¹³

But the platform was “silent as the grave” on the liquor industry, “the great evil” that posed a greater threat to American workers and homes than did capital, “the Mongolian hordes,” or Mormonism. “It is hard to believe,” she continued, “that of all others, the party which wreaked itself on heart-expression in its infancy, has grown so cold to human suffering” in its maturity. With an apparent mixture of reluctance and determination, “One Who Was There” concluded that if indeed “policy now rules where principle first

¹² “The Memorial at the National Republican Convention,” *Union Signal*, June 12, 1884, 8-9.

¹³ “The Memorial at the National Republican Convention,” 9.

inspired,” it would be necessary to sacrifice the party that had, in the eyes of the NWCTU officers, clearly lost its way.¹⁴

But if the other three major parties received Willard and the Great Petition less than enthusiastically, the Prohibition party welcomed them with open arms. Unlike the other convention reports, which focused only on the presentation of the petition, this one, written by the *Union Signal* editor, Mary B. Willard, recounted the convention in its entirety, emphasizing both the Christian atmosphere and the centrality of women throughout the proceedings. In this convention that accorded women standing as delegates, speakers, and committee members, Willard took center stage, the place she most liked to be. She and the other NWCTU officers were given places of honor on the main platform, along side other prohibitionists of note. When she presented the petition to the delegates on the morning of first day, it “was received with great applause,” as were her remarks accompanying it and “Three cheers were given Miss Willard” as she once again took her seat.¹⁵ The Kansas delegation gave her the honor of nominating John St. John as their presidential candidate, and during her speech introducing him,

Men stood gazing at her as if fascinated. Old men sat crying like children....and when she sat down, apparently every one in the hall arose at one time, and hundreds of throats made the air quiver with such loud and prolonged applause that it seemed as if it would never cease....The leader of the W. C. T. U. moves hearts and lives wherever her voice is heard.¹⁶

Here, clearly, was the political backing Willard desired. In this convention, she was no mere petitioner begging a few minutes of time from an indifferent or downright hostile audience. Here, she occupied a place of central importance. A delegate from Nebraska

¹⁴ “The Memorial at the National Republican Convention,” 9.

¹⁵ “The Pittsburgh Convention,” *Union Signal*, July 31, 1884, 8.

¹⁶ “The Pittsburgh Convention” 9.

seemed to voice the sentiments of the whole convention when he declared that his state “always follows...St. John and Willard....We know our leaders.”¹⁷

“Oh! wasn’t it all jolly and glorious,” wrote one especially enthusiastic WCTU member to the *Union Signal* about the Prohibition party convention,

and wasn’t Miss Willard grand, and weren’t you all just as proud of her as proud could be? Oh! I am so glad I am a woman, and I thank God that woman’s citizenship and the triumph of the temperance cause are going to come, hand in hand, and that we have not many more years to wait.¹⁸

Enthusiasm for the Prohibition party was still riding high six weeks later when the delegates at the 1884 NWCTU convention in St. Louis passed a far more assertive and uncompromising resolution for partisanship than they ever had before. After taking considerable pains to emphasize the NWCTU’s continued commitment to evangelicalism and moral suasion and to stress that “our action as a National society is not binding upon States or individuals,” the NWCTU declared that

as we now know which national party gives us the desired embodiment of the principles for which our ten years’ labor has been expended, we will continue to lend our influence to the national political organization which declares in its platform for National Prohibition and Home Protection.¹⁹

Though the name “Prohibition party” does not appear in the resolution, the references to national prohibition and home protection in the “St. Louis resolution” disqualified all but that particular party as contenders for the NWCTU’s support.

But the unrelenting efforts of Willard and other national officers to build support for the Prohibition party within the NWCTU only partly explain why increasing numbers of temperance women were voicing their approval of the Prohibition party. During the

¹⁷ “The Pittsburgh Convention,” 12.

¹⁸ “A California Congratulation” *Union Signal* August 28, 1884, 5.

early and mid 1880s, when Willard was laying out her arguments for partisanship, WCTU women across the country were finding out how difficult it was to affect change within the two-party system as disfranchised citizens.

In their fight for prohibition, WCTU women literally created communities throughout the country, particularly in the Midwest, where industrialization and swelling populations were taxing to the limit resources of towns sometimes less than twenty years old. WCTU women established libraries, restaurants, coffee houses, reading rooms, and “friendly inns.”²⁰ They organized juvenile temperance clubs and taught temperance in Sunday schools. They drafted legislation for prohibition, woman suffrage, age of consent, temperance instruction in public schools, and prison reform, and labored tirelessly for its passage. They gave lectures to packed houses, wrote temperance columns in hundreds of local newspapers, and seemed to paper the entire country in prohibition tracts and pamphlets.²¹ They organized WCTUs in immigrant and African American communities. They visited prisons and almshouses, ran soup kitchens and free medical dispensaries for the urban poor, and established orphanages, homes for “fallen women,” free kindergartens, and industrial schools for working boys and girls. They demanded that laws against prostitution punish the men who paid money for sex, and not just the women they hired, and they worked to protect female prisoners from sexual abuse by appointing police matrons and establishing separate prisons for men and women.

¹⁹ *Minutes of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, At the Eleventh Annual Meeting In St. Louis, Missouri., October 22nd to the 25th, 1884.* (Chicago: Woman’s Temperance publication Association, 1884), 64.

²⁰ “Friendly inns” were low-cost shelters for poor or “intemperate” men.

²¹ In 1885, for example, the Illinois WCTU alone reported distributing 2.5 million pages of temperance literature throughout the state. “Corresponding Secretary’s Report” *NWCTU Convention, 1885*, 101.

WCTU women from around the country shared their successes and accomplishments with each other each week in the *Union Signal*. Through the *Signal*, union members learned about the work done for prostitutes and unmarried mothers in Portland (Maine), Cleveland, and Baltimore. They followed the progression of southern unions from fledgling to fully-developed, and shared in southern women's exultation as they slowly began to gain the support of the region's leading ministers, newspaper editors, and politicians. They learned that small town WCTUs were often victorious in securing prohibition for their town or county, even when it was defeated at the state level. They read that WCTU-sponsored alternatives to the saloon like reading rooms and coffee houses, and educational endeavors like free kindergartens and night and industrial schools for working boys and girls, were highly successful throughout the country.²² And they learned that WCTU lecturers frequently spoke to standing room only crowds and that gospel temperance meetings among the intemperate resulted in numerous conversions to both temperance and Christianity. In short, the *Union Signal* proved to temperance women everywhere that the WCTU's influence was a national, rather than a local, phenomenon.

The *Union Signal* also reported on WCTU women's first major legislative victory: the passage of scientific temperance legislation in numerous states during the

²² By 1885, at least one union in every state and territory reported having either a coffee house, reading room, or library. Many also maintained one or more friendly inns. In 1882, Ohio reported having fifteen coffee houses and five friendly inns throughout the state, and in 1883, Pennsylvania reported eleven and ten, respectively. "Corresponding Secretary's Report," *NWCTU Convention, 1882*, xcvi; "Corresponding Secretary's Report," *NWCTU Convention, 1883*, 74. Chicago WCTU women founded a company in 1881 called "The Woman's Christian Temperance Union Coffee House Company" for the purpose of opening coffee houses "at all practicable points in the city." "Corresponding Secretary's Report," *NWCTU Convention 1881*, xcii. Unions in most major northern cities established free kindergartens for poor children. And at least one southern city, Baltimore, ran a highly successful free kindergarten throughout the 1880s. Industrial and night schools seemed to be more tenuous ventures, given that they relied on the attendance of tired working children for their existence, but unions reported maintaining such schools all

first half of the 1880s. These laws required all public schools in the state to include in their curriculums instruction on the effects of alcohol on the human body. Vermont enacted the first scientific temperance law in 1882, and over the next three years, nine other states, Washington DC, and the Dakota Territory all followed suit.²³ In every case, WCTU women were the most vocal and active campaigners for scientific temperance instruction, and they rightfully claimed each legislative triumph as their own. In addition, WCTU-led campaigns for state prohibition amendments resulted in victories in Kansas (1881) and Iowa (1882).²⁴

Still, for every statehouse victory, there were numerous failures, and in the wake of these failures frustration began to spread. Between 1880 and 1883, twenty-one state legislatures introduced amendments to their constitutions in favor of prohibition. All but three were eventually defeated, but many—notably those in Ohio, Indiana, and Oregon—were defeated by the narrowest of margins.²⁵ WCTU women took part in all of the campaigns, and many WCTUs were centrally involved. Perhaps the most rancorous response to the WCTU's growing political activism came from the Illinois legislature. In 1883, the Illinois WCTU again presented petitions to the legislature asking for

through Willard's presidency. Urban unions also frequently reported providing dinners and "entertainments" for bootblacks and newsboys.

²³ The states that passed scientific temperance instruction laws between 1883 and 1885 were Michigan, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, New York, Alabama, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, and Oregon.

²⁴ Maine also passed a state prohibition amendment in 1884, but given the state's long history of prohibition (Maine had been dry since 1851), the WCTU campaign there was not as crucial to the final victory as in Kansas and Iowa.

