LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This year has been an interesting one for the undergraduate academic journal. I began this year as the only remaining member of last year's journal staff due to the graduation of my colleagues. I have been a member of the Michigan State History Association since my sophomore year, and had the opportunity to be an editor of Volume 7 of the journal. Seeing the journal grow through the last three years has been a blessing. I believe that the interest it has garnered for both students and professors alike should be a point of pride for the Department of History. It is my pleasure to present Volume 8 of the Michigan State Journal of History.

Volume 8 represents the continued restoration of the department's academic journal, and by extension the tradition of recognizing excellent undergraduate scholarship at the university. It is our good fortune to have five exceptional works to help grow journal's reputation in the academic community. The showcased research touches on a variety of subjects, with a coincidental focus mainly on Italian history. Without question, it is the creativity of these authors that has made serving on the editorial board an experience worthwhile.

I offer my gratitude to the editors of this academic journal for their dedication to reviewing and evaluating the submissions that were presented to them. To Owen Carvill, Evan Newton, Micaela Procopio, Duncan Tarr, and Al Wang, I send my utmost thanks.

Additionally, I would like to congratulate Owen Carvill for his appointment as Editor-in-Chief for Volume 9 of the academic journal. I having nothing but the utmost confidence that Owen will continue to expand the journal past what it has already become in these last few years.

Last, but by no means least, a special thanks to department secretary Elyse Hansen. Her help and patience in technologically related affairs was essential to the completion of an electronic journal.

For the editorial board, our work is not finished. The next few months will be spent expanding our web presence and critically assessing every step taken this year to ensure future editors can learn from our mistakes. For my part, I am excited to see what Volume 9 will bring. Thank you, please enjoy Volume 8.

Kolt Ewing
Editor-in-Chief
Michigan State Journal of History

Staff of the Michigan State Journal of History

Abstract:

The Economic Miracle in Italy was a period of unprecedented economic growth from 1958-1962. This essay looks explore the origins of this economic post-war boom and in a larger context discuss how it affected Italian society. In discussing how it altered Italian society it will show the correlation between the increasing advancement of consumer goods in Italy with the rise in urbanization in Italian cities. Then the essay will analyze how the Economic Miracle altered the religious and political spheres in Italy.

The Economic Miracle

After World War II Italy faced a war shattered economy, massive infrastructure damage, and a disastrous period of inflation. Despite these circumstances by 1970 Italy was transformed into one of the most advanced industrial nations in the world. The reason for the transformation was the dramatic expansion of the Italian economy. The transition that ensued became to be known as the 'Economic Miracle' and its apex was during 1958-1963. The Economic Miracle ushered in a period of vast economic, social, and political transformation that altered the course of Italian history. This paper looks to explore the major causes and effects of the Economic Miracle and transformation it had on Italian Society. This paper will argue that the origins of Economic Miracle started with massive labor surplus in Southern Italy because of the failure to industrialize Southern Italy. Then with a huge labor surplus and then European economic integration the Italian economy became a main producer for European goods which allowed Italy to explosively develop into one of the most industrial nations in the world. Furthermore this paper will briefly examine economic transformation on Italian society in the 20th century by showing it economic miracle created an increase in individualism in Italian society.

Although Nazi occupation and large amounts of resistance fighting was concentrated in Northern and Central Italy, Southern Italy coming out of World War II was arguably in worse condition. Faced with overpopulation, high birth rate, poor educational facilities, outdated farming techniques, lack of stable employment, and a quasi-feudal system of land tenure; Southern Italy was more backwards than ever compared to Northern Italy.[1] The first Post-war Italian government headed by Aleci De Gasperi realized the dire situation of the south. Realizing this in 1950, De Gasperi implemented the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* which was an attempt to

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[1] Smith Mack, Dennis. "Post War Recovery." In *Modern Italy: A Political History,* 411.

solve the 'southern question'.[2] The *Cassa peril Mezzogiorno* was a program that invested in the building of rail-roads, dams, aqueducts, and irrigation works. Another element of the program was major land re-distribution in the *latifundisti* or large plantations of Southern Italy. De Gasperi directed the *Cassa peril Mezzogiorno* to break up the large *latifundisti* into numerous small plots of land that were given to peasants. The peasants would take loans from the Italian government which they would pay back to the bank of *Cassa peril Mezzogiorno*.[3] In 1954 there was another plan designed to the 'southern problem'. This plan was designed by the Italian Minister of Finance, Enzio Vanoni. The Vanoni Plan directed public and private capital into investments in building factories in Southern Italy. The goal of the program was to grow the industrial sector to such an extent it would double the average income in Southern Italy.[4]

As vast sums of money were spent in Southern Italy to solve the southern question, the villages that were built nobody came, the dams that were built were never diverted for irrigation, and the small plots of land divided up for thousands of peasants barely provided subsistence farming.[5] Likewise, the economic investments from the Vanoni Plan were counterproductive too. This is because the factories that were built focused solely on heavy machinery products. Italian businesses that needed the heavy machinery found it was more economical to outsource the labor than to domestically buy from the southern factories.[6] The results from these initiatives were the division of lands and creation of factories having little impact on solving the numerous problems of southern society.[7] Therefore, with empty factories and ineffective economic production lead to financial mismanagement, the government attempted to keep money flowing to these

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[2] Ginsborg, Paul. "The 'Economic Miracle' Rural Exodus and Social Transformation." 212.
[3] Ibid, 214.
[4] Harris Elinor. Board of Govenors of the Federal Reserve System Division of International Finance". *Italy's External Balance and Vanoni Plan*
[5] Ginsborg, Paul. "The 'Economic Miracle' Rural Exodus and Social Transformation." 215.
[6] Smith Mack, Dennis. "Post War Recovery." In *Modern Italy: A Political History*, 411.
[7] Ibid, 413.

initiatives, but there was massive corruption stalling the process. Over a third of the money was lost due to financial mismanagement by the governing agencies while another large percentage was lost because money was diverted into the hands of the *Mafiosi* and *camorristi*.[8]

Even though this was the first major attempt by the Italian government to solve the southern question, it failed because of two reasons. One, it was vast underestimation by the Italian government given the economic realities and financial market of Southern Italy. With the investment in capital labor firms the finished goods were largely stockpiled in Southern Italy because there was a lack of necessity for large industrial machinery. This heavily depreciated the value of the factory and products which lead to an overall counter-productive investment. Secondly, due to the clientelistic relationship between the administering agencies and the local officials, the building of public works, of the villages, and the flow money was diverted to specific individuals. [9] Although the push to catch up the south failed, the brief taste of industrialization felt by Southern Italians was captured. This included the benefits it brought to society including steady or even higher paying jobs along with an increase in standard of living. Even though the push modernization failed, the taste for modernity was felt by Southern Italians which made an entire generation willing to immigrant into Northern Europe and emigrate from southern Italy to Central and Northern Italy.

The second reason which contributed in the massive labor surplus in Italy during the 1950's was the modernization of farming practices. In 1951 agriculture still occupied over 57% of the working population's job in Southern Italy.[10] This system of farming was largely based on traditional style cultivation, in which, labor was intensive while yield was comparably low.[11] The

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[8] Ibid, 417.
[9] Ibid, 414.
[10] Grindrod, Muriel. "Developing Southern Italy: A Fifteen Years' Survey." *The World Today*, 439.
[11] Ibid, 419.

agricultural system only allowed for temporary employment during harvest season while the rest of the year, the peasant was out of employment. This strictly inhibited the growth of the farming industry and overall economic well-being of the Southern Italian economy. This was because there was less cash to be invested in modern farming techniques and less cash to buy goods. With investments from the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* and from the Vanoni Plan, southern farmers were able to invest into modern farming practices. This lead to the rise of capitalistic farming which allowed produce to be planted and cultivated through the use of tractors, pesticides, insecticides, and fertilizers; all of which increased production and decreased the need for labor.[12] The modern farming techniques created a rise in unemployment in a society that was already without or already under employed. This created a massive surplus of workers in Southern Italy who were without jobs, but tasted the effects of industrialization. It is in this context that Italy's entrance into the wider European market was essential in capitalizing on the massive labor surplus that fueled the Economic Miracle.

Since the first wave of industrialization in the 1890's, Italy has always lacked the natural resources to complete the industrializing process. This changed in 1951 with the signing of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).[13] The ECSC was signed by Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. In 1951, the treaty had a dramatic improvement on the Italian economy. The idea of the ECSC was to provide free trade within all the signatory countries. For Italy, this was beneficial because all the countries had large coal deposits which Italy lacked. Italy was then able to import coal at a fraction of the cost rather than spending large sums of money on coal. This allowed for industries to have efficient energy at a fraction of the cost which allowed businesses to have more capital to invest into their businesses

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[12] Carte-Fonds Europèeen D'orientation et de Garantie Agricole. *Un Outil pour le Développement de l'agriculture Réunionnaise,* Bruxelles

[13] Ginsborg, Paul. "The 'Economic Miracle' Rural Exodus and Social Transformation." 221.

and hire more workers. This explains the constant growth of internal investment in Northern Italian businesses between the years of 1951 -1956 which rose on average 14% more per year.[14] Although the ECSC contributed to the constant growth in the early I950's, it was not the fundamental reason for the explosive growth between the years of 1958- 1963. The reason which lay behind the explosion of growth between the years of 1958-1963 was Italy's entrance into the European Economic Community (EEC) which was orchestrated in 1957. It is in this treaty that allowed for a surplus of poor Southern Italian peasants to emigrate in the search for a better life; which was used by Northern Italian businesses in the evolution of the Italian economy.

In 1957 the creation of the EEC allowed European market to be opened without trade restrictions. This had a profound effect on the Italian economy because it allowed for the exportation of goods into a wider European market. With the Northern Italian businesses in need of workers to keep up with high demand, they were able to hire the Southern Italian workers at low cost. As it has been shown; there was an extraordinary surplus of workers from southern Italy because of the failure to industrialize the South and the rise of capitalistic farming. Thus, it is this context that the roots of the Economic miracle are established. This is because with the surplus of workers and eagerness of Southern Italians for better lives it pushed Italians north. Then with the formation of the EEC, it spurred economic growth in Italy. This allowed Northern Italian businesses to use the cheap labor to manufacture products leading to the explosive growth in the Italian economy. With the formation of the EEC and the use of cheap labor, the exports from Northern Italian businesses increased average 14.5% per year.[15] This was because of shared resources as a member of EEC and the expansion into a greater European market. This allowed Northern Italian industries to grow at an unprecedented rate, in which, to keep up with demand,

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[14] Ibid, 231.
[15] Smith Mack, Dennis. "Post War Recovery." In *Modern Italy: A Political History*, 416.

there was a need for cheap labor. Therefore, the Northern Italian firms were able to hire Southern Italians to keep up production, while still keeping production costs low allowing the products to be competitive on the international market.[16] As the international market continued to expand, so did the domestic market. This was because as more emigrates from Southern Italy were arriving at the factories; they started to earn stable wages which allowed them to buy products that were being produced, such as Fiat 500s, a washing machine from Candy, or even a fridge from Zanussi.[17]

During the Economic Miracle between the years of 1958-1963 the GDP increased by an average of 6.3% per year and this growth rate was an unprecedented figure in Italian history.[18] Private investments on the Milan Stock Market increased on average by 9% per year with both international and domestic investments in Italian companies skyrocketed.[19] This was further aided by joining the EEC which allowed Italian exports, the largest profit source in the Italian economy, to grow by 14.5% per year.[20] With cheap production cost because labor was inexpensive, it allowed for the continued rise of Italian exports to rise within the EEC countries which reached its peak in 1965 with over 40% of all goods coming from Italy. The composition of what Italy produced during this period dramatically shifted as well. Textile and food products were replaced by consumer goods such as; fridges, washing machines, televisions, cars, precision tools, typewriters, and plastic goods.[21] In terms of economic production this shows Italy's strength in becoming an industrialized nation and the change in materials produced shows Italy's transition from a back water economy into an industrial society. Moreover, as this process of

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[16] Schott, Warner. "Italy: The Economy and the Stock Market .", 67.
[17] Ibid, 68.
[18] Ibid, 68.
[19] Mini, Peter V. "Foreign Direct Investment in Italy, 1956-1963: Some Developmental Aspects." 78
[20] Ibid, 79.
[21] Ginsborg, Paul. "The 'Economic Miracle' Rural Exodus and Social Transformation." 244.

industrialization continued, Italians found themselves with the ability in partaking on this radical transition into modernity. This directly created a supply economy based on massive consumerism which had a tremendous effect on the societal and political composition of Italy.

The effect of the Economic Miracle was the transformation of everyday life for the Italian individual. From the years of 1950-1970, Italy's per capita income grew more rapidly than both Britain and France.[22] The result of the unprecedented growth was the use of money to buy consumer goods. In 1958, only 12% of Italians owned a television, but by 1965 over 50% of Italians owned a television.[23] Likewise, other goods followed a similar pattern in the same years: fridges 13% to 55%, washing machines 3 to 23%, private cars 347,000 to 4.67 million, and motorcycles from 700,000 to 4.67 million.[24] This rise in standard of living was welcomed by all Italians, but it did produce several important changes that altered the 'traditional' society of Italian culture.

To examine the effect of the Economic Miracle on Italian society it is important to examine the role of the television and the car in Italy. Initially, the television was a collective form of entertainment.[25] People would gather at houses to watch events and it was a focal point for socialization. In the magazine *L 'Espresso*, Massimo Calamandrei from Mugello, a town north of Florence, recounts his experiencing of watching television as a "collective action". When Calamandrei is interviewed for the article he tells the interviewer "that there were eleven televisions in the entire town and we would gather to watch events and the game show of *Lascia o Raddoppia*".[26] As more and more families' bought TV sets, the collective action of what

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[22] Mini, Peter V. "Foreign Direct Investment in Italy, 1956-1963: Some Developmental Aspects." 78.
[23] Ginsborg, Paul. "The 'Economic Miracle' Rural Exodus and Social Transformation." 247.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid, 248.
[26] M. Calamandrei, "La Città in Compagna", *L'espresso,* vol. V

Massimo Calamandrei experienced started fading away. This was because the act of going to the bar or neighbors was replaced by the individual action watching the television in their own flat.

With the rise of the individual emerging from the Economic Miracle, mobility, like the television became an important aspect in aiding that transition. The Fiat 500 became a symbol of the Economic Miracle because it was the Ford Model T of Italy. The Fiat 500 was small, affordable, and provided middle class families the ability of escaping city life to go on vacations during the weekend or paid holidays.[27]This provided the family with a more individualized way to spend and create family time. Rather than spending it with the community, or with a large extended family, the extra mobility allowed families to go the mountains or even the sea with ease. Moreover, the Fiat 500 also provided an individualized way to commute to work rather than taking the public transportation. This took to the individual out collective group as opposed to taking the trams of Turin or Milan.

The transition from a communal social structure into individual experience, shows the tremendous social shift that resulted from the Economic Miracle. This is because with the rise of mass production and goods being relatively affordable; more individuals were able to buy goods as opposed to relying on neighbors, public transportation, or the local bar to watch a football match. Thus, the rapid economic development and mass production, gave the majority the ability to 'own' the good they wanted. This is how consumerism removed the individual from the collective group. By removing the individual from the group; this affected both the religious and political spheres of Italy as well.

The decline of religion in Italian society was one of the most significant consequences of the Economic Miracle and is a direct result in the rise of individualism. In a survey taken in

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[27] Smith Mack, Dennis. "Post War Recovery." In *Modern Italy: A Political History*, 430.

1956, 69% of Italians went to Sunday mass regularly.[28] In 1962 the figure had dropped to 53% and by 1968 that number was only at 40%.[29] The decline in religion was the result of massive movement of the rural population into urban centers. This combined with the growing consumerism of every-day life lead to a growing individualistic society. The traditional regions in Italy where the Church possessed the most influence were often times in Southern or Northern rural areas such as; Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Basilicata, Puglia, and many other regions in Southern Italy.[30] As Southern Italians emigrated north, the process of urbanization in cities such as Turin and Milan, lead to dramatic decline in Church attendance. In a survey taken on the outskirts of Milan in 1968, it was found that out of 300,000 inhabitants only 26% regularly attended mass.[31] This was massive transition that was a crisis for the Catholic Church because their traditional influence over the Italians population was drastically decreasing.

Urbanization contributed to the decline of religion because it was the process of breaking social norms. In traditional rural society the Italian male or female would have been obligated to attend mass every Sunday; being in an urbanized center allowed the individual to exercise greater freedom without the expectations of 'traditional society'. Therefore, with urbanization it allowed the individual break societal norms that would have been impossible to do in rural society because of the social expectation. Furthermore, with the emphasis on the American model of consumer society, materialism started replacing the values of religion in Italian society. This happened because as the individual laborer worked, the money earned by the worker went directly to goods to benefit their individual nuclear family. For example, when buying the Fiat 500, the Candy washing machine, or even the Zanussi fridge; the good is bought with the direct

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[28] Ibid, 433.
[29] Ginsborg, Paul. "The 'Economic Miracle' Rural Exodus and Social Transformation." 248.
[30] Ibid, 249.
[31] Ibid.

intention to benefit the family as opposed to the community. It is in this context that religion was replaced by the values of materialism. This is because consumer items became a status symbol and a way to improve one's life, in which, the individual became focused on his nuclear family as opposed to the collective community of the church. This frightened to the Roman Catholic Church because there was a dramatic shift in societal norms with the introduction of consumer values, but it also effected the political environment of Italy; most dramatically the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party.

The Christian Democrats (DC) was the main political party of Italy after the World War II. Although it was the centrist catch all party of Italy, comprising both right and left leaning political factions, the party was centered on traditional and Roman Catholic beliefs.[32] The DC had a traditional view of Italian society, which was a rural, traditional, and highly religious society centered on the family. With both emigration leading into urbanization and the emphasis placed upon the individual from a consumer society; the Economic Miracle dramatically altered the DC's version of Italy.[33] Mariano Rumor, the secretary of the DC party in 1964 said in a party meeting "the family finds itself at the centre of the decomposition of the traditional structures of Italian society".[34] It is in this context that the DC viewed this economic transformation as a negative effect on Italian society because the economy was expanding so fast the family could not adapt.[35] This is because as both urbanization and consumer values replaced religious values, which were fundamental to the Italian family; the product in their eyes was a change into a debased and immoral society.

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[32] Smith Mack, Dennis. "Post War Recovery." In *Modern Italy: A Political History,* 437.
[33] Damilano, ed., Atti e documenti della DC, vol. 2, p. 1819.
[34] Smith Mack, Dennis. "Post War Recovery." In Modern Italy: A Political History, 439.
[35] Ibid, 440.

Likewise, the Communists were hardly more than content with the transition of Italian society into consumerism. This is because as a society becomes more affluent and reaches a higher level of prosperity, there is a general lack of want or change for the political structure. In the Communist case, that was the antithesis of the goal of the party. With the rise of white-collar workers, as opposed to the traditional blue-collar workers, the Communist Party lost a significant amount of support of the Italian populace.[36] The cause of the decline of the Communist party was blamed because of the transition of blue collar into white-collar workers. This changed emphasized the individual because white-collar workers were able to earn enough for televisions, home based appliances, and even vehicles. With the rise of wealth and each family focusing on their immediate members it took the worker out of the mindset of the collective community. This is directly opposed to communist ideology which is built on the idea that the collective group is more important than the individual and this is the antithesis of communist ideology

With the effects of Economic Miracle, the major societal effect on Italian society was the emphasis of the individual as opposed to the whole. With massive urbanization and the use of consumer goods, Italy entered into a period built on materialistic values. This in the context of religious values was a negative influence because the Catholic Church lost major influence over the Italian population. In the political landscape, Italian society became more individualized because it emphasized the individual family which altered the DC's view of traditional Italian family structure. In the Communists case, the transition shows the growing affluence of Italian society based upon the individual family. With the growing affluence it meant that Italians tended to focus less of groups of community and more on the individual. As each large political and social force opposed the Economic Miracle, it shows that the political and social institutions were reactionary and opposed to change which ultimately led to the political instability and

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[36] Ibid.

terrorism that ensued in Italy during the 1970's as the political structure was not able to adapt to the modernity of the Italian economy.