²⁵ In Ohio, the legislature actually voted in favor of submitting the amendment to a popular vote, where it received a majority of the votes cast, but not a large enough majority to be ratified. In Indiana and Oregon, two successive legislatures had to approve submission before an amendment came before a popular vote. In both states, the amendment passed in one legislative assembly, but failed in the next. In Michigan, a submission bill passed both legislative chambers, but lacked by two votes a two-thirds majority in the House. In Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut, Illinois, West Virginia, Arkansas, and Texas, submission bills passed in one chamber of the legislature but not the second. Leigh Colvin, *Prohibition in the United States: A History of the Prohibition Party and of the Prohibition Movement* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1926), 140-142.

submission to a popular vote an amendment to the state constitution for either prohibition or woman suffrage. As the women looked on from the galleries, the legislators

flouted and scouted and jeered; some shied the daintily tied rolls of petitions at the Clerk's head, or used them as foot balls, never deigning to glance at the names they contained. Others unrolled their petitions and, holding them aloft, pointed sneeringly to their thousands of names, saying, "Here are yards of names, nobody knows how much wasted shoe leather, how many dinnerless husbands, how many buttonless shirts they represent."²⁶

Legislators deemed the petitions "an unwarrantable trampling upon the dignity of this House," and demanded that "these desecrating intruders [the WCTU women]" be cleared from the chamber. Through it all, the women "sat gazing on this horrible travesty of legislative justice in dumb despair of ever receiving help from such representatives."²⁷

Temperance women throughout the country experienced resistance when they tried to move into the political arena. In some areas, particularly in the southern states, opposition to women's political activism was so deep-rooted it prevented temperance women from even attempting legislative campaigns. But outside of the South, many state unions embarked on at least one significant, and ultimately unsuccessful, campaign. The Massachusetts legislature, for example, voted against a bill for the Home Protection ballot in 1880, despite the fact that a Massachusetts WCTU petition drive had collected 43,000 signatures of support. One year later, the Minnesota legislature did the same, in the face of over 33,000 signatures. Iowa temperance women watched helplessly as the state supreme court overturned their victory for constitutional prohibition less than a year after ratification, and a WCTU woman from Ohio blamed the defeat of their own

²⁶ "President's Address," *Tenth Annual Report of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of the State of Illinois. For the Year ending October 23, 1883*. (Chicago: Union Signal Print, 1883), 23.

²⁷ "President's Address," *Illinois WCTU Convention, 1883*, 23.

prohibitory amendment to “great frauds” in the tallying process and the governor’s refusal to issue a recount.²⁸

Though the failure of a protracted and expensive campaign had an immediate, demoralizing effect on the WCTU women involved, it often also contributed to an increased interest in suffrage or third party politics, or both. In the aftermath of its failed campaign for a scientific temperance instruction bill, for example, the Indiana WCTU claimed that “stand[ing] before courteous school boards and plead[ing]” for the enactment of a scientific temperance instruction law was a “stern educator for the women of Indiana.” As “courteous” school officials declined their request, WCTU women “longed to be able to answer their smiles with votes that would retain or displace them.” And after witnessing the debacle in the Illinois legislature, the state WCTU president overcame her reservations toward suffrage and “labored heartily for Home Protection.”²⁹

As the accomplishments of WCTU women multiplied, legislators’ and other elected officials’ refusal to solidify their reforms in law became increasingly objectionable. Often explicitly voicing their dissatisfaction with the two mainstream parties, particularly the Republicans, and their elected representatives, growing numbers of state and local unions began passing resolutions of support for both suffrage and the Prohibitionists.³⁰ The 1884 Missouri convention was exceptionally emphatic in its support of the two measures as well as its condemnation of the Republican party. Noting that the party’s platform “entirely ignored” not only prohibition, but also woman suffrage, “an omission which, in our government, impairs its strength, depriving it of the

²⁸ “Corresponding Secretary’s Report” *NWCTU Convention, 1884*, cxxv.

²⁹ “President’s Address” *Illinois WCTU Convention 1883*, 23.

³⁰ In 1884, the national superintendent of the Department of Franchise reported that twelve state unions were actively working for suffrage. With the exception of Maine, Massachusetts, and Arkansas, all the

element of justice,” convention delegates resolved to “protest against this so-called party of progress and...endorse that party that shall better represent the advanced sentiment of the nation.”³¹ The Arizona territory convention also passed a strongly worded resolution for suffrage, stating that

it is the sentiment of this body that the exclusion of woman from the possession and exercise of her natural rights, has been calamitous to the whole human race, inflicting great injury, upon both sons and daughters, cultivating in man a love of domination, and in woman an unwomanly dependence, and farther, that the votes of woman are imperatively needed to promote temperance, purity and peace, to give woman greater self-reliance, self-respect, and personal independence, and to secure her ‘a fair day’s wages for a fair day’s work,’—also that in the progress and development of civilization new duties and responsibilities have been thrust upon us, therefore it is the duty of all intelligent women to accept a full recognition of equal civil and political rights.³²

Most unions similarly pointed to what they saw as the failure of male voters and political parties to uphold the nation’s moral standards and protect the home when justifying their more political, women’s rights approach to temperance reform.

By 1884, less than ten years after Annie Wittenmyer had advocated caution and restraint as the guiding principles of the NWCTU, temperance women across the country were unhesitatingly declaring the masculine right of enfranchisement and the masculine privilege of partisanship as their own. Although many WCTU women and chapters chose to remain non-political—particularly in the South and, to a lesser extent, in small towns in the North—the national chapter’s unswerving devotion to politicized reform created a culture that encompassed—but minimally infringed upon—even non-political WCTUs. Although temperance women’s alliance with the Prohibition party failed to result in their enfranchisement, or in a influential political party led by women, (the

unions were in the mid or far West. “Report of the Department of Franchise,” *NWCTU Convention, 1884*, xxii-xxiii.

³¹ “News From the Field: Missouri” *Union Signal*, July 7, 1883, 12.

party's influence peaked in 1884, and by 1892 it was once again of negligible political importance), the WCTU nevertheless helped shape a distinct political sphere for women. And the extensive amount of "moral" legislation that WCTU women successfully agitated for at the state and local levels, such as prohibition, blue laws, age of consent, school suffrage for women, and scientific temperance education in public schools is evidence of how strong that culture was.

³² "News From the Field: Arizona" *Union Signal* January 10 1884, 11.

Jean Paul Marat: Target and Martyr of Liberty

By Yvonne Cupp

The French Revolution produced countless influential politicians throughout its tumultuous course. As a political figure in the French Revolution, Jean Paul Marat began as a nonentity and became a martyr to the revolutionary patriots of France. His influence is often misconstrued, and sometimes overlooked. Although he was not a political leader like Robespierre, his influence was substantial in that he motivated many people through his writings and powerful personality. Through his involvement with the Cordeliers' Club and his journal *Ami du peuple*, started September 1789, Marat was able to express the indignation of the bourgeois class through his hopes for social revolution. His conspiracy theories and alleged prophetic outlook on the Revolution created an aura of mystery and intrigue around him, as well as detestation. Because he often stood alone behind his radical ideas, Marat became marked as the scapegoat for various controversial events of the period, and was several times forced into hiding to evade the law. Targeting Marat was an easy and effective way for the warring factions in the National Convention to assert their political dominance. It is curious how a virtual unknown and newcomer to government could become so crucial to the politics of the French Revolution, only to be murdered by another unknown in a seemingly isolated event. Marat's assassination played a great part in what became the cycle of the Terror. Even though he was not a preeminent leader, both his life and death had an impact on the course of the Revolution. Because of his incendiary political beliefs and bold nature, the government targeted Marat, however, his assassination by the outsider Charlotte Corday was primarily an unrelated event motivated more so by personal convictions than politics.

Jean Paul Marat's early personal life had an effect on his later political career. Born in Boudry, Neuchatel on 24 May 1743 to a family of mixed race, Jean Paul Marat had a passionate

and tenacious temperament that would serve him throughout his professional life.¹ Marat always fought for his principles, and this exceptional determination was apparent even from his childhood. Although he was bold and passionate, he exuded coolness and confidence when under fire- a trait that helped him in his political career when he was being denounced in front of the entire National Convention.² An educated man fascinated in the natural world, Marat's first career was as a scientist and physician. His education opened him up to radical thoughts and ideas, as he held great admiration for Enlightenment philosophers such as Rousseau.³ His dedication to the scientific profession lasted until the French Revolution, when he was accidentally thrust into politics. The political climate was changing, and the people were growing impatient with the declining economy and oppressive monarchical rule of Louis XVI. The nature of Marat's liberal thoughts and political leanings introduced him to politics as a writer who would later become a politician of national importance.

Jean Paul Marat's political beliefs were radicalized during the French Revolution, but he was not a republican from the very start. Marat's political ideals were similar to other revolutionaries because he believed in the institution of monarchy as a type of government, but that the royalty in France needed reform. Although they criticized Louis XVI, the revolutionaries still had faith that the king could save the country. Marat was skeptical of the French people's ability to sustain and support a republic.⁴ His discontent with Louis XVI was based upon his personal opinion that the king was an inadequate ruler who was unresponsive to the social crises of the French populace. Marat believed that government power should be centralized, but that it should also be limited by legislation and the will of the people.⁵ As Marat's suspicion of the king's involvement in counterrevolutionary plots and political conspiracies thickened, so did his

¹ Ernest Belfort Bax, Jean Paul Marat: The People's Friend (London: Grant Richards, 1901), 15.

² Clifford D. Conner, Jean Paul Marat: Scientist and Revolutionary (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), 228.

³ Jean Paul Marat, Polish Letters (Bibliophile Society, 1905), 2.

⁴ Louis R. Gottschalk, A Study in Radicalism, (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1927), 75.

⁵ Clifford D. Conner, Jean Paul Marat: Scientist and Revolutionary , 151.

desire to see the end of monarchical power.⁶ The Flight to Varennes on 21 June 1791 was a turning point in this early stage of the Revolution because it proved that the king could not be trusted, and that he would rather flee the nation like a coward than help the cause for liberty and fair government.

From this point on, Marat's opinion changed to one of direct denunciation of the king, advocating for his trial and execution. In his speech made in December of 1792, Marat discussed his belief that Louis was guilty of tyranny and crimes against the people because he did not fulfill his function in the general interest, and violated the Constitution of 1791.⁷ He deserved a trial if only for political appearance, but should be punished for his offenses. Marat said in this speech, "The investigation connected with this trial is therefore the surest means to deliver at last the nation from its most redoubtable enemies, to strike fear into traitors, to cut off their plots at the root, and finally, to assure liberty, tranquility, and public felicity."⁸ Through this quote it is apparent that Marat's revolutionary beliefs were evolving more violently, and that his suspicions were growing- as were those against him by other revolutionaries. He knew that the time was right for the people to rise up and react.