The origins of the Italian Economic Miracle involved the massive labor surplus in Southern Italy, integration into the European Coal and Steel Community, and the formation of the European Economic Community. With integration into ECSC and importation of cheaper energy Italian factories were able to drastically cut their expenses allowing the business to invest in more workers and new machinery. Then with the formation of the EEC opening up trade boundaries, it allowed Northern Italian business to exploit the massive surplus of Southern Italian workers. Many Southern Italians left to go to Northern Italy and it created a massive urban expansion in cities such as Milan, Turin, and Genoa. With the rapidly growing economy the Italian industry changed turning into a consumer economy which produced cars, televisions, and fridges at an affordable price. As economic expansion was occurring the Italian middle class became larger, in which, they were able to buy the goods being produced. Furthermore, the Economic Miracle affected Italian society by replacing the traditional communitarian values of Italian society with a more individualistic approach as the populace was able to earn enough to be dependent without community help. This change lead to a decline in the religious following as many rural areas became less populated with emigration and the two dominant political parties at the time, the Christian Democrats and the Communists. Therefore, it can be argued that the Economic Miracle in Italy after World War II was a completely transformative event that altered all aspects of Italian society reaching from economic, political, and even religiously. However, to understand modern Italy today it is imperative to understand the effects of the Economic Miracle and that it encompassed which would require a much more extensive study than the introduction provided here.

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How to Build a Nation with Films:
A study of Italian film from 1945-1950

Spring 2015
HST 483 – Professor Hanshew

Abstract:

The objective of this paper is to analyze how Italians could have created their post-war identity via neorealist films. This is achieved by considering the following questions: How did Italians view Germans?; How did Italians view Americans?; and How did Italians view Italians?. These questions were analyzed by looking at five films from two leading directors covering the years 1945-1950. The analysis revealed that Italians are united by similar pain, society fails to consider the future of Italy, Americanization inhibits identity creation, and the institutions in place cannot operate under the current situation and cannot provide for its citizens. While the films did achieve their desired outcome (social and moral upheaval), the population was not able to fully embrace the message because they were so traumatized that they subconsciously desired escapist films to sooth their social and psychological trauma.

Italian citizens during the late 1940s confronted a complex reality after the end of the Second World War and the Fascist era. Such difficulties included the creation of a new national and individual identity, which was absent due to the destruction of both Italy and the meaning behind being "Italian". After the fall of Fascism, the once proud regime that Mussolini cultivated left Italians little sense of an identity to cling to and forced many to conceive an anti-fascist nation. Coming out of this chaos, the people struggled to rebuild this concept of identity because they were being stifled by the ever-growing international presence within the country. Yet there was such an immense frustration coming out of Italy during the reconstruction period. Italians had faced the horrors of the war and were now dealing with the horrors of the aftermath. The post-war cinema was a way of expressing the collective struggles and giving the every-day

people a voice. In this way, the unconventional cinematic movement of the late 1940s can arguably be a microcosm of the broader sentiments felt across the country.

By focusing on the two most well known directors, Vittorio De Sica and Roberto Rossellini, this paper seeks to understand the classic – if not traditional – views of the time period. While this cinematic style is characterized for its disillusionment, it forced people to realize that they needed to promote social cohesion in order to morally rebuild Italy. One method to create this solidarity was through defining what is *not* Italian by including portrayals of foreign nations, which played upon the perceptions of the Italian people. Thus, while many post-war Italians used film for entertainment, for others it became a way of constructing a new national and individual identity by looking at De Sica and Rossellini's portrayals of foreigners.

Vittorio De Sica   Roberto Rossellini

This paper will analyze, Rossellini's unofficial war trilogy, *Rome, Open City* (1945), *Paisan* (1946), and *Germany, Year Zero* (1948) as well as De Sica's films, *Shoeshine* (1946) and *The Bicycle Thief* (1948), in the hopes of shedding light upon the beginning of the new identity.

Rome, Open City (1945)

Paisan (1946),

Germany, Year Zero (1948)

Shoeshine (1946)

The Bicycle Thief (1948)

During this decade of reconstruction, the Italian cinema went through a major shift even though they were mostly presenting American films. Although counterintuitive, the Fascists had allowed many American movies to be shown because of similar features in both: "reverence for leaders, importance of family life, and recourse to nationalist rhetoric".[1] The new Italian style was staunchly different from the Fascist productions created a few years prior and correctly

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[1] Matthew Hibberd, *The Media in Italy Press, Cinema and Broadcasting from Unification to Digital.* Maidenhead, England: McGraw Hill/Open University Press, 2008.

labeled as Neorealism.[2] Neorealism films usually wrestled with the altered economic and moral

conditions of post-Second World War Italy. Although difficult to identify because of it having no

single approach, one of the most noticeable characteristics is the sense of dissatisfaction.

Typically, no character is given a happy ending and leaves the audience with a sense of

bewilderment and lacking a feeling of fulfillment. This was a key strategy to keep the watchers

thinking and discussing with one another about their life outside films. Yet life outside the

cinema was similar to the settings of neorealist productions, bleak and dissatisfying. After the

Second World War, those who survived had to rebuild and it was no easy task for a country that

had little money to spend – employment was scarce and food even more so. The necessities of

life soon became commodities the average Italian could no longer afford. By using the same

setting, the film directors hoped to get viewers motivated and communally pick themselves up

again in order to create Rossellini and De Sica's moral rebirth of Italy.

Moreover, this was planned to create the sense of belonging (their national identity) by

making the audience experience shocks like a main character dying, a child being left homeless,

or a man left with nothing. The connection between characters to their audience was as strong as

it was because of the common experiences. All these examples could be seen on the streets of

Italy but it was uncommon to view it in the cinema. Italians during this time were staunchly

political beings, yet to recreate an identity out of the rubble would be difficult without

reawakening the repulsive idea of nationalism. Italians usually went to the cinema as a form of

escapism. Italian comedies and historical documentaries, as well as Hollywood films, crowded

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[2] Vittorio De Sica comments on his work *Shoeshine* and explains neorealism as such: "The experience of the war was decisive for us all. Each felt the mad desire to throw away all the old stories of the Italian cinema, to plant the camera in the midst of real life, in the midst of all that struck our astonished eyes. We sought to liberate ourselves from the weight of our sins, we wanted to look ourselves in the face and tell ourselves the truth, to discover what we really were and to seek salvation…. *Shoeshine* was a small stone, a very small stone, contributed to the moral reconstruction of our country." From *La table ronde* 149 (May 1960), 80.

the silver screen because it helped the Italian people escape from the harsh realities of poverty, social injustice, and unemployment — everything neorealism sought to upset them with to get a response.[3]

Although neorealism is a famous era of films and loved by movie viewers today, they were not as popular to the Italian people when they were first produced.[4] In fact the films by Rossellini and De Sica did rather poorly in the box office (with the exception of Rossellini's *Rome, Open City*) and usually were around seventh place. As Millicent Marcus points out, "the established authorities felt threatened by their films like *Paisan* and labeled them as antagonistic to the national interest."[5] Also, the Vatican's newspaper saw *The Bicycle* Thief as being "uncharitable towards Catholic charities" and *Shoeshine*'s use of the Roman prisons caused the jailors to close the doors on all directors who sought to film there.[6] Thus this brings about the argument of how much influence neorealist films had on the people and if there is any worth in analyzing these productions. However, this was only one path Italians could take to create their identity. There were American products and influences across Italy, all of them Americanizing the country in hopes of banishing communism, which had stable roots within the government. Yet this path lacked the national and self-understanding neorealist thought could give them. This unique view of Italy and its citizens is why it is worthy of research.

That said, by looking at Vittorio De Sica and Roberto Rossellini's films it presents the classic neorealist thought because their films were not only distributed right after the war, but

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[3] While this is true for Italian audiences, in Roberto Rossellini's *Ten Years of Cinema*, he notes the importance of American markets for his fame. "The American market was especially important; when *Roma Città Aperta* and *Paisà* were distributed there, they were received in triumph by critics and a rather specialized audience." p. 94. Taken from David Overbey. *Springtime in Italy: A Reader on Neorealism.*

[4] Peter E. Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present.* 2nd ed. New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1991.

[5] Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Light of Neorealism.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986. Pg. 26.

[6] *Ibid.*

also because they were the masters of the genre. Following De Sica and Rossellini, there were disciples continuing their works as well as a large fan base abroad, though little in Italy. This lack of domestic support was due to the need for escapism that can be seen in the large numbers of American Hollywood films and Italian comedies that filled the screens. This was the antithesis of Neorealism. Yet it is their portrayal of international foreigners and nations that is so revealing. By looking at their interpretations of Americans and Germans during this time period, it reveals the directors' understandings of what it meant to be Italian. Namely, by using the thought: "this is German/American so the contrast must be Italian".

Rome, Open City is often described as being Rossellini's masterpiece. It was one of the first neorealist films and captured the true nature of life during the Second World War. The story centers on Pina, a pregnant fiancée with her second child, her son, Marcello, the priest, Don Pietro Pellegrini, Giorgio Manfredi, and Francesco, Pina's betrothed. However, by the end of the movie, it is realized by the audience that "the protagonist is Rome, as a place, as a people, and as a historic identity".[7] By hiring predominantly non-professional actors, Rossellini desired to convey the adversities and destitution average Italians faced during and coming out of the war as authentically as possible. The audience watching underwent the same adversities as the characters as well. In fact, the deaths of both Don Pietro and Pina were taken from recollections of actual events.[8] It was using similar histories as a collective linkage to enforce the national identity. Moreover, the character, Romoletto (Romulus) is taken from the myth describing the birth of Rome. He is a disabled child with an immense following of other children who fight back against the Germans and symbolizes this sort of "rebirth" of Rome and Italian national identity.

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[7] Millicent Marcus, 42
[8] Millicent Marcus, 37

It is rather obvious to see how Germany is portrayed in this film: as barbaric yet effeminate warmongers eager to spill blood. Yet before analyzing further, what is interesting is the mention – although brief – of the Americans. As Pina looks out on to the rubble and buildings marked with bullet holes, in the dialogue the characters question whether the Americans are real. The scene changes to a blown up house without a roof and she sarcastically replies, "Looks like it".[9] This symbolizes the alliance with the Allies, specifically the Americans. While vowing to help Italy, the viewpoint the average citizen in Italy is the destruction from the bombs raining down and holes in the wall from gunshots. Moreover, with the Marshall Plan, American help came with a price. Italy needed help to rebuild and the United States was happy to oblige, but while Italy received the money to rebuild their culture, it got something more in return: the vast supply of American goods like Pepsi and Hollywood films, these things being one aspect that hindered the rebuilding of the Italian identity. Italy was either going to be Americanized or the people would simply rot away because they were tired and struggling after the war.