Marat strongly proclaimed that he was the "defender of the people". In order to promote popular liberty, he advocated for a social revolution in France, in accordance with the political revolution. Being a member of the bourgeois class, Marat's interest in urban reform stemmed from his identification with city life since his childhood. This interest in social reform set Marat apart from other revolutionaries whose main concern was using the common people only for assistance in the political reform movement to end the ancien regime.⁹ He wanted to alleviate the social problems of workers and the poor from below, but he was not a socialist. These ideals were true to the spirit of the revolution, and would grow to connect Marat to the sans culottes

⁶ Stephen Miller, Three Deaths and Enlightenment Thought (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001), pg 151.

⁷ Michael Walzer, Regicide and Revolution, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pg 160.

⁸ Walzer, Regicide and Revolution, 165.

⁹ Clifford Conner, Scientist and Revolutionary, 177.

movement in Paris and the Cordeliers' Club. He desired to awaken the people to the evils of despotism, and the need for a free and active role in government. For this reason, he opposed the idea of "passive citizenship", believing instead in universal suffrage.¹⁰ He knew that political participation was the only way to achieve revolutionary goals. Marat said, "All is lost when the people become indifferent."¹¹ He advocated violence only as a means to accomplish this goal. He stated, "Insurrections are necessary for social progress."¹² Marat used his radical ideas to arouse the people, and set himself apart from other revolutionaries.

Marat's greatest influence on his 'people' was through his revolutionary writing in his acclaimed, *Ami du peuple* started on September 12, 1789. Through this journal Marat expressed his early indignation towards the king, and then the Revolution itself. It included the growing suspicions, accusations, and prophecies that made his character legendary, and made him a revolutionary target. Historian Jeremy Popkin sees *Ami du peuple* as the most celebrated radical journal of the French Revolution, and Marat as a pioneer in the field of radical journalism.¹³ There were few others at the time who were willing to 'stick their necks out' and unabashedly express their radical ideas in writing. Because Marat could not obtain actual political influence (he was not chosen for the Estates General), he actively participated in politics through his vitriolic writings.¹⁴ In *Ami du peuple*, Marat expressed both his support and scorn for the revolutionary government. He was suspicious of those whose political ideas differed from his, and openly denounced opponents in his journal.¹⁵ He expressed his conviction that the National Assembly created to replace the monarchy was corrupt and had aristocratic tendencies.¹⁶ By judging his peers, Marat lent credibility to his own patriotic views, a strategic move for a

¹⁰ Ibid., 179.

¹¹ Jean Paul Marat, *Polish Letters*, 21.

¹² Conner, *Scientist*, 163.

¹³ Jeremy D. Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France 1789-1799* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), pg 116.

¹⁴ Gottschalk, *Radicalism*, 57.

¹⁵ Ibid., 56.

¹⁶ Ibid.,85.

politician. His controversial promotion for a dictatorship also appeared in his journal. Marat wrote on several occasions that a strong leader was necessary in order to end factionalism in the government, and set the Revolution on the right track to ensure liberty for all people. This reflects his fear of a conspiracy against the people and the Revolution by either aristocrats or counter-revolutionaries.

Although he portrayed himself as the voice of the public, Marat dissociated himself from his readers by becoming their messenger.¹⁷ He did not fully believe that the people could understand and appreciate revolutionary ideas without his guidance. He also distanced himself from the common people through his use of exalted, intellectual language.¹⁸ In addition to open criticisms in his writing, Marat used his distance to criticize the idleness and inability of the people to react to oppression. This is reflected in his disappointment with the lack of popular reaction to the Champ de Mars massacre in July 1791 that almost caused him to lose faith in the people.

Several attempted arrests were made against Marat because the government perceived him as a threat. Freedom of the press was restricted after events like the Champs de Mars, because of right wing attempts to protect the country and king from radicals.¹⁹ Marat publicized his arrests in *Ami du peuple* in order to politicize them by portraying himself as a martyr under an oppressive government.²⁰ The sensationalism and shock value of *Ami du peuple* was significant because Marat used it to gain notoriety. Marat also gained a popular reputation as a prophet by ‘predicting’ government conspiracies before they happened, such as Lafayette’s attempted betrayal of the Revolution. Although others criticized him for spreading conspiracy theories, he believed it was better to be vigilant and make a mistake than become victim to despotism or the

¹⁷ Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, 146.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁹ Hugh Gough, *The Newspaper Press*, 45.

²⁰ Conner, *Scientist*, 168.

counterrevolution, which he greatly feared for the sake of the people.²¹ Marat once said, “To remain free one must be perpetually on guard against those that govern.”²² His influential writings opened him up to the support of the Cordeliers’ club, and eventually the National Convention. According to Hugh Gough, *Ami du peuple* was important because it coordinated the democratic movement in Paris by spreading information.²³ Jeremy Popkin agrees with this theory in saying that Marat created a democratic consciousness by forcing democracy into a revolutionary debate.²⁴

While Marat’s denunciations and suspicions gained him popularity and notoriety, they also created enemies in those who were threatened by his inflammatory assertions. Personally, others disliked Marat’s bold, fiery demeanor and paranoia. His advocacy of murder and dictatorship distanced him from other revolutionaries, while simultaneously providing his enemies with political leverage over him. For this reason Robespierre disagreed with Marat’s violent ideas because they discredited his useful writing, giving fire to the opponent.²⁵ Class differences that were apparent when compared to the more refined revolutionaries influenced opinions because of Marat’s connection with street life and commoners, in addition to his unkempt appearance, which was worsened by a debilitating skin ailment. Opposition was more prevalent after Marat secured political power through his election to the National Convention in September 1792, where he would serve for only 9 months.

Marat’s election to the National Convention embroiled him in the debate between the revolutionary factions. The struggle between the Gironde and the Mountain dominated France’s political climate, despite the fact that their only real differences stemmed from personal rivalries.²⁶ Both factions aspired to obtain the support of the moderate majority or “Plain”, so

²¹ Conner, *Scientist*, 176.

²² Marat, *Polish Letters*, 21.

²³ Hugh Gough, *The Newspaper Press in the French Revolution* (London: Routledge, 1988), 233.

²⁴ Popkin, *Revolutionary News*, 168.

²⁵ Clifford Conner, *Scientist*, 207.

²⁶ MJ Sydenham, *The Girondins* (London: The Athlone Press, 1961), pg 17.

each side tried to discredit the other by denouncing its respective deputies. Since Marat always considered himself an outsider, his convergence with the Montagnards was more strategic in promoting his own career than based on common political ground.²⁷ Because of the risk involved in associating with a radical, it was difficult for Marat to obtain full support from even those revolutionaries who shared his beliefs. Marat's growing popularity provoked the Girondins to continue monitoring him as the monarchical government had done before, forcing him to move in and out of seclusion to evade arrest.²⁸ The Girondins promoted the evil reputation of Marat in order to discredit preeminent Montagnards through their association with him, including Robespierre and Danton. Although intended to be harmful, in many ways these attacks enhanced Marat's reputation as a political martyr.

Additionally, the Girondins blamed undesirable events of the Revolution on Marat. The controversy over the September Massacres of 1792 widened the rift between the Girondins and Marat because they blamed him for the tragedy because of his radical promotion for a dictatorship.²⁹ Marat's responsibility for the Massacres is unlikely because he did not have enough political influence at the time to organize such an event. He had just been elected to the Committee of Surveillance when the Massacres started on September 2.³⁰ This does not mean however, that he had no influence whatsoever behind the scenes or through his writing.

Marat did not sit idly by and allow himself to be denounced, rather he used this factional conflict to the Montagnards (and his own) advantage. In order to depict the Montagnards and himself as defenders of the people, he portrayed the Girondins as oppressors of true revolutionary spirit and royalist sympathizers for their opposition to the revolutionary policies.³¹ He also toned down his radical rhetoric in order to quell Girondins opposition they could be purged them from the Convention. In this Marat was also instrumental. After the attempt to impeach Marat from

²⁷ Conner, 226.

²⁸ Conner, 164.

²⁹ Conner, 90.

³⁰ Ibid., 219.

³¹ Sydenham, Girondins, 157.

the Convention resulted in his acquittal by the Revolutionary Tribunal in what became known as the “Triumph of Marat”, the Gironde was virtually defeated. The extent of popular support for Marat was demonstrated when the public rejoiced at his acquittal.³² The final blow would come with Marat’s influence in the events from May 31-June 2, 1793 in which the sans culottes and Parisian National Guard surrounded the Convention and purged the Gironde.

Marat’s political influence during this time expanded with his seat in the Convention, but paled in comparison to preeminent leaders such as Robespierre or Danton. Although Marat was influential through his ideas and writings, he did not have a political agenda or enact many legislative reforms. Marat focused on ideas and left the specifics to fate, or whoever wished to take on the task. He was often absent from the political scene because he went ‘underground’ to avoid police, and ‘retired’ when he got discouraged with the Revolution’s progress. Michael Walzer writes that Marat was the center of controversy, but not an influential deputy in the Convention.³³ This would lead one to believe that he was an ineffective politician overall. Other than his writing, Marat did not have much influence in early revolutionary events, such as the storming of the Bastille in 1789.³⁴ Although he insisted on his role in the October Days, there was not much evidence to prove his presence at the insurrections.³⁵ This may lead one to question why a figure with modest political influence would be targeted for assassination.

Because of his radical ideas, Marat’s influence extended beyond the National Convention floor, whether or not he had ultimate power within it. Marat was able to affect the popular consciousness through his *Ami du peuple*, and his proclamation in being the defender of the people. Montagnard support allowed Marat to align sans culottes with the Jacobins in the National Convention, and extend his influence in both.³⁶ This also had the effect of creating

³² Conner, 246.