As for the German portrayal, the movies were to act as a moral compass, which he presented Germans as lacking. The two Germans, Major Bergmann and Ingrid, are presented as evil viper-like characters with Bergmann being effeminate and Ingrid, a lesbian, seducing Marina, the younger sister of Pina. In the 1940's it was still very much a sin to be homosexual and thus a grave insult towards foreign nations. There are countless examples of the brutality the Italians faced. One of the most interesting is when Don Pietro Pellegrini visits one of the Resistance's bases in order to pick up illegal material. Outside of the building were two German soldiers grasping two sheep demanding that the hotel owner allow them to butcher the sheep

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[9] Roberto Rossellini. *Rome, Open City.* DVD. Italy: Janus Films, 1945.

inside. In response he utters: "Yes, you guys are good at that".[10] In this scene it gives a rather fitting example of how the Italian people felt during the war. The hotel owner symbolizes the leader of Italy allowing the Germans to enter the country (the hotel) where Italians reside and massacre the people who were defenseless (the sheep). The lack of trust in the government after the allowance of the Germans to enter not only continues past the war but it also puts the invasion of the Allies in a grey area. The Allies were never invited into the country unlike the Nazis so is the invader those who try to liberate it or those who work with the government but murder its civilians? It is not hard to imagine the common reaction being the resurfacing of pent up anger and frustration from the lost faith in the government. Every citizen had lost a loved one during the war and by harnessing this frustration, Rossellini was trying to transform it into a force that would unite the people in order to encourage a change in the direction Italy was heading. This is also seen from the fact that an Italian man in the film has no name. Sick and paralyzed, "[it] makes him an emblem of that Rome, which was damaged and helpless, yet unwilling to surrender either to superior military force, or to its own will to die."[11]

In order to understand fully Rossellini's version of reconstruction, one needs to understand his connection to the Church and religion. As the home of the Pope, Italy's identity has been tied to the Church. In his films, Rossellini seems to understand that religion will still be an important aspect to Italian society. He himself was consumed with interest in Christian values, teachings, and history. Often his films dealt with the question: "what role does religion play in the modern world"? In order to answer this question, he uses Don Pietro, the priest working with an atheist and a communist, to show that those working for the betterment are not as bad as those who brutalize others. Yet it was the Germans and Fascists who were for a structured religion —

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[10] *Ibid.*
[11] Millicent Marcus, 46.

the closest group to the Church. The idea of a priest working with an atheist and communist is unheard of! However, this does not mean that Communism was viewed as negative in his films or for that matter in Italian society. In fact, the bravery the communists displayed in his films and the influence communists had on Italy prove this is not the case. What was negative was the Church's view of communism rather than Rossellini's. Nonetheless, Rossellini creates characters that are easily characterized as good and evil. His accepting of the atheists and communists working with the Church was a way of promoting solidarity and expressing the idea that Italy is in need of those who fight to save their country. The different ideologies mean little if they are fighting for a good cause.

Next in Rossellini's war trilogy came *Paisan*, which details six stories from Sicily to the Po Valley. Every event is self-contained with a different problem, language barriers, poverty, the partisan struggle, and religion during wartime. This film is more directed to the portrayal of the United States being a comrade-in-arms rather than an illusive destructive force, which presents Italians as all being partisans. Even more fascinating is that the second and third episodes are the only sections in Rossellini's war trilogy that details Italian life when the Allied forces remained after Italy's liberation. The second episode was designed to get people motivated to fix Italy with the question: "what world do we want our children to live in?" Although this question is left unanswered from his films altogether, he views Italy as a socially and individually aware society, a secure nation capable of taking care of the orphans from the war, and a united nation working together to reestablish Italy in any way so long as it is collaborative.

By using Pasquale, an orphan of the war, as a main character, it's an emotional realization that there are children exactly like him outside of the cinema who need help. When Pasquale meets a drunken military policeman (MP) named Joe, his natural response is to steal

whatever he can from the American soldier. After some time Joe finds the boy again and asks, "Why do you steal?"[12] He is met with an unresponsive child and forces Pasquale to take him to his home. It is at Pasquale's "home" — or what little of a home he had — that Joe realizes the true extent of the aftermath the war created. Orphaned and penniless because he is too young to work, Joe begins to understand the answer to his question, "Why do you steal?" Survival causes these orphaned children like Pasquale steal and pawn off their findings. Yet as these children age, it is chilling to think of how those orphaned will act when they are grown up. Unfortunately, Joe could not cope with the tragedy and ran away leaving Pasquale abandoned and helpless. These two characters, Joe and Pasquale, serve as a reminder that although they are liberated, the fight to live has still carried over into the post-war times. While the American soldiers and MPs are swarming the nation, when they are confronted with the true issues like poverty and neglect, they cannot handle the situation and run away. Thus, only true change can come from the Italian people.

In the third episode, the American soldier, Fred, is showered in flowers as the Allied forces first arrive in Rome, the sincere gladness can be seen on the faces of everyone there. Yet as time goes on, people have become more accustomed to the Allies living in the city and life goes on. Noticeably, the characters have all become sardonic, disillusioned, and unfulfilled in this episode. Fred, once loved by all throughout Rome becomes a cynical American soldier no longer holding on to the hope of finding his love, Francesca. Moreover, when he stays with Francesca for the night, he drunkenly fumes that everything has changed since his arrival. The drunkenness of the Americans in both the episodes serves the purpose of presenting them as unable to conceive of the realities Italians go through as well as enforcing the idea that only

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12 Roberto Rossellini. *Paisan*. DVD. Italy: Janus Films, 1946.

Italians can rebuild their nation. American soldiers are able to leave Italy and have no real interest in the rebuilding. Rather, there is the economical interest with the Marshall Plan.

One part of life that had not changed since the occupation of German troops and after the war was the life of many single women. The characters Marina from *Rome, Open City* and Francesca from *Paisan*, both played by Maria Michi, prostitute themselves in order to survive. When the American soldier describes his unsuccessful search for his love, he soon begins to condemn her. In reply, Francesca dismally declares, "Rome is full of girls like me".[13] Single Italian women were desperate and prostitution was an effective way of achieving at least a semi-comfortable lifestyle. By prostituting towards American soldiers who had money and prospects across the sea, they ensured themselves a more certain future than Italian men could give them. At one point Francesca yells, "You'll starve when they're gone!" and "You'll be in rags like before!" at another prostitute.[14] Thus, although Italy was considered to be free after 1945, this shows that nothing had really changed for many people. The ways they had to endure post-war life were the same as wartime regardless of the liberation. This forces the audience to realize the desperation their country is in. Only by collaboration of Italians can they make life better for not only the children but the women as well – and help them live a more virtuous lifestyle that was sought after.

The last film of Rossellini's trilogy is *Germany, Year Zero*, which features German life after the war through the eyes of a child. The purpose of this was to give the audience the unique experience of viewing the war not only from the German perspective but a child's as well. The significance of this it to present the war not only was having devastating effects on Italy but all of Europe. Like the second episode in *Paisan*, a child, Edmund, is the main character that has to

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[13] *Ibid.*
[14] *Ibid.*

learn how to survive after liberation. Although this is from the German perspective, there are

definite similarities to be found between the ways the everyday people were living in both

Germany and Italy. For example, Edmund is too young to work yet he has to support his family

like many of the children whose family survived the war. Many families had members who could

no longer work, either from sickness, age, or they had other disabilities. His sister, Eva,

prostitutes herself like many of the Italian women using men in order to obtain cigarettes and the

like. However, their father who is bedridden and cannot work said one of the most fitting

remarks of the era, "Condemned to live".[15] These few words embody all that neorealism was

trying to convey, orphaned children, overwhelming poverty, rampant unemployment… the post-

war decade was in a way worse than the paradise many Italians hoped to find after death. Also,

while this does bring up the argument of a universal fate, the film is more of a reminder to not

become a nation devoted to hate. It uses Germany as a historical idea from the First World War,

whom rebuilt their nation on the hate of the Treaty of Versailles. It is a warning that if Italy

retains the sentiments, history will repeat itself and ensure that Italy will be worse off in the

future. Also it is a reminder to Italy to not forget the German suffering from the outcome as well.

However, the shocking feature of the movie is the choices the young Edmund makes,

which in any other period of time would seem damning. His father's words and those of his

former Nazi sympathizing teacher convince him that killing a person during such struggles like

poverty is actually a heroic gesture, a form of sympathy. Rossellini presents the twisted nature

people have turned into through the body of Edmund. Even more, to the audience it generates the

question: "how did things become so terrible that a thirteen year old boy would commit murder

and perceive it as heroic"? After the Second World War, many Italians still believed children

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[15] Roberto Rossellini, *Germany, Year Zero*. DVD. Italy: Janus Films, 1948.

should be virtuous and innocent. For one to commit such a grave sin is truly horrifying. Therefore, Rossellini argues that uplifting the nation and creating a stable society is one of the most successful ways to preserve the innocence of a child.

Vittorio De Sica also shared this notion of the importance of children. Turning to his productions, there is perhaps a more theatrical yet nonetheless relevant depiction of the average child. In the film *Shoeshine*, it presents life from the perspective of two young boys, Pasquale Maggi and Giuseppe Filippucci, who work tirelessly as shoe shiners in order to buy a horse. Giuseppe is lucky enough to have his family, with the exception of his father, yet Pasquale has none left. While working one day, they are arrested for being an accessory to theft and selling illegal goods given to them by Giuseppe's brother. As punishment they are both sent to a juvenile jail until the trial. In this trial the lawyer says, "the people who in pursuit of our passions, abandon our children to fend for themselves, children who are all alone".[16] Many neorealist directors like De Sica and Rossellini viewed selfishness — like war — as the root of all the problems and thus social cohesion would fix the nation by the community selflessly working together. In fact they show selfishness and greed "spreading throughout the whole community" rather than staying with only one or two characters.[17] This can be seen through the way Giuseppe's family uses the kids in order to rob a psychic. They persuade the two children to sell stolen American blankets and when they are charged with accessory, instead of turning himself in, Giuseppe's brother lets them stay in prison hoping that a package of food would suffice for their silence.

What is unique to this film is foreigners are not directly in the film itself but rather their stuff – the American blankets. Only mentioned once, it sets the stage for the rest of the entire

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[16] Vittorio De Sica. *Shoeshine.* DVD. Italy: International Classic Films, 1946.
[17] Flavia Skov. *Popular Italian Cinema Culture and Politics in a Postwar Society.* London: I.B. Tauris, 2011. Pg.128.

movie. From these goods, the Italians can enter into a life of crime by selling them on the black market (also being a big part of *Germany Year Zero*). However, in the case of the film, the products are used as a guise to rob houses. Pretending to be the police, the robbers "arrest" or threaten the homeowner with jail time for buying illegal products. The movie serves to show the audience that in the post-war period, selfishness and greed thrive in society corrupting the children regardless of their choices and forcing them to spend their lives either committing crimes or suffering in the jails.

De Sica's last film to be discussed, *The Bicycle Thief*, has no mention of foreigners from other nations. However it is included here to describe how Italians viewed themselves rather than how they viewed others. It is important to mention this here because although the audience can look at others to find their "Italian-ness", looking at how the typical Italian survives the post-war is just as important for a national identity. The film by De Sica follows a poor, desperate father, Antonio Ricci, his wife, Maria, and his son, Bruno trying to survive in post-war Rome. Originally selling his bicycle for food, Antonio soon gets a job, which requires a bicycle. His wife subsequently sells their sheets from off their beds to buy the new bike. Unfortunately it is stolen the first day of his work and he is forced to spend the rest of the day searching with his son for the bike that seems to have disappeared into thin air.[18]

Not only is there this sense of desperation and hopelessness when Antonio first looses his bike but there is also the presence of his son, Bruno who serves as a reminder of what is at risk. Bruno serves as the child's perspective, such as in his film *Shoeshine*, and Rossellini's *Paisà* and *Germany Year Zero,* to reinforce the idea of an Italian family being something to treasure and hold sacred. Millicent Marcus again points out "the bicycle is the emblem of all those cultural

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[18] Vittorio De Sica. *The Bicycle Thief*. DVD. Italy: Image Entertainment, 1948.

and material forces that determine the relationship from without."[19] There are many layers brought out through the use of Bruno, not only is there Antonio's conscience, but the relationship that changes between the father and son. Towards the end, Antonio's metamorphosis into a criminal mentality (through sheer deprivation) causes a sort of identity crisis for Bruno when thinking about his father. Although Antonio is his father, he has "abdicated any claim to patriarchal respect by violating the legal sanctions on which all authority rests."[20]

Yet De Sica's portrayal of authorities who are supposed to be people the citizens like, the Church, the law, and the trade unions, all fail in the end. He shows that these groups have a different perspective from the average citizen. When Antonio claims his bike has been stolen, a journalist soon appears and asks if the police have any sensational news.[21] The reply given to the journalist: "No, nothing, only a bike."[22] The loss of the Antonio's bicycle is uninteresting to these men yet it means the livelihood of the entire Ricci family. De Sica includes this to show that only the citizens can bond together. Although all of the institutions are important, which he also includes in the film as well, there is something missing between the average citizen and the institution when perspective is different.

Overall, both Rossellini's war trilogy and De Sica's films help the audience come to terms with the injustice and inhumanities of war and provide a social commentary on inequality faced by the Italian people. In *Rome, Open City*, Rossellini uses Germans to present Italians as victims to be united by a similar pain. *Paisan* demonstrates the inability to create a national identity with relentless Americanization under the Marshall Plan. *Germany, Year Zero* has a different take on Germans but expresses the idea that children are the future of a nation and

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[19] Millicent Marcus, 59.
[20] Millicent Marcus, 62.
[21] Millicent Marcus, 54.
[22] Vittorio De Sica. *The Bicycle Thief*.

society worldwide has failed them. In De Sica's *Shoeshine*, the damages to society as a whole are clearly defined in the breaking of the bonds of brotherhood and family. Finally, *The Bicycle Thief* shows the desperation of the Italian person and how institutions like the Church and police force failed the people. Although these films are popular now, the audience at the time was too traumatized and demanded escapist films rather than confront their situation. Yet these films laid out a path to Italian identity for future generations and consolidated the Italian struggles abroad since neorealist films were more popular elsewhere.

In conclusion, while many post-war Italians went to the cinema for entertainment, for others it became a way of constructing a new national and individual identity by looking at De Sica and Rossellini's portrayals of foreigners. Neorealist movies such as those made by those directors played upon the emotional sentiments of the audience by using stories that could actually be the plight of an average Italian. These films were utilized by active citizens to motivate the public to conquer the problems arising from their liberation and declaring the need for social cohesion to solve them. Thus, this era of film was not only a form of escapism but it created groups of citizens questioning what it meant to be truly Italian.

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"We understand better than anyone else how much work goes into every pound of bacon":

Gender and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers

In an interview conducted around 1969, a Black woman working in an automobile factory in Detroit lamented the plight of Black working class women, declaring that they "understand better than anyone else how much work goes into every pound of bacon, and into every slice of bread. We, more than anyone else in the workforce, know what it means to be laid off. We, more than anyone else in the workforce, know what it means to be looking, always looking, for work."[1] The feeling of frustration with a system that burdened women three times over because of their race, class, and gender took on a particular form in the "Model City" of Detroit and especially among its industrial workforce. During the late 1960s in the heyday of the Black Power era, members of the black working class began militantly organizing in the factories of Chrysler, Ford, and General Motors for better working conditions and an end to racism. Their targets were not only the plant management, but also the union bureaucracy of the United Auto Workers (UAW). Calling each local struggle a Revolutionary Union Movement, together they formed the city-wide League of Revolutionary Black Workers. These workers were self-described Marxist-Leninists and the architects of chants such as "U-A-W means You Ain't White" and "Put a Halter on Walter."[2] Black women, like the one quoted earlier, were active participants in these organizations. They helped with mobilizing voter turnout, spearheaded

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[1]   Unknown speaker. Vincent Voice Library, *Finally Got the News* Collection (VVL), DB14464. 14:00. Accessed November 2015. (All subsequent references to this collection will be abbreviated to VVL.)
[2]   VVL, DB14402. 2:00. "Walter", referring to Walter Reuther, the then president of the UAW-International Union.

efforts to organize non-auto workers, and faced their own particular struggles within the plant and within the community. They were also participants of and catalysts for the split that led to the disintegration of the League as a formal organization in 1971. This paper is a preliminary analysis of the role that gender played in the history of the League. It examines the role of women in the League, sexism within the League's leadership, and larger questions regarding gender and African American activism. Black women were active in the League and they were the organizers and targets of small women-centered efforts. However, the leaders of the League preferred to see women as part of a group of Black workers, rather than a distinct subgroup.

The research for this paper involved historical and sociology monographs, articles from journals and online collections, documents from the MSU Special Collections Library, and the *Finally Got the News* collection found in the Vincent Voice Library which includes hours of interviews and other materials used to make the documentary on the League. Perhaps predictably, it was quite a challenge to find sources that documented the participation and perception of Black women in the League. For those attempting to do Black women's history, the search for primary documents is somewhat hindered due to the fact that "the black woman's world has been peripheral to those most likely to keep records of any kind, men and white women."[3] Even in the Vincent Voice Library collections, out of hours of recorded interviews there is only one interview with a Black woman. If more time were available to devote to this project, I would attempt to search through the archives at the Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University. Perhaps more fruitfully, I would try to do an oral history project with some of the women participants who wish to share their experiences. For instance, Cleo Silvers, cited a few times later in this paper, is still alive. Despite these source limitations, this paper

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[3]   Deborah Gray White, "Mining the Forgotten: Manuscript Sources for Black Women's History," *The Journal of American History,* Vol. 74, No. 1, 1987, 237-242.

represents a point of a departure for those wishing to place the League of Revolutionary Black Workers within the discourse about gender and Black Power-era organizations.

There is still much to be written about the League. There are only two book-length studies on the League, both falling more comfortably within the discipline of sociology rather than history. They are James A. Geschwender's *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency: the League of Revolutionary Black Workers* (1977) and Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin's *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying* (1975). These two works have been extremely important in contextualizing the rise and fall of the organization as well providing revealing interviews with participants. However, the two books certainly have their shortcomings. While neither dive into polemics, sometimes they read more as contemporary primary sources because the authors were physically and politically engaged with the League (Geschwender was a Professor who talked Marxist strategy with members of the League and Georgakas was an anarchist and founding member of New York-based direct action group Up Against the Wall Mother Fuckers). Additionally, one member of the League has claimed that *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying* "grossly distorts the history and development" of the League.[4] Also, in part a product of their time, both works hardly examine gender roles and gendered ideology within the League directly.

The Black Power Era

By the late 1960s the nonviolent dogmatism of the Civil Rights movement was waning in popularity and these changing attitudes ushered in what became known as the Black Power era. Historian William L. Van Deburg points to the thought of Malcolm X as the ideological forefather of the Black Power militants such as Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Angela

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[4] A. Muhammad Ahmad, "1968-1971: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers." libcom.org. Published online on Oct 28 2005. Accessed November 2015. https://libcom.org/library/league-revolutionary-black-workers

Davis, Eldridge Cleaver, and Huey Newton. Malcolm X's writings on self-defense, racial pride, and the re-evaluation of Black people by themselves were very influential on the next crop of Black activists.[5] However, one could just as easily point to Robert F. Williams (*Negroes with Guns)* or Gloria Richardson (of the militant Civil Rights movement of Cambridge, Maryland) as other proto-Black Power era figures.[6]

Despite the inconclusiveness of a Black Power political revolution, the fact that Black Power was "essentially cultural" meant that its' ramifications were felt in much of American life. The most well known and influential "cultural nationalist" figures that emerged in this period were Maulana Ron Karenga, founder of US organization, and Amiri Baraka/ Leroi Jones. Yet even groups like the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense were not totally bereft of cultural aspects (Indeed, they had their own musical group called "The Lumpen"). The boundaries between cultural nationalism and revolutionary nationalism were certainly blurred.[7]

Much of the Black Power-era ideas about Black liberation implicitly or explicitly elevated Black masculinity and diminished women's role in the movement. Cultural nationalist Karenga is described as assigning "rigidly subordinate roles to women."[8] Additionally, the men in the Black Power movement intertwined the notions of "liberation" with reclaiming antiquated notions of masculinity. In this way, "the black man's attempts at self-definition presumed the right to define Afro-American women as well."[9] Historian Kimberly Springer examines the influence that white upper class values had on perceptions of what liberation could look like. She

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[5]   William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1-5.