³³ Walzer, 158.

³⁴ Conner, 154.

³⁵ Gottschalk, 58.

³⁶ Conner, 226.

class-consciousness among the Parisian working class.³⁷ Marat was influential because of his uniqueness when compared to other revolutionaries and the public. He did not fear independence or political isolation. His violent yet mysterious nature and ability to evade police gained him popularity. His role in the insurrection of May 31-June 2 that led to the purge of the Girondins was perhaps one of his greatest accomplishments in that it allowed his party to ascend to dominance. Although he retired shortly afterward, this event would also be the last straw for an unlikely perpetrator to end the life of Marat.

Charlotte Corday targeted Marat for assassination for mostly personal rather than political reasons. Although Charlotte was a virtual unknown from Caen (a counter-revolutionary area), she was a strong supporter of the Gironde, and had followed the French Revolution since its not-so-humble beginning. She was a stranger to the political arena, yet she saw herself as destined to kill Marat in order to save the Girondins, restore peace, and destroy the Mountain. Charlotte disliked Marat's violent ideals, and believed that his seditious writings were the cause of all the evils of the Revolution.³⁸ She thought he was a monster, and was repulsed by not only his political standings but his personal appearance and character as well. She believed he was a tyrant, and that to kill him she would destroy the Montagnards and save France from anarchy and civil war.³⁹ She was prepared to sacrifice her own life for the cause, believing wholeheartedly in her duty to rid the world of Marat. On July 13, 1793 Charlotte Corday ended Marat's life by stabbing him in his bathtub. She acted alone, and based her actions on her own personal moral convictions.

It is peculiar why Charlotte Corday chose to murder Marat when she did because he had virtually disappeared from public life after his retirement due to illness. His influence waned significantly since his retreat from the public eye, even though he was still writing. The

³⁷ Gottschalk, 104.

³⁸ Ian Germani, Jean Paul Marat: Hero and Anti-hero of the French Revolution (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), pg 36.

³⁹ Marie Scherr, Charlotte Corday and Certain Men of the Revolutionary Torment (New York: AMS Press, 1929), pg 73.

immediate cause for Charlotte's choice to target Marat after he had already retired was because of his influence in the purge of the Girondins. After the purge, several Girondins came to Caen, and she had the opportunity to meet with them. Although there is no proof in collaboration between the Girondins and Charlotte Corday, chances are she was influenced in her decision after meeting with them. Despite the lack of evidence, Jacobins used her to discredit the Gironde, accusing them of treason and a royalist conspiracy.⁴⁰ The underlying cause of the murder was, of course, her personal opposition to Marat's ideals. Keeping in mind Marat's supposed 'prophetic' powers, one may wonder if Marat foresaw his own bloody demise. Throughout his political career, Marat was aware of his political significance. Because he courageously took the blame for his controversial beliefs, Marat expected vengeance to be inflicted upon him in one way or another. It is most probable, however, that he expected to be assassinated by a prominent political enemy rather than an unknown young woman.

Charlotte Corday's plan to destroy the reputation of the Mountain by killing Marat backfired, with the intended effects being forced upon her beloved Girondins instead. Charlotte did not live to see her cause unfulfilled. The assassination had the unintended consequence of making Marat into a martyr and a cult hero. Popular admiration reflected through paintings and writings came about shortly after his death, but the trend did not last long. The Montagnards were able to use the death to their advantage against the remaining Girondins as a reminder of the conspiracies in revolutionary France.⁴¹ In this way, the assassination of Marat was a formidable event in the cycle of the Terror.

The assassination of Marat reawakened political tensions in the National Convention between the Gironde and the Mountain. Although his murder was an isolated event, it was still influential in the factional struggle against the Gironde, as it was used against them by the Mountain to gain dominance over the Convention. This eventually led to the executions of

⁴⁰ Ian Germani, Hero and Anti-hero, 39.

⁴¹ Conner, 258.

several important Girondins. They were able to excuse the Terror by arguing that the assassination was a plot by counter-revolutionaries.⁴² Charlotte Corday had unwittingly assisted Robespierre in his rise to preeminence by ridding the Jacobins of Marat.⁴³ Because of his violent and radical beliefs, there is the possibility that had Marat lived, he would have supported the Terror. This may lead one to question whether Marat was truly a 'victim', or whether the nation was served when Charlotte put an end to his 'evil' before it could get out of hand during the Terror. Throughout the Revolution, Marat suffered for his revolutionary ideals financially, physically, and emotionally.⁴⁴ Despite his radicalism, he was not a bloodthirsty animal. He truly cared about the social good, but believed that violence was the only way towards reaching revolutionary goals, and in some sense, he was right. Non-violent political debates can only take a government as fractured as France's so far before something erupts.

Jean Paul Marat was the target of assassination by Charlotte Corday because of her personal opposition to his radical beliefs and violent outlook on the Revolution. He was targeted by the government for these same views, and because he was seen as a threat to national stability. Since his early life, Marat had always stood behind his ideals. His courage under fire separated him from the pack and made him an influential politician. Marat was the self-proclaimed 'defender of the people', and the only revolutionary concerned with social reform and popular mobilization for reasons outside of politics. His *Ami du peuple* was extremely significant because it gained Marat notoriety as a radical journalist and helped to disseminate his ideas and create a democratic consciousness. The journal incorporated all of Marat's suspicions, accusations, and prophecies that made him a popular figure, and those that put him in position to be a revolutionary target as a political enemy. Opposition to Marat was both political and personal because of his character and violent proposals. His election to the National Convention intensified this because he was now endowed with political power and entangled in the debate

⁴² Miller, *Three Deaths*, 127.

⁴³ Scherr, *Charlotte Corday*, 155.

⁴⁴ Gottschalk, 138.

between the revolutionary factions. In order to discredit the Mountain, the Girondins promoted the evil reputation of Marat. He became a scapegoat for political problems in their attempts to denounce the Montagnards. In his defense, Marat used this conflict and the attacks upon him to portray the Girondins as repressive to revolutionary spirit. The nature of Marat's influence in the French Revolution increased with time but remained generally more modest than other revolutionary leaders. He was most influential as a writer and philosopher, not as a politician. Marat was influential because he stood out amongst other revolutionaries and the public, and remained steadfast in his convictions for social reform. Because of his concern for urban reform, Marat was able to align sans culottes with the Jacobins in the National Convention, becoming influential in both and creating proletariat class-consciousness. His most influential political role was in the insurrection of May 31-June 2 that led to the purge of the Girondins. This was the event that provoked Charlotte Corday to murder him because he saw herself as destined to kill Marat in order to save the Girondins. She strongly disliked Marat's violence and saw him as the cause for all evil. However, the assassination had the unintended consequence of making Marat into a martyr and a cult hero, and strengthening the power of the Mountain, which began the start of the Terror. Marat was the target of assassination for many reasons, both political and personal. Ultimately, Charlotte Corday's personal dislike of Marat was based on her support of the Gironde. Since she was a woman and did not have political power, this was more likely a moral objection to what she saw as a violent threat to her nation.

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State Violence and Black Resistance during World War I and the 1920s

By Shannon King

The fact that there is little or no gang labor gives Harlem Negroes the opportunity for expansion and individual contacts with the life and spirit of New York. A thousand Negroes from Mississippi put to work as a gang in a Pittsburgh steel mill will for a long time remain a thousand Negroes from Mississippi. Under the conditions that prevail in New York they would be all within six months become New Yorkers. The rapidity with which Negroes become good New Yorkers is one of the marvels to observers . . . One of the principal factors in the race riot in Chicago in 1919 was the fact that at that time there were 12,000 Negroes employed in gangs in the stockyards. There was considerable race feeling in Harlem at the time of the hegira of white residents due to the “invasion,” but the feeling of course, is no more.¹

James Weldon Johnson, “The Making of Harlem”

In 1925 when James Weldon Johnson published “The Making of Harlem,” Harlem had yet to experience a race riot comparable to those in East St. Louis, Chicago, and Tulsa. According to Johnson, there were no race riots in Harlem because, “Employment of Negroes in New York is diversified.” Blacks in Harlem, therefore, no longer remained “merely ‘Harlem Negroes’; astonishingly soon they become New Yorkers.”² Johnson’s history of Harlem misrepresents and mischaracterizes the history of race relations and violence in United States history. He suggests that blacks’ increased presence caused a disruption in social relations. Once they assimilated, he assumed, interracial violence would cease. In Harlem, and throughout black Manhattan, interracial violence arose on a daily basis, though not at the magnitude of race riots in other municipalities.³ Civil societal and state violence was a constant threat, for racial tensions between blacks and whites persisted.

In August 1900, the Tenderloin district was the site of a race riot that set the tone for the relationships among blacks, whites, and the police for most of the twentieth century. On August 12th, on Forty-First Street and Eighth Avenue, police officer Robert J. Thorpe in civilian clothes attempted to arrest a black woman, who he thought was “soliciting.”⁴ Unaware that the white man was a police officer, her husband Arthur Harris ran to her aid. Officer Thorpe struck Harris with a club, and Harris retaliated with a penknife, fatally wounding the officer. On August 15th and then on the 16th (the day of Thorpe’s funeral) the police and white gangs wreaked havoc on black neighborhoods throughout the Tenderloin. Black pedestrians from 34th street to 42nd street along Broadway, Seventh, and Eighth Avenues were attacked. “They [police] ran with the crowds in pursuit of their prey; they took defenseless men who ran to them for protection and

¹ James Weldon Johnson, “The Making of Harlem” in *Survey Graphic*, Vol. 6 No. 6 (New York: Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, March 1925), 639.

² James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1940), 157.