[6]   Sharon Harley, "Chronicles of a Death Foretold." in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil-Rights Black Power Movement,* edited by Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin. (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 174-192.

[7]   Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon,* 9-10, 171, 176-177, 175.

[8]   Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til The Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America.* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 218.

[9]   Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon,* 297

elaborates on Van Deburg's argument, explaining that "the roots of black women's second-class citizenship are embedded in bourgeois notions of womanhood, femininity, and motherhood… An implicit, sometimes explicit, goal of the movement was the reassertion of the male breadwinner as head of household."[10] The centering of the Black masculine experience during this time was not omnipresent, however. Tracye A. Matthews complicates the hegemonic perception of the Black Panther Party as hyper-masculine and sexist, arguing that media focus on "gun barrel politics" distorted the ways that the Panthers were progressive regarding gender politics.[11] Additionally, some members of the League at least acknowledged the fact that the single Black mother faced particular sorts of oppression because of her status and gender, pointing to how members of the League have helped "ADC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) mothers who are jammed up".[12] However, the sentiments that women's position in the Black liberation movement should be "prone" were felt throughout this period and informed the decisions of the League of Revolutionary Black workers to center racism, capitalism, and imperialism (not gender) in their analysis of oppression.

Detroit, Postwar to the 1967 Uprising

The city of Detroit in the late 1960s was home to a variety of problems that made it possible for an organization for the League to appear. The one-time "Arsenal of Democracy" had a long legacy of brutal racial housing discrimination. Thomas Sugrue explains that the exclusion of Black people from white neighborhoods was not an unforeseen consequence of capital

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[10]   Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 23.
[11]   Tracye A. Matthews, "No One Ever Asks What a Man's Role in the Revolution Is," in *Sisters in Struggle: African American Women in the Civil-Rights Black Power Movement,* edited Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin. (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 249-250.
[12]   Kenneth Cockrel, VVL, **DB14489.**

investment, an ugly hangover from de jure Jim Crow, or a preference of Black people to live in their own neighborhood. Instead, he argues that, "private-sector discrimination was… a direct consequence of a partnership between the federal government and local bankers and real estate brokers."[13]

The history of housing discrimination and white opposition to the integration of Black people into white neighborhoods stretched back to the 1920s. The landmark case of Ossian Sweet in 1926 arose when a white mob attacked a Black family moving into a white neighborhood and the Black family responded with gunfire. Victoria Wolcott highlights the gendered dynamics of this incident and the way that "Masculinity was defined, in part, by the ability of men to "protect" women in the domestic sphere."[14]

Detroit was also the site of years of industrial decline and "decentralization" by the Big Three auto manufacturing companies during the 1950s. Sugrue notes how this process facilitated white workers vacating the city of Detroit and moving to the suburbs. Investments followed. This left the city without a tax base and ultimately the city became poorer and Blacker as a result of these processes.[15]

In the eyes of some of the Black community, deindustrialization and redlining encouraged the sense that they were betrayed by the city power structure. In 1963, the Reverend Charles W. Butler, a prominent African American minister and Civil Rights advocate, observed the effects of these political decision on the consciousness of the Black Detroiters. He asserts that, "The desire and ability to move without the right to move is refined slavery… [racial

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[13]   Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), Princeton Classic Edition, 43.
[14]   Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 142.
[15]   Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis,* 149.

segregation] spawned and cultivated the spirit of rebellion."[16] The Reverend would prove to be more true than he may have wished. In July of 1967 following a raid on an after-hours bar (a "blind pig"), the city exploded in a violent uprising against businesses and police with low estimates of damage beginning at $32 million.[17]

These rebellions had a direct effect on the formation of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. Ernie Allen, a participant in and critic of the League, asserts that "the LRBW was an organized outgrowth of the 1967 black urban rebellion of Detroit."[18] In Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin's seminal study on the League, they deliberately begin their narrative with the "Great Rebellion of July 1967" and the impact that had on the people of Detroit.[19] Certainly, the riots were had a large impact on the consciousness of Detroiters. Sylvia McClain, who was 14 years old in 1967, points to her encounter at gunpoint with the National Guard during the rebellion as the reason that she "became what I am today". McClain later went on to join the Black Panther Party and help establish numerous student and neighborhood organizations.[20]

In addition to affecting the general consciousness of the Black community, the rebellion was the explicit cause for the auto plants to hire many new young Black workers, some who would go on to support the League. In order to curb one of the perceived catalysts for the rebellion- Black unemployment- auto companies began purposefully hiring workers that were Black and unskilled. In 1968, Henry Ford II famously said "If they want jobs we will give them

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[16]   Charles W. Butler, "Message to the Open Occupancy Conference", in *City in Racial Crisis: The Case of Detroit Pre and Post the 1967 Riot*. edited by Leonard Gordon William (C Brown Publishers, 1971), quoted in Segrue page 258.

[17]   Sidney Fine, Violence in the *Model City: The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1989) 297.

[18]   Ernest Allen, "Dying From the Inside." in *They Should Have Served that Cup of Coffee,* edited by Dick Cluster, (Boston: South End Press, 1979), 75.

[19]   Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying: A Study In Urban Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 1-2.

[20]   Sylvia McClain, "Riot 101: 1967." in *Eyes on Fire: Witnesses to the Detroit Riot of 1967,* edited by Heather Buchanan et. al. (Detroit: Aquarius Press, 2007), 27.

jobs" and President of Ford, Arjay Miller, said that the company's purpose was nothing less than

to "eliminate hard-core unemployment in the inner city." The site of the Dodge Revolutionary

Union Movement (DRUM), Chrysler received a grant on February 1st, 1968 to provide jobs for

750 "hard-core unemployed and to enroll an additional 1,295 underemployed persons in a 'skill-

improvement program.'"[21] The Detroit auto companies' clamoring to help build the "New

Detroit" encouraged the hiring of many young Black workers who were likely to be sympathetic

to shop-floor militancy.

Additionally, 1960s Detroit was host to a vibrant community of radicals. C.L.R. James

and Grace Lee Boggs lived in the city and were publishing written pieces on Marxism, labor

activism, and revolution. The Socialist Workers Party had active support and there was much

sympathy for the Republic of New Africa in Detroit.[22] The future core cadre of the League all

studied Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* with Martin Glaberman in the early 1960s.[23]

Black Labor and the UAW

Black industrial laborers had a long and antagonistic history within the UAW. They were

originally hired en masse in Ford's River Rouge plant as strikebreakers during the UAW's fight

to organize the auto industry.[24] This move encouraged the UAW to admit Black workers into the

union to counter the strategy of the management.[25] Following this, however, Blacks continued to

be sidelined within the union. Even in the late 1960s, "As a matter of principle, the UAW also

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[21]   Fine, *Violence in the Model City,* 442-443.
[22]   James A Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency: the League of Revolutionary Black Workers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 78. Joseph, *Waiting 'Til The Midnight Hour,* 186. Joseph actually credits the rise of the League to "living room chats where Jimmy and Grace Boggs and youthful militants traded war stories and plotted revolution."
[23]   Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency,* 170.
[24]   August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 16-22.
[25]   *Ibid,* 30-33.

placed economic issues that affected the bulk of the rank and file ahead of race-specific measures."[26] Despite Walter Reuther's very publicized support for Martin Luther King Jr., including his marching with King in the 1963 Walk to Freedom down Woodward Avenue, he opposed efforts to make the UAW more democratic and more proactive about supporting the concerns of Black UAW members. In particular Local 3 (the local at the Dodge Main plant in Hamtramck) had a longstanding reputation of union racism. Sugrue notes that, "white officials gerrymandered elections to dilute black votes and influence."[27] The Black workforce was a significant portion of the auto manufacturing workforce. In 1970, in the whole Detroit metropolitan area, Black workers made up 23% of the industrial workforce in the auto industry compared to 18% of the population of Metropolitan Detroit.[28]

Additionally, the UAW did almost nothing to stop the trend of workplace discrimination. An analysis of in-plant racism by Georgakas and Surkin demonstrate that **"**[Blacks] invariably got the worst and most dangerous jobs: the foundry, the body shop, and engine assembly, jobs requiring the greatest physical exertion and jobs which were the noisiest, dirtiest. and most dangerous in the plant."[29] Yet, the union did not prioritize combating these trends for fear of jeopardizing agreements with the plant management. Black workers also were excluded from seniority benefits because many of them were hired after white workers because of the long history of discriminatory hiring practices. In the 1950s, it was Black men and women who took the brunt of auto-plant firings. Jacqueline Jones describes how with technological innovation in the 1950s led to "layoffs for Black men and women who lacked the seniority rights that unions

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[26]   Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis,* 102.
[27]   *Ibid,* 101.
[28]   Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency,* 45. 1970 U.S. Census. Statistics for SMSA 2160. Accessed online using Social Explorer on December 19th, 2015. http://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/C1970/R11090099?ReportId=R11090099
[29]   Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying,* 35.

guaranteed to longer-term white employees."[30] The UAW again did nothing to combat this injustice.

Working Class Women, the Auto Plants, and the UAW

Women in the auto industry occupied very specific positions in the plants. In 1970 Detroit, women make up 13% of the total auto-industry manufacturing workforce. Black women make up only 2% of the total workforce (5,712 individuals). That it 16.7% of the women's workforce.[31] During World War II, Black women predominantly worked as janitors, matrons, and government inspectors.[32] In the 1960s when they began to enter more skilled positions in the plants in greater numbers, they both celebrated the new opportunities as well as encountered new struggles because of their race and gender.[33] A Black woman production line worker in 1970 experienced these struggles, saying, "I don't have skills like a secretary or something. I went into the factory because it was the only place where I could get a job making decent money, but if you stay a lady, you don't make it out there. They all put the pressure on you."[34]

The UAW was, on paper, progressive on women's issues. In a statement written in April of 1970, they ratified a resolution that affirmed that the UAW will "insist… on the right of every woman to work" and 'to be paid for her labors on the same scale as men doing the same or comparable work" and "on the rights of equal opportunity for advancement."[35] Yet even by

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[30]   Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Perseus Book Group, 2010), 230.
[31]   Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency,* 45.
[32]   Ruth Milkman. *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex During World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 55.
[33]   Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow,* 244-247.
[34]   Carla Cook, interview quoted in Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 169.
[35]   Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement*: *Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 207.

1974, "in the sewing divisions of auto industries… women and black men have the hard, heavy, lower-paid jobs involved in sewing and lifting upholstery [while] white men have the light, high-paid jobs."[36] Women were also often relegated to clerical work because of notions of gender-appropriate work. Furthermore, in the 1970s blue-collar women had a higher rate of unemployment than blue-collar men.[37]

The UAW did make some inroads into women's issues, notably their dedication to the organizing of Technical, Office, and Professional (TOP) Workers. Yet Sugrue holds them accountable for other grievous errors, saying that, "In the case of women workers, however, the seniority system failed altogether. Union and company officials viewed women's work as temporary, and refused to defend women's seniority rights during the wartime reconversion. Women were invariably assigned to separate seniority lines, with separate pay schedules, reflecting and hardening the gendered division of labor that prevailed in auto work."[38] Union and company collusion to marginalize women was felt especially hard on black women workers. Because of "the [Black] husband's poor economic position in the labor force, the black family is more dependent on the black woman's wages."[39] Black women are more likely to work at jobs with less prestige than black men, and in a less diverse pool of jobs. Black women are also more likely to have inferior jobs even within the same occupations as white women.

Rise and Fall of the League

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[36]   Pamela A. Roby, *The Conditions of Women in Blue Collar, Industrial, and Service Jobs: A Review of Research and Proposals for Research Action and Policy* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1974), 25, quoted in Mary Frank Fox and Sharlene Hesse-Biber, *Women at Work* (Mayfield Publishing Company, 1984), 119.
[37]   Fox and Hesse-Biber, *Women at Work,* 120.
[38]   Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis,* 104.
[39]   Fox and Hesse-Biber, *Women at Work,* 158.

In May of 1968, the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) was formed. It followed on the heels of a wildcat strike protesting the speedup of the assembly line.[40] This first wildcat saw 4,000 workers leave the plant and was the first strike to happen at the Dodge Main plant in fourteen years.[41] The demands issued by DRUM included the immediate hiring of 50 Black foremen, 10 Black general foremen, 3 Black superintendents, and a Black plant manager. They also demanded all Black doctors and 50% Black nurses in the medical centers at Dodge Main and that "all Black workers immediately stop paying union dues" and those funds instead "be levied to the Black community to aid in self-determination for Black people."[42]

A series of additional wildcats inspired the formation of affiliate organizations at other plants. These included the Eldon Avenue Revolutionary Union Movement (ELRUM) and the Ford Revolutionary Union Movement (FRUM) at the River Rouge plant.[43] To coordinate the activities of the various local Revolutionary Unions, the League was formed in 1969 and opened it's office in October.[44] The groups staged wildcats, boycotts, and in UAW elections ran their own slate of candidates against the union bureaucracy.

The heads of the League described it as "the only avowedly Marxist-Leninist approach to organizing Blacks". They were critical of other revolutionary groups, such as the Black Panther Party for not organizing factory workers. They were also critical of nationalist groups like the Nation of Islam.[45] In an interview, one time Executive Board member Mike Hamlin explains that the League believed in the "revolutionary potential [of] the Black working class at the point of

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[40]   Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency,* 89.
[41]   Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*, 24.
[42]   A. Muhammad Ahmad, "1968-1971: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers."
[43]   Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying,* 106, 85.
[44]   Ahmad, "1968-1971: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers."
[45]   Kenneth Cockrell, VVL, DB14397.

production."[46] However, the ideology of the League was never as clear cut as some of their spokespeople may have implied.

There was tension between the leadership regarding questions of nationalism, focusing on only plant organizing, cross-racial alliances, and gender. Some of these tensions led to the collapse of the League. One participant observed that "problems with structure became so thoroughly intertwined with those of negative personal behavior on the part of leaders and followers alike."[47] Geschwender points to ideological differences within the leadership cadre about how to deal with dual oppressions of race and class.[48] Another strain on the League was the fact that they were perpetually short on funds and this made it difficult for them to sustain all the necessary operations to keep the organization intact.[49]

Women in the League

An overview of the League and its affiliates may give the impression that the organization was completely made up of men. However, this outwardly masculine presentation merely obscures the existence of women and the roles that they played within the organization. As discussed above, women had jobs in the auto plants, albeit jobs that were segregated on the basis of sex and jobs that seemed to be on a "last-hired, first-fired" basis. Black women are seen walking into the plants alongside men in the *Finally Got the News* documentary. There are also women handing out the DRUM newsletter to their fellow workers at the plant gates.[50] Women voices are heard loud and clear during days when DRUM was getting the plant workers to go

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[46]   Mike Hamlin, "Revolution at the Point of Production: An Interview with Mike Hamlin of DRUM and The League of Revolutionary Black Workers." Interviewed by Jack Taylor. *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men.* 2:1, Autumn 2013.
[47]   Allen, "Dying from the Inside," 105.
[48]   Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency,* 182.
[49]   John Watson, VVL, DB14408.
[50]   *Finally Got the News,* Documentary, Copyright 1970. 16:30. Accessed online in November 2015 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgJd_MvJVzg

vote for the DRUM candidates in a union election. Women in the crowd can be heard stopping

workers and asking ""have you voted brother?" and "have you voted lady?" and responding with

an enthusiastic "right on!" if they have.[51]

Militant activity led by women turns up throughout the history of DRUM and the League.

In a detail that was often "forgotten" by League leaders in their later recollection of the May

1968 wildcat, the strike that spurred the creation of DRUM was actually instigated by Polish

women who were doing clerical work in the Dodge plant.[52] Women were also forgotten in their

role in the proto-League organization. Uhuru was a small militant student organization centered

around high schools and Wayne State University and later its' members became half of the

Executive Board of the League. Uhuru leaders included women, notably Gwendlyin Kemp.[53]

Gwendlyin was arrested along with Luke S. Tripp Jr., John Williams, John Watson, and General

Baker in a 1963 protest for the killing of sex worker Cynthia Scott at the hands of the Detroit

Police.[54] The four men went on to be leaders in the League. Yet Gwen Kemp's leadership in

Uhuru did not translate over into later League activities.

Women were certainly attracted to the League. Cleo Silvers, a Black woman from New

York City, was recruited to come to Detroit to help organize the League. She began her

organizing experience in New York in the DRUM-inspired Health Revolutionary Unity

Movement (HRUM) which was trying to organize hospital workers in New York City. She was

hired into the Dodge Truck plant in Warren where she began her organizing efforts. In her time

spent in the plant she was witness to the women-specific oppressions that existed on the shop

floor. She shares that "I had been harassed by foremen. You know, foremen's thing with women,

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[51]   Unknown Speakers, VVL, DB14402
[52]   Martin Glaberman, "The Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement." April/May 1969. Accessed online
November 2015 at https://libcom.org/library/dodge-revolutionary-union-movement-martin-glaberman
[53]   Ahmad, "1968-1971: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers."
[54]   *Detroit News*, October 14th 1963.

that's another issue. There weren't a lot of women in the plant, and those that were there were always being harassed, whether you were black or white or whatever. It was not unexpected for a foreman to come up to you and say, if you sleep with me I'll give you a better job." These conditions helped to convince Stivers that a revolutionary union movement was necessary to change the working conditions of the plant.[55] It is worth noting that Stivers mad the transition to organizing for the League from a more stereotypically "feminine" organizing effort: she was heavily involved in tenant's rights organizing in New York City prior to her experience with HRUM and the League.[56]

Women were also included in the election slates that DRUM ran against the official UAW candidates. Although none won their race (only 2 of DRUM's 35 candidates were elected[57]) the inclusion of them on the ballot at all is significant in the face of DRUM's all-men leadership.[58] Additionally, women like Helen Jones and Mabel Turner were instrumental in the operations of the League's Black Star Publishing and Black Star Productions.[59]

Despite the focus on exclusively men for the duration of the documentary, the filmmakers of *Finally Got the News* include a very interesting interview with a League woman at the end of the film. She shares the anecdote of a Black women worker, saying, "Like the majority of her black sisters, Mrs. Smith has to work, not for any kind of fulfillment but because of sheer bread and butter need." She goes on to explain the situation of working class women, saying. "We, more than anyone else in the workforce, know what it means to be laid off. We, more than anyone else in the workforce, know what it means to be looking, always looking, for work. We

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[55] Cleo Silvers, "When the union's the enemy: an interview with Cleo Silvers." interviewed by Andrew Elrod. Accessed online November 2015 at https://libcom.org/history/when-unions-enemy-interview-cleo-silvers

[56] Roberta Gold, "'I Had Not Seen Women like That Before': Intergenerational Feminism in New York City's Tenant Movement," in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Summer 2009), 387-415.

[57] Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying,* 50.

[58] Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency,* 115.

[59] Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying,* 171.

have the highest unemployment rate and the lowest wage scales. In spite of our need to work, we

are the last hired, the first fired." The clips that play during this voice-over include Black women

marching down the street holding a sign that says "Cops Kill", Black women caring for small

children, and grocery shopping. The selection of these scenes could have been influenced by the

filmmakers themselves or by the League members advising the film. Either way, these clips

reveal something about the perception of women in the League. They were not the Panther-style

leather-jacket-wearing gun-toting revolutionaries. Instead, they appear as working class mothers

and community members concerned both with police brutality and feeding their families.[60]

This association of working class women as being primarily responsible for feeding the

family shows up again in the blues song that *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying* takes it's name from. In

the second verse of his "Please Mr. Foreman," Joe Lee Hooker wails that "My wife's been very

sickly, she can't help me by takin' on a job….and we got 5 little children to feed, tell me, why

you wanna make my life so hard?"[61] In this way, the working conditions in the plant were

perceived as affecting women and families who did not work in the plant but relied on and

supported men that did.

In later League newsletters there are selections that focus on how the oppressive and

dangerous conditions in the plant hurt the women and families that rely on industrial workers for

survival. An article following the death of a few workers due to an unsafe workplace highlights

the experience that plant violence had on those not working directly in the plants.

> "What is the nature of your "concern", Harry [the plant manager]? Are you "concerned"
> about the family of Rose Logan, now motherless because of one of your brakeless high-
> lows? Are you "concerned" about the family of Mamie Williams, Harry? The same
> Mamie Williams whom you made leave a hospital bed and a doctor's care so she could
> return to the death pit of Eldon Avenue? Are you "concerned", Harry, about the pregnant

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60   Unknown Speaker, VVL, DB14464. *Finally Got the News,* 50:00.
61   Joe Lee Carter, "Please Mr. Foreman" 1965. Accessed December 2015.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYcecsNc-GI

wife whose husband you killed, or about the 19-month-old son whose father you murdered ? Gary Thompson was only 22 years old, Harry; he survived 18 months in Vietnam, yet he could not survive a mere five months in your plant. But of course your "concern" will remove this huge burden of sorrow that rests on the families of those whose loved ones you murdered."