³ Harlem’s black community developed as other black neighbors in Manhattan devolved. Black Manhattan, therefore, covers the general black population in Manhattan. In fact, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, black southern and Caribbean migrants initially resided in the Tenderloin and San Juan Hill districts, where they experienced state and civil societal violence. As these migrants and native New Yorkers moved uptown to Harlem, they, of course, carried their experiences of violence with them.

⁴ The Citizens’ Protective League, *Story of the Riot* (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969), 1.

threw them to the rioters, and in many cases they beat and clubbed men and women more brutally than the mob did.”⁵ In retaliation, blacks armed themselves, while the black elite formed the “The Citizens’ Protective League.” Although the CPL persistently solicited the protection and cooperation of Mayor Robert A. Van Wyck, the mayor placed all the authority of the investigation in the control of the Police board, who only legitimized their officers’ actions. In each case, the state—the police, the mayor, and the Police board—neglected to protect black citizens’ rights. As Frank Moss, the compiler of the affidavits of black victims, lamented, “The ‘investigation’ was a palpable sham.”⁶

In the 1900 race riot, both civilians and the police attacked the black community. The police masked their role in the riot as conduits and initiators of racism. The 1901 police report stated that the police’s “Prompt and vigorous action...kept the situation under control.”⁷ This characterization suggests that the state intervened in the race riot as an independent entity enforcing “law and order,” though they actually initiated and exacerbated violence upon blacks. The state, therefore, enforced a racial hierarchy, which persisted as whites fled their communities. Blacks did not become “New Yorkers”; they remained “Harlem Negroes.”

Historical studies on race riots have demonstrated that interracial violence was the result of black settlement into white neighborhoods and occupational competition.⁸ This chapter argues that violence was constitutive of racism rather than the result of social and economic forces. Interracial violence in black Manhattan suggests that blacks consistently lived under the threat of violence. The potential for interracial conflict on the ground—in the neighborhood, the workplace, in the saloon, and on public transportation—was more dynamic than Johnson’s analysis indicates.

This essay examines interracial violence in Harlem during the neighborhood’s transformation from a white to a black community, 1917-1929. Through focusing on the relationships among white civilians, the police, and the black community, I delineate the ways in which blacks responded to civil societal and state violence. Interracial violence within civil society was engendered by white civilians’ reactions to blacks as competitors in the labor and housing market. While socio-economic forces are attributed to the prevalence of violence in black and white civilian confrontations, these forces can not solely account for the conspicuity of violence in segregated black communities once whites fled. An analysis of the coercive arm of the state, however, explains the continuity of violence in African American and Afro-Caribbean experiences as racialized subjects. Frantz Fanon argues that within colonial societies, “it was the policeman...who are the official, instituted go betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression.”⁹ Historians and contemporaries mischaracterized race relations because police

⁵ Ibid., 2.

⁶ Ibid.,4.

⁷ Quote in Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of the Ghetto, Negro New York, 1890-1930* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 1996), 52.

⁸ Dominic Capeci, Jr., *The Harlem Riot of 1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977; Cheryl Greenberg, “The Politics of Disorder: Reexamining Harlem’s riots of 1935 and 1943” in *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 18 No 4, August 1992; Elliot Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis, July 2, 1917* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964); Sandburg, Carl, *The Chicago Race Riot* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1969); Shogan, Robert and Craig, Tom, *The Detroit Race Riot: A Study in Violence* (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1964); Mayor LaGuardia’s Commission of the Harlem Riot of March 19, 1935, *The Complete Report of Mayor La Guardia’s Commission on the Harlem Riot of March 19, 1935, Mass Violence in America*, eds. Robert M. Fogelson and Richard E. Rubenstein (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969); and Tuttle, William M. Jr., *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1970).

⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 38.

violence was often semipublic—not part of the “public transcript”—although it took place in public spaces and was known throughout the black community.¹⁰ The semipublic character of state violence and surveillance was perpetrated in tandem with overt or “public” acts of violence. As historian Joe W. Trotter Jr. aptly states, “Afro-Americans were both overpoliced and underprotected in their lives and property.”¹¹ For black New Yorkers, then, the police was an “army of occupation” rather than bearers of “law and order.”¹²

The accumulation of insults, harassment, searches, and seizures induced blacks to arm themselves for self-defense and sometimes, violently attack the police. In Harlem, these bouts with the police, and the distrust that ensued, translated into public articulations of antiracism and self-preservation that were reflected in New Negro radicalism during and after the World War I; these conditions raised Harlem’s racial consciousness, persuading Harlemites to defend themselves as well as other blacks in their environs, so that an attack on one denizen was an attack on the entire community. Harlem developed a political culture—an infrapolitics—reflected in their daily acts of resistance that had been cultivated earlier in the century throughout black Manhattan.¹³ The essay contends that the persistence of violence throughout black Manhattan perpetuated by white civilians and reinforced by the police mobilized and politicized blacks, individually and collectively, to defend their own race.

“Hoodlums in and out of police uniforms”

The Great War caused a dramatic demographic shift in Harlem, as in other northern cities. Since the turn of the century, US Southern and Caribbean migrants traveled to Harlem seeking better living conditions, as blacks moved northward from other neighborhoods in black Manhattan. Although the WWI had not begun, Harlem’s black population outpaced the rest of black Manhattan. By 1911, according to the New York Urban League, “San Juan Hill, or Columbus Hill, has become a less desirable district in which to live, while the Negro population has doubled in itself many times in Harlem.”¹⁴ Between 1910 and 1920, black Manhattan expanded from 60, 534 to 109, 133, increasing 80.3 per cent.¹⁵ WWI intensified the migration process, facilitating Harlem’s transformation from a white to a black neighborhood. By 1930, there were 224,670 in black Manhattan, an increase of 105.9 per cent.¹⁶

Although W.E. B. Dubois’ call for African Americans to volunteer for the war in the spring of 1917 was met with skepticism, many blacks enlisted in the military to demonstrate their loyalty to the US; it was argued that service in the military during the US’ war for democracy could be used as a weapon to claim their rights. In Harlem, Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church told his congregation:

¹⁰ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*(New York: The Free Press, 1996), 85

¹¹ Joe W. Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45*(Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 118.

¹² Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), 85.

¹³ Infrapolitics is understood as social and cultural practices that are associated with oppressed classes geared towards covertly changing the power relations through “hidden transcripts,” a dissident political culture, and daily acts of resistance and survival. Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 8-9. In Harlem, and throughout black Manhattan, both state repression and black resistance were “infra” in the sense that they were not documented in the “official” or “public” transcript, which criminalized black self-defense.

¹⁴ *Twenty-Four Negro Families in Harlem* (New York: The New York Urban League, May 1927), 3.

¹⁵ Fourteenth Census of The United States: 1920. Vol. II. General Report and Analytical Tables, Chapter I. Table 16., 55.

¹⁶Fifteenth Census of The United States: 1930. Population, Vol.II General Report Statistics by Subjects, Chapter II, Table 24., 76.

This is the proper time for us to make a special request for our constitutional rights as American citizens. The ten million colored people in this country were never so badly needed as now...As a race we ought to let our government know that if it wants us to fight foreign powers we must be given some assurance first of better treatment at home...Why should not the colored Americans make a bloodless demand at this time for the rights we have been making futile efforts to secure [from a] government that has persistently stood by with folded arms while we were oppressed and murdered?¹⁷

While Powell encouraged participation in the war, his tone was evident of blacks' waning faith in the US. Harlemites, nevertheless, responded by selling Liberty bonds and marching in parades, confirming their loyalty and demonstrating their pride as representative citizens. "Many Harlemites could not have been more prouder that their community had been chosen as the base for the first black military unit ever recognized in New York State."¹⁸

Several phenomena, within and without, jolted Harlem's patriotic mood. Blacks' experience in Europe during the war, as segregated soldiers in battle, forced them to question their already fleeting allegiance to their country. Simultaneously, race riots erupted throughout the US during the war and until the early 1920s. In Harlem, New Negro radicalism emerged, politicized by the Great War, the Bolshevik Revolution, and especially the race riots. According to Harlem politician J. Raymond Jones, "in World War I and throughout the 1920s, there were... the beginnings of a political renaissance."¹⁹ Hubert Harrison, the "Father of Harlem Radicalism," was instrumental to the politicization of the black community. Harrison, who could be found on street corners prior to the war dazzling black and white pedestrians with his encyclopedic knowledge, inspired younger radicals and provided the template in which two streams of black radicalism—black nationalism and black socialism—flowed throughout Harlem.²⁰

In the midst of the internal and external forces politicizing the black community, state and civil societal violence erupted throughout black Manhattan. 1917 inter-racial violence emerged in several black neighborhoods before and during the East St. Louis race riot. Similarly, throughout the 1920s, Prohibition, Jazz music, prostitution, and gambling intensified police surveillance in Harlem. These conditions confirmed the community's right to defend themselves and to retaliate against violence. The seeds of the Harlem's resistance were sowed and cultivated throughout black Manhattan since the turn of the century and the US South and Caribbean, but it was after the war that the New Negro emerged in Harlem.

On May 26, 1917, Benjamin Hamilton and a white friend went into a saloon at Sixty Fifth Street and Amsterdam Avenue and ordered two drinks of lemon seltzer. Both were charged fifty cents. Hamilton refused to pay and told his friend not to pay and they left the saloon. A group of white men followed them out the saloon and attacked Hamilton. Frank Higman, a member of the Home Defense Guard, attempted to intervene, but he was also beaten. Hamilton escaped. A white crowd calling out "thief," followed Hamilton who entered Bobb's saloon. Gabriel Gollote, another member of the Home Defense Guard, followed Hamilton into the

¹⁷ Quote in Jervis Anderson, *This Was Harlem: A Cultural Portrait, 1900-1950* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1982), 105.

¹⁸ Jervis Anderson, *This Was Harlem*, 101.

¹⁹ John C. Walter, *The Harlem Fox: J. Raymond Jones and Tammany, 1920-1970* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 36.

²⁰ Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth Century America* (New York and London: Verso, 1998), 123; Barbara Foley, *Spectres of 1919: Class and Nation in the Making of the New Negro* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

saloon, and he was attacked by a group of blacks and thrown out. Police officer Mirzio rescued Gollote until reserves arrived in response to the blown whistle.²¹

Simultaneously, between Sixty- Second and Sixty- Third and Amsterdam Avenue, blacks and whites brawled, using revolvers, bricks, rocks, and razors in the streets. The police attempted to clear the streets, but they were unsuccessful until reserves arrived from several police stations. Home Defense Guards and white “volunteers” also assisted the police. The police officers were unsuccessful with their batons, so they used their revolvers, according to the *Times*. The fighting continued to spread down Sixty-Second and Sixty-third and West End. Eventually, the police cleared the streets, although the fighting continued in surrounding environs, within stores, barber shops, saloons and tenements.²² Three white and four black civilians were injured. Their injuries ranged from razor cuts to gun shot wounds to homicide. One police officer and one Home Defense Guard were injured.

Richard Hill, a 30-year-old black man of 210 West Sixty-fourth Street, was murdered in cold blood, reported the *Age*.²³ When police officers entered a saloon on Sixty-Third street, they ordered all the blacks to leave. Hill ran from the saloon, and several officers followed him. There were two versions of Hill’s killing. The *Times* alleged that Hill slashed Police officer Hey with a razor and that he was about to strike the policeman again when Policeman Meade shot him.²⁴ Witnesses, however, alleged that Hill was no more than fifteen feet away from the police officers who were following him when he was shot by a police officer who had just exited a patrol car in front of Eugene Greaves’ grocery at 227 West Sixty-Third Street.²⁵ The police entered Greaves establishment, where the police shot him and his niece. Greaves was arrested and charged with felonious assault, but was later discharged, as was the charge of disorderly conduct against Hamilton.

In the Fifty-Fourth Street Police Court Monday morning, David C. Outlear, attorney for the defendants revealed evidence that the police was selective in the arrests.²⁶ As was the case in inter-racial conflict in 1905, blacks were criminalized—only their community was under surveillance. All of the violence and shooting occurred on Sixty-third Street, which was populated by blacks. Although both blacks and whites participated in the riot *only* blacks were arrested. The day after the riot, in order to “ensure the peace,” the police department searched blacks for weapons, again.²⁷ Similarly, the religious community organized and solicited the auspices of District Attorney Swann. Reverend Sims, pastor of the Union Baptist Church, and other pastors, businessmen and politicians throughout black Manhattan established the Columbus Hill Committee. The committee received assurance from Police Commissioner Woods that the investigation was in progress, but the results of the investigation were not reported.²⁸

Only four days later, another riot erupted. In a saloon, on 137th street and Lenox Avenue, Walter Clark, a black man, protested against the price of liquor and threatened to kill the saloon’s employee with a razor. James Mohan, an off-duty police officer, had been walking outside with his daughter when he heard cries in the saloon. He ran into the saloon and told Clark to give up the weapon. He told Mohan that his gang would not allow the entire police force to take his

²¹ NYT, May 27, 1917, 12.

²² NYT, May, 27, 1917, 12

²³ NYA, May 31, 1917, 1.

²⁴ NYT, May 27, 1917, 1.

²⁵ NYA, May 31, 1917, 1.

²⁶ NYA, May 31, 1917, 1.

²⁷ NYT, May 28, 1917, 17.

²⁸ NYA, June 7, 1917, 1 and NYT, June 21, 1917, 24.

razor, reported the *Times*.²⁹ Clark charged Mohan and slashed him on the face and neck. The owner of the saloon grabbed Mohan's daughter and they ran to the 135th Street police station. Mohan grabbed Clark and led him down the block. When the police arrived, they found over 200 hundred blacks attempting to release Clark from Mohan. The officers charged into the crowd and used their nightsticks to scatter the crowd. Clark and William Grant, the alleged gang leader, were arrested. Extra reserves were placed in Harlem because the police department feared that the killing of Richard Hill on Saturday would renew violence in Harlem and San Juan Hill.³⁰ It is not clear if there was a direct relationship between the two events, but the fact that the police saw the connection illustrates that the police understood the black communities' general disenchantment with the police department's treatment. Both black communities experienced congruent conditions and responded similarly. Once they retrieved news of violence against those in their community, blacks joined in the fighting in order to defend their race.

The two altercations among blacks, whites, and the police in late May; the beating of Reverend George Sims, the leader of the Columbus Hill committee, in Harlem by officer Schwartz in June; and the St. Louis riot in early July enraged black Manhattan. Only a day after the St. Louis riot, San Juan Hill was the scene of another conflict among whites, the police and the black community. As in the May 30 mass reprisal against the police, this conflict highlighted blacks' historical distrust for the police. On July 3 police officer Hansen ordered approximately twenty-five men of the Fifteenth Infantry Regiment, a black infantry regiment that would later become the 369th Infantry Regiment, to leave the corner of Sixty-First and Amsterdam.³¹ Most of the men followed Hansen's orders. Only private Lawrence Joaquin refused to leave the corner, arguing that Hansen showed no respect for his uniform.

Hansen arrested Joaquin and led him down the street. As Hansen walked Joaquin down Amsterdam Avenue, black civilians and soldiers charged Hansen, attempting to release Joaquin.³² Hansen backed Joaquin into a hallway and defended himself with his nightstick. Meanwhile a woman informed the Sixty Eighth Street Station and three officers were sent to aid officer Hansen. Before the reserves arrived, white residents in the surrounding area *joined* the police officer's side in the fight. By the time the police arrived on the scene, nearly 2,000 people, black and white, were fighting, "with knives and clubs swinging and bricks flying through the air," according to the *Times*.³³ The three officers were unable to control the belligerent crowd, so more reserves were called. The reserves eventually chased the rioters from the corners and subdued the fighting, which persisted down the streets.

Only black men were arrested. Along with Joaquin, Vernon Cox was charged with disorderly conduct and Isaac Brown was charged with assault. Frederick R. Moore, editor of the *New York Age*, and Reverend George Sims started an independent investigation. Colonel William Hayward of the Fifteenth Infantry also did his own investigation and found that Joaquin was unjustly arrested. Hayward stated, "I cannot find on shadow of justification for this arrest... I have not found any one who says that Joaquin was doing anything more than standing quietly on the street corner, or that he did more than protest verbally when ordered to move on."³⁴

²⁹ NYT, May 31, 1917, 18.

³⁰ NYT, May 31, 1917, 18.

³¹ NYT, July 4, 1917, 9.

³² NYT, July 4, 1917, 9.

³³ NYT, July 4, 1917, 9.

³⁴ NYT, July 6, 1917, 9.

Although officer Hansen neither respected Joaquin's uniform nor his civil rights, the July 3rd conflict evinces more than a police officer's unlawful behavior. The riot highlights the intense racial animosity among blacks, whites, and the police that were intensified by police brutality and unwarranted searches and arrests. In this case, as well as the brawl of May 26th in San Juan Hill, white "volunteers" joined the police to repress blacks, demonstrating a racial bond between the police force and the white civilians. The riot also sheds light on the contradictions of WWI—black patriotism and race riots. Black patriotism prevailed because the community believed race relations would improve after the war. The soldiers of the Fifteenth Infantry Regiment came from the San Juan Hill district, but the majority was from Harlem.³⁵ The violence within and outside of Harlem must have been unsettling. Black soldiers serving in the war abroad were segregated and discriminated against; while throughout the US, whites terrorized blacks in the North and the South. Finally, and perhaps most emblematic of the contradictions during the period, black soldiers were objects of state and civil societal violence. Blacks soldiers persistently challenged white aggressors. In Houston Texas, August 1917, black soldiers retaliated against the police department after white police officers shot several black MPs the night before.³⁶ Many blacks, therefore, felt a conflicted loyalty. As one black man stated, while watching the black troops marching in a parade in Harlem, "They'll not take me out to make a target of me and bring me back and Jim Crow me."³⁷

Reoccurring violence in black Manhattan during the summer of 1917 and thereafter, as well as the race riots throughout the country, confirmed the black community's distrust of the police. In an article entitled "New Negro," Roscoe Dunjee, a black journalist for the Oklahoma City Black Dispatch, explained the black community's distrust:

If you were to creep up to-night to a place where there are 10, 000 Negroes gathered, you would find no division on this point, I know that they all would say, 'WE HAVE NO CONFIDENCE IN WHITE POLICEMEN... Let there be one hundred or one hundred thousand, they would with one accord all say, WE HAVE NO CONFIDENCE IN THE WHITE MAN'S COURT...If their cause is the cause of a black man against a white man they will say that they know that a verdict would be rendered in favor of the white man.'³⁸

Throughout the country, blacks began to arm themselves for self-defense, as had black Manhattan prior to the war. In the mist of the violence, black radicals advocated self-defense and retaliation. The day after the inter-racial violence between the police and the soldiers of the Fifteenth Regiment, Harrison held a meeting at Metropolitan Baptist Church.³⁹ "Certainly I would encourage the Negroes in the South, or in East St. Louis or anywhere else who do not enjoy the protection of the law, to arm for their own defense, to hide those arms, and to learn

³⁵Jervis Anderson, *This Was Harlem*, 101-102.

³⁶Mary Frances Berry, *Black Resistance White Law: A History of Constitutional Racism in America* (New York: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1994), 109-110. In Chicago, according to black communist Harry Haywood, black soldiers organized and used their military training to ambush belligerent whites. Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Illinois: Liberator Press, 1978), 82.

³⁷NYA, March 29, 1917.

³⁸Rosecoe Dunjee, "The New Negro," Oklahoma City Blacks Dispatch, October 10, 1919 in *Voices of a Black Nation: Political Journalism in the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Theodore G. Vincent (New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc, 1973), 65.

³⁹Irma Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations: Caribbean Immigrants and The Harlem Community, 1900-1930*(Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 101.

how to use them.”⁴⁰ Harrison’s argument was salient because the public discourse of black leadership had condemned self-defense, although there were elements within the community that continued to arm themselves. Harrison placed self-defense within the context of elites’ rhetoric of law and order, for black Manhattan did not “enjoy the protection of the law.”

In response, Fred R. Moore chastised Harrison, replying “No man, or woman either, for that matter, is a friend to the race, who publicly advises a resort to violence to redress the wrongs and injustices to which members of the race are subjected in various sections of the country.”⁴¹ Violence was lawlessness and the espousal of such was dangerous—for blacks as well as the procurement of the franchise. Harrison rejected Moore’s “cringing,” opining that Moore’s accommodationist views were antiquated.⁴² Harrison’s response was directed toward Moore’s position on self-defense and the general stance of the “Old Negro.” Moore’s strategy was to convince the United States and white America to enforce the law, thereby ensuring that blacks received equal protection, similar and emblematic to DuBois’ “Close Ranks” article.⁴³

Moore’s politics were incompatible with New Negro radicalism. “The Old Negro and his futile methods must go. After fifty years of him and his old methods the Race still suffers from lynching, disfranchisement, Jim Crowism, segregation and a hundred other ills. His abject crawling and pleading have availed the Cause nothing,” argued Cyril V. Briggs. During the war, black soldiers “felt that they were fighting for false ideals.” The discrimination they experienced during the war only corroborated what they already believed. “The new Negro has put the question: ‘What will the shot of my bolt mean?’⁴⁴ New Negroes demanded and defended their rights, especially the right to defend themselves.

As race riots continued during and after the war, black radicals continued to mobilize and politicize Harlem. In 1919, after the “Red Summer,” Marcus Garvey wrote an article entitled, “Negroes Should Prepare—Black Men All Over The World Should Prepare To Protect Themselves—Negroes Should Match Fire With Hell Fire,” contextualizing the race riots, recently the Omaha Nebraska race riot, with the global race war between Europeans and people of color. Garvey argued:

No mercy, nor respect, no justice will be shown the Negro until he forces all other men to respect him. There have been many riots in the United States and England recently, and immediately following the war of democracy, there will be many more as coming from the white man. Therefore, the best thing the Negro of all countries can do is to prepare to match fire with hell fire.⁴⁵

The black race, Garvey argued, needed to prepare for “war of the races” because Europeans would seek the aid of blacks against the Japanese. “The New Negro had fought the last battle for the white man, and he is now getting ready to fight for the redemption of Africa. With mob laws and lynching bees fresh in our memories, we shall turn a deaf ear to the white man when Asia administers to him his final ‘licking.’ ” Garvey, as did Powell, identified the contradiction between domestic violence against blacks in both the US and England and their dependence of

⁴⁰ NYT, July 5, 1917, 9. W. A. Domingo, editor of the *Emancipator* and a member of the African Blood Brotherhood advanced similar sentiments in 1921 in response to white terror in Tulsa, Oklahoma. NYT, June 20, 1921, 8.

⁴¹ NYA, July 12, 1917.

⁴² Irma Watkins-Owens, *Blood Relations*, 102.

⁴³ W. E. B. DuBois, “Close Ranks” in *Crisis*, July 1918.

⁴⁴ William N. Colson “The New Negro Patriotism” in the *Messenger* (August, 1919).

⁴⁵ Marcus Garvey, “Negroes Should Prepare—Black Men All Over The World Should Prepare To Protect Themselves—Negroes Should Match Fire With Hell Fire,” in *Negro World*, October 11, 1919.

blacks to fight their wars. Blacks were primarily used as pawns. Garvey argued that blacks needed to defend their race because their prize for service to the US was only more violence. Framing state violence in international terms, Garvey placed blacks' struggles within a global race war.

As Garvey warned, violence against blacks continued in Harlem and throughout the US. In 1921, after the Tulsa race riot, in a meeting on 135th and Lenox Avenue, speaking to a large crowd, Harrison and members of the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB) argued that the state, the police and troops, allied with white Tulsans to attack blacks. In addition, they defended and confirmed the right of black people to arm themselves and remonstrate attacks.⁴⁶ On June 12, 1921, at the Palace Casino, the ABB organized a meeting, speaking to an audience of over two thousand. They stated the facts of the Tulsa Riot, affirming blacks Tulsans right to defend themselves. On June 19, W.A. Domingo organized another meeting at St. Mark's Hall.⁴⁷ Domingo admonished, "Our aim is to allow those who attack us to choose the weapons... If it be guns, we will reply with guns."⁴⁸ Throughout Harlem, as well as other black neighborhoods throughout the US, New Negroes spoke against state and civil societal violence.

Cyril Briggs founder of the ABB and editor of the *Crusader* wrote, "the real outrage at Tulsa was the use of the city police and the state militia against the Negroes who mobilized primarily with the one thought of protecting, against the openly announced purpose of lynching, the Negro prisoner confined in the Tulsa court-house." Briggs, like Harrison and Garvey, identified the contradiction, "The entire power of the State, all of the forces of capitalist 'law and order,' were turned upon the Negro in the process of 'putting down' race riots that were started and most actively prosecuted by white mobs." Law and order was illegitimate, for it was "law and order" that attacked and criminalized blacks' right to protect themselves. The community's experiences concretized New Negro discourse and mirrored the experiences of blacks throughout the country. During the twenties, state violence against blacks continued. Still, as in the past, blacks persistently defended themselves, engendering racial consciousness and the protection of the black community.⁴⁹

"Three thousand people can't be wrong"

Tensions in Harlem were aroused again in the late summer of 1928. This, "near-riot," as the *Amsterdam News* called it, illustrates the efforts of the community to protect their own, their distrust of the police department, and the violent relationship between the black community and the police department. On July 22, 1928, approximately three thousand blacks and one hundred and fifty police brawled in Harlem. "The worst riot in the district" occurred on 139th street and Lenox Avenue, after seven in the evening. The community saw a black man being attacked by four police officers, so the community retaliated. As reserves from different precincts continued to arrive, Harlemites threw bricks, dishes, and chairs from their windows. The riot persisted for an hour, until the presence of the emergency squad with machine guns and a fire apparatus finally subdued the crowd.

⁴⁶Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 132 and Article published in the *Baltimore Afro-Americans*, June 10, 1921, entitled "A Call To Arms" in *Voices of A Black Nation: Political Journalism in the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Theodore G. Vincent(New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 1973), 138

⁴⁷The *Crusader*, Ed. Cyril V. Briggs, Vol. IV. No. 5, July 1921 in *The Crusader: Facsimile of the Periodical* . ed. Robert Hill(New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1987) ,1181.

⁴⁸NYT, June 20, 1921, 8:3.

⁴⁹ NYT, April 15, 1918, 22; NYT, March 26, 1919, 11; NYT, September 19, 1926, 29; NYAN, September 22, 1926,3; and NYAN 29, 1926

Harlem believed that the police had brutalized another of their denizens. As the editor of the *Amsterdam News* wrote, “Three thousand people can’t be wrong.” White and black police officers served the community with “brutality not brains.” The court case endured for seven months. Clarence Donald, who was at the center of the riot, was convicted for felonious assault on an officer. Several witnesses, testifying in Donald’s behalf, would also serve time.

The conflict began in Mr. Henry and Zerlena Chavis’, a black couple, apartment at 559 Lenox Avenue. Mrs. Chavis said that at seven in the evening, three drunken men knocked on her apartment door asking for Robert. Mrs. Chavis testified that she closed her door and awoke her husband, who went to the kitchen door and let the three men into the apartment⁵⁰ She left the apartment and ascended the stairs, allegedly followed by Clarence Donald. Donald choked her and she screamed, testified Mrs. Chavis. Ruth Jackson, a tenant on the 5th floor, heard the scream and brought Mrs. Chavis into the apartment. Jackson also identified Donald as the aggressor. Mrs. Chavis then screamed out the window, yelling, “Catch that man.”

The actual riot began in the street with the beating of Clarence Donald. There were several versions of the altercation; yet all stated that Clarence Donald battled with several police officers. The *New York Times* and the *New York Amsterdam News* named Officer James Kubeil as the first officer to arrive. After this, the stories diverge. *The Times’* and the police officers’ testimonies both stated that Donald initiated the conflict and that the black community defended him. Donald kicked Officer Kubeil in the privates when the officer tried to grab him and “several negroes standing near by joined in the affray,” according to the Times.⁵¹ *The Amsterdam*, however, states that Donald was attacked first and that the riot began as a result of Officer Destella striking a black woman when she told him that he should be ashamed for beating a defenseless man.⁵²

While in custody the police assaulted Donald, according to the *Amsterdam*. “When Donald was taken to the police station he was walking, but they brought him out on a stretcher.”⁵³ Dermot Bailey, who was also arrested at the riot on a charge of disorderly conduct and later released, told a reporter that he saw four plain clothed men and one uniformed police officer beat Donald behind closed doors at the West 135th street police station.⁵⁴ Donald claimed that Mrs. Chavis would not have identified him without the detective pointing him out to her in court. Mrs. Chavis, however, claimed that she first identified him as he lay in blood in the West 135th street police station.

Officer Kubeil testified that he grabbed the first man he saw running, but that someone yelled, “That is not the man.” Kubeil also admitted to hitting Donald, but only because he initiated the conflict when he struck Officer Destella. Officer Kubeil testified:

As I went to grab him at about 139th Street, he became abusive. I started to bring him back to find out what the trouble was. ...Both of us grappled him together, and he put up a fight, and he made a pass at Destella and we had a mix-up. He fell down, in the tussle, taking Destella to the ground with him, and he had Destella by the coat, at the throat. I

⁵⁰ New York Amsterdam News, August 8, 1928.

⁵¹ New York Times, July 23, 1928, 1.

⁵² New York Amsterdam News, August 1, 1928.

⁵³ NYAN, August 8, 1928.

⁵⁴ NYAN, August 1, 1928.

didn't know what was going on. So I went over to help Destella. As I did, he kicked me in my private.⁵⁵

A closer examination of the officers' testimonies cast further suspicion on who initiated the conflict. Kubeil's statement suggests that Donald was facing Destella. Yet, officer Destella states that he did not see Donald kick Kubeil. "He had me pulled down like this (indicating) alongside of him, and he was facing Kubeil," testified Destella.⁵⁶ It is unlikely that Destella could not see Donald kick Kubeil if Donald was lying beside Destella, facing Kubeil. It is also incredible that Donald could kick Kubeil while strangling Destella.

Several witnesses claim that Donald was not in the Chavis' apartment during the altercation, all placed him on the street, drunk and staggering. Gertrude Simmons, a tenant of 65 West 139th Street, stated that police officers, Kubeil and Destella, clubbed Donald without saying a word. Simmons also alleged that Officer Destella sought to kick Donald, but missed and Kubeil caught the kick in the groin.⁵⁷ Other eyewitnesses confirmed Simmons' story; two were intimidated and arrested in court. Just before Pedro Suner, 21 years old, a native of Panama, was about to testify on the stand, Patrolman Young arrested him for assault. Attorney Smith protested that Suner was framed, arguing that it was perpetrated in order to "gag" Suner's testimony on the behalf of Donald. Suner testified on the stand that Donald was drunk, walking down the street singing and dancing the Charleston. Suner claimed that he watched Donald for five or ten minutes and that as Donald neared 139th street, he heard the woman scream.⁵⁸

Patrolman Young alleged that during the riot, Suner took a strangle hold upon Young with his left arm and reached for Young's revolver with his right. Samuel W. McFadden, a black officer who was also injured during the riot, corroborated Young's testimony. Attorney Smith challenged Young, who weighed 210 pounds, while Suner weighed about 130 pounds. Smith asked, "And you want us to believe that you could not protect yourself against this young man, the defendant?" Young stated that he had been grappling with another prisoner. Smith asked him what happened to the prisoner and Young stated, "He got away." Smith continued to question Young, asking him if he could identify the man? If the man was in the courtroom? Young exclaimed, "Well, I could go down the aisle and pick him out." Young stood up and glanced over the courtroom. Simultaneously, Detective Farrington of the West 135th street station whispered something in Assistant District Attorney Martin's ear and Martin, subsequently, asked Young if it was not a fact that he could not arrest the prisoner because he was already in custody, stating that Clarence Donald was the prisoner. Young replied that Donald was the other person he fought with as Suner attempted to grab the officer's gun.⁵⁹ St. William Grant, another eyewitness for Donald, testified that he overheard the officers say they were going to frame the arrest of Suner. Nevertheless, Suner was found guilty and sentenced to the penitentiary for an indefinite term.⁶⁰

In the Heights Court on August 14, St. William Grant testified that Destella was responsible for kicking Kubeil and that patrolman Richardson beat Donald with a club while

⁵⁵ People against Clarence Donald (Cal. #52, 964; Ind. #174, 626) Statements of :Officers James Kubeil, Samuel McFadden, Young, Herman Destella, and Mrs. Chavis, November 21, 1928. New York City Indictment No. 174626, Cal No. 52964, September 27, 1928. Municipal Archives of the City of New York.

⁵⁶ Ibid. , 2.

⁵⁷ NYAN, August 1, 1928.

⁵⁸ NYAN, August 8, 1928.

⁵⁹ NYAN, August 8, 1928.

⁶⁰ NYAN, November 21, 1928.

Destella and Kubeil held him.⁶¹ He also corroborated the testimonies of Cecil Lee and H. E. Armstrong, who stated that Donald “was not in the Chavis apartment before the disturbance.”⁶² The moment after Grant left the stand, he was arrested in court for robbery. Herman Ellis, a white taxi cab driver, who was also in court testifying against Donald, recognized Grant and informed officer Herman Ellis that Grant had robbed him in the hallway of 204 West 119th Street. Counselor Smith requested protection from the Magistrate for Grant, as well as to illustrate that Grant was unblemished prior to his imprisonment. While in custody, Grant was beaten and burned. The arresting officer, Detective Webber accused Grant of attacking him during the fingerprinting process. The police reported that he was turning over desks and breaking windows. Detective Webber stated:

He wanted to make a bad job. So I asked him to keep his hand quiet, and I torn up two or three different forms that he had smeared with his hands. So the next minute he smears it again. He started the holler ‘murder.’ So he sat on the floor and wouldn’t get up. I pulled him up, and he grabs me and he torn my shirt and underwear, and he got his hand around my tie, and other detectives in the house there—he is a pretty husky fellow—they sat him up, and he wouldn’t stand up. He was yelling ‘Murder,’ throwing chairs, and he tore all his clothes from him, making it appear that he was beaten by the police and refused to walk.⁶³

Webber also alleged that Grant refused to enter his cell, banged his head against the walls, and took all of clothes off in order to validate Attorney Smith’s characterization of the police department. During his first arraignment, Grant was “hardly recognizable” and in the line up he could barely stand.⁶⁴ His bail was set at \$5,000, but reduced to \$2,500. After spending ten days in lockup, District Attorney Martin attempted to raise Grant’s bail to \$10,000, stating that “certain colored people upon whose word he could rely” had told him that Grant and Donald belonged to “a vicious organization.” District Attorney Martin’s machinations failed. Grant’s bail was set at \$5,000. Grant told the *Amsterdam News* that he was abused. He was beaten at the Wadsworth Avenue police station and then he was taken in the taxi of Herman Ellis to the 123rd street station, where he was burned with cigar butts on his hands and legs and advised to testify that he stole Ellis’ watch and money. Grant also stated that he was told that the charges would be dropped if he testified against Donald. Donald refused, replying, “I will not lie on anybody.”⁶⁵

During Grant’s second arraignment, Grant pled not guilty. Dermot Bailey’s and Samuel Grant’s, St. William’s brother, testimonies provided the defendant with an alibi, each placed Grant at home, between 2 a.m. and 6:30a.m., during the time Ellis claimed that he was robbed, approximately 2:45 a.m.⁶⁶ Once it was revealed that Grant had attended each of Donald’s court hearings and that he had seen Ellis on the morning of August 14, hours before he was arrested in the afternoon, the Magistrate Hyman Bushel questioned whether it was “probable that he (Grant) would return to court when he knew his own liberty was in danger?”⁶⁷ It seemed clear that Grant

⁶¹ NYAN, August 22, 1928.

⁶² NYAN, August 15, 1928.

⁶³ People Against St. William Grant, Statement of George Webber, 16th Squad. Made to Assistant District Attorney Morris H. Panger. October 31, 1928, 3. New York City Indictment No. 174466, Calendar No. 52962, September 27, 1928. Municipal Archives of the City of New York.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, and NYAN, August 22, 1928.

⁶⁵ NYAN, August 29, 1928, 3.

⁶⁶ NYAN, August 29, 1928, 2.

⁶⁷ NYAN, August 29, 1928, 3.

was framed. In a letter written from Tombs Prison to Judge Panger, Grant expressed emphatically, “They frame me that I Rob a white taximan the Saturday before the Riot in Harlem. Hon Panger I was in Court three times before I was arrested charge for robbing him. He was also there three times, on the 4th time he cause my arrest.”⁶⁸ In the letter, Grant also stated that black officers abused blacks citizens and assisted District Attorney Martin in persuading Magistrate Bushel to augment Grant’s bail. Unlike Suner and Donald, Grant was acquitted.

The “Near-riot,” epitomized the antagonistic relationship between the black community and the police department. Although it was not clear who initiated the conflict, Clarence Donald was beaten and Harlem responded, immediately and emphatically. As a community they retaliated, rejecting the police’s racist behavior in the streets and the police station. The alleged beating of Donald and Grant in custody and the arresting of Suner and Grant placed suspicion on the practices of the NYPD, whose behavior legitimized Harlem’s distrust.

Conclusion

World War I was a transitional and transformative period for the black World in general and Harlem in particular, for along with the change in the racial and cultural fabric of the community came internal and external forces that politicized the developing black community. The prevalence of police brutality, concomitant with the emergence of New Negro politics raised Harlem’s consciousness as objects of state repression, forging a politics that protected denizens within the community.

While interracial violence among civilians were often caused by socio-economic and spatial related conflicts that were mutually reinforced in the neighborhood as well as the workplace, violent interactions between blacks and police were based on unwarranted arrests and illegal searches and seizures—issues of personal dignity and state-sanctioned violence.⁶⁹ The semipublic and personalized nature of state violence and surveillance has obfuscated the degree to which blacks constantly lived under the threat of violence, leading historians as well as contemporaries, such as James Weldon Johnson, to mischaracterize race relations and violence in Harlem because of the absence of race riots.

The 1928 “near riot” displayed, again, the community’s anger and distrust of the police department. Black weeklies’ coverage of the court case confirmed the community’s convictions and demonstrated the criminality of the state: eyewitnesses were arrested, prisoners were beat, and police officers’ testimonies were contradictory. These conditions and conflicts would continue throughout the 1930s and 1940s, intensified by the Great Depression and World War II—contributing to and culminating in the 1935 and 1943 race riots.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Letter to Honorable Panger from St. William Grant. November 11, 1928, New York City Indictment No. 174626, Calendar No. 52964. Municipal Archives of the City of New York.

⁶⁹ Kelley, 79.

⁷⁰ Capeci, Jr., *The Harlem Riot of 1943* and Cheryl Greenberg, “The Politics of Disorder.”