In this way ELRUM tied the household labor of reproduction to the in-plant production and highlighted the toll that the industry took on both.[62]

Black women faced not only the sexual harassment of foreman but also the dangers of working in some of the more dangerous jobs on the shop floor. A Black woman named Rose Logan at the Eldon Ave plant was severely injured in an accident with a forklift (or, according to ELRUM, was run down by "a honkie driving a forklift"), and when ordered by the plant infirmary to return to work, died from her injuries. Her death became a rallying cry in the publications of ELRUM.[63] However, these publications, in indicting management and union for placing profits ahead of safety, do not explicitly point to sexist division of labor as the reason that many Black women end up in janitorial positions or other service work on the shop floor. This is in keeping with the primary focus on race and class that the leadership espoused.

Gendered Organizing Efforts

The League's political strategy was based around the concept that Black people possessed the greatest amount of power at the point of the production. The logic goes that the high density of Black workers on the assembly line had the capacity to shut down entire plants and potentially the whole auto industry. Indeed, the successful wildcats at the Eldon Ave plant were especially powerful because Eldon Ave was Chrysler Corporation's *only* gear and axle

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[62]   DRUM, "The carrot and the stick: December 11, 1968" (from DRUM Newsletter Number 24), accessed online November 2015 at https://libcom.org/library/carrot-stick-december-11-1968
[63]   ELRUM newsletter, Volume 1 number 7. 1970. Back page. In MSU Special collections.

plant.[64] Following from this theoretical framework, the League did not prioritize organizing

women *as women* but rather *as workers.* Geschwender mentions that the League "recognized a

special need and believed that a special program was required" in organizing workers.[65] It is not

certain that this assertion holds up and it is unclear where that point came from. In some cases

the leadership talked about "the women question" as merely a distraction from work to be done.

Kenneth Cockrel asserts that "there are a profound number of revolutionary tasks that have to be

performed and a relatively scarce number of people. But people use shit like the women

question, the race question, as a pretext for not doing this work. Black organizations being

subjected to pressures 'primarily by whites', to posture. The real thing is to relate to workers."[66]

Women were definitely not dismissed as being important to the functioning of the League, but

the primary focus on class-based organizing is emphasized. Indeed, to suggest otherwise caused

tension within the League as those who asserted the importance of women's issues were charged

with wishing "to elevate the problems of women on par with capitalism by calling it sexism."[67]

The message was clear: women are important members of the Black working class, but focusing

specifically on women's issues detracts from the struggle against capitalism.

Still, women within the League did what they could to organize efforts that supported

women more directly. There was some effort to organize hospital workers in the city of Detroit.

These efforts were publicized at least enough to encourage similar organizing efforts in New

York City (under the name the Health Revolutionary Union Movement).[68] Hospitals were

singled out as sites where a lot of Black women were working in large numbers. Hospitals were

also targeted because of their history of brutal treatment of both Black workers and patients.

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[64]   Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency,* 97.
[65]   *Ibid,* 131.
[66]   Kenneth Cockrel, VVL, DB14398.
[67]   Geschwender, *Class, Race, and Worker Insurgency,* 160.
[68]   Stivers interviewed by Andrew Elrod. "When the union's the enemy."

When those identities overlapped the situation was doubly bad. One hospital worker recalled how, "Sometimes [a sick worker] has to pay the hospital to cure him of a disease that he contracted while working as an employee of the hospital."[69] An article in DRUM's newsletter shares some other horror stories from the hospitals, and the intersection between injuries sustained on the job in the factory and the mistreatment and racism of the hospitals. The article relates that

> "Last week a black sister fell down the stairs, and her stupid Honky foreman didn't want her to go to First Aid. The Hamtramck First Aid sent her to Ford Hospital for an X-ray. When she got back she had a slightly - fractured wrist and a bruised leg and hip. The nut at the so-called hospital sent her back to work and put on her slip, doing left-hand work on a sit-down job."

This article is very potently titled "The butcher shop: Hamtramck Hospital."[70]

It is hard to find definitive accounts of the type of organizing work that went on in the hospitals, despite it being referenced in multiple accounts and by multiple speakers. Georgakas relates that the hospital worker organizing drive was initiated early on by Edna Watson, Paula Hankins, and Rachel Bishop but were not given enough support by the rest of the organization so the project collapsed.[71] This narrative is at least complicated by the experience of Cleo Stivers who was involved in HRUM in New York in the early 70s. Perhaps the lack of documentation of concrete struggles in the hospitals was aided by the very short period of existence of the League (under two years) and the fact that their base of support began in the auto plants.

There were a few select instances in which League leadership addressed specifically the place of Black women in society and their particular needs and role in revolutionary organization. Kenneth Cockrel, in one interview, explains that the League has supported "street

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[69]   Unknown Speaker, VVL, DB14514.
[70]   Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, "The butcher shop: Hamtramck Hospital," (DRUM Newsletter Number 21), accessed online November 2015 at https://libcom.org/library/butcher-shop-hamtramck-hospital
[71]   Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying,* 171.

brothers out there who don't work in plants, ...ADC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children]

mothers who are jammed up… we try to deal concretely with all of those problems. We have

represented ADC mothers, we have organized and worked with ADC mothers".[72] This instance

of reaching out to the community is noteworthy for its' acknowledgement of how gender affects

who is able to work in the plants in the first place. Black women who have to raise their children

on their own were most likely unable to work in the plants. Cockrel and the League's devotion of

resources to supporting these women is very significant.

Additionally, one white women auto worker interviewed as part of the *Finally Got the

News* material collection shares how she is helping to organize auto worker's wives. She is

helping to do this because they have a tendency to encourage their husbands *not* to go out

onstrike, and apparently this was a huge problem in the Sterling Stamping plant strike where

white workers wildcatted over working conditions.[73] The woman interviewed asserts that the

wives of the workers were the ones putting pressure on them to stay on the job so they could

bring home a decent wage to their family.[74] This is because in the classic nuclear family it was

often the burden of the women to "economize at home" when money was tight.[75] Although this

is a white women talking about issues with white workers, the interview was conducted while

gathering material for a documentary on the League. It is not a stretch to imagine these same

ideas being brought up in League meetings.

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[72]   Kenneth Cockrel, VVL, DB14489. For a discussion on the racist discrimination of ADC, see Cynthia Edmonds-Cady, "The Boundaries of Sisterhood: Race, Class, Gender, and Participation in Michigan's Welfare Rights Movement and Response to Welfare Policy, 1964-1972," (PhD, Michigan State University, 2006), 45-47.

[73]   Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 2001), accessed online November 2015 at https://books.google.com/books?id=MgbhCQAAQBAJ&pg=PT255&lpg=PT255&dq=sterling+stamping+strike+detroit+1968&source=bl&ots=3CB66UwXNh&sig=8cR_NTKQ1p47A_kEXULPmJfk6jE&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjKibuk4dzJAhUo7YMKHUCWBg4Q6AEIPjAF#v=onepage&q&f=false

[74]   Unknown Speaker, VVL, DB14514.

[75]   I am thankful to Dr. Lisa Fine for the term and for discussing this topic with me which helped me to develop some of these ideas.

Gender Oppression in the League

In order to persuade white workers to support the League, John Watson was fond of espousing that "the things the Black movement is doing inside of industry is basically in their [white workers] interest."[76] However, parallel claims were never made regarding *women's* interests. The Executive Board of the League's only engagement with the contemporary feminist movement was dismissing it as the "*white* women's liberation movement".[77] The treatment of women within the League was sometimes just as dismissive. The decisions and the individual behavior of some League members were very harmful to women in the movement and disrespectful of their concerns.

In some cases this behavior exhibited itself as abuse. The office of Chuck Wooten and General Baker in Highland Park was described as "often in filthy condition and the scene of abusive treatment of women and generally uncomradely behavior."[78] Another account charges that "male chauvinism was rampant in the League" and that "sisters would be asked to give it up sometimes when coming to the Cortland [Highland Park] office."[79] Georgakas also posits that physically abusive behavior towards women existed in some groups of the League.[80]

An interesting development in intra-League gender politics was the controversies that arose about members of the Executive Board dating and marrying white women. There arose a "double standard [that] allowed League males to seek relationships outside the organization even where 'competing' political groups were concerned; similar action on the part of League females

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[76]   John Watson, VVL, DB14432.
[77]   In a transcript of an interview conducted by David Wellman and Jim Jacobs. Untitled. MSU special collections.
[78]   Allen, "Dying From the Inside," 101.
[79]   Ahmad, "1968-1971: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers."
[80]   Georgakas and Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying,* 171.

was often viewed as a 'security risk'." This caused women within the League to become furious with these leaders. Some of the men attempted to deflect criticism away from their personal lives by turning it into a critique of cultural nationalism in general.[81] Even later critics of the League (especially those with cultural-nationalist leanings) continue to accuse some of the Executive Board as "chasing white women" instead of solving the contradictions that were emerging within the League.[82]

Some women in the League took a moderate approach to the misogyny in the League. Cleo Stivers, League and Black Panther veteran, in a 2012 panel entitled "16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence" hosted at the Guillermo Morales Assata Shakur Community and Student Center in New York City said that "Men engage in violence as a response to pain."[83]Although certainly not reflective of *all* League women, this perspective articulates a woman's support of the goals of the League while momentarily de-emphasizing women-specific issues.

The Limits of Marxism-Leninism and the Potential for Revolutionary Working-Class Feminism

I was originally interested in this project because of those classic inquiries of the social historian: What was the experience like of women in the League? What did they think about the movement that they were participants in? What did it feel like, as women, to support an organization led by men that often refused to address women's issues?

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[81]   Allen, "Dying From the Inside," 86-87.
[82]   Ahmad, "1968-1971: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers."
[83]   Amber Tafari Laraque, "Original Panther Cleo Silvers spreads knowledge at City College," <u>New York Amsterdam News</u>, New York, N.Y., 13 Dec 2012: 42.

As was the case with many male leaders of the time, the men of the League almost totally ignored gender-specific issues of oppression. Sexism was addressed, if at all, as a subsidiary to capitalism and racism. Black women workers were certainly valued within much of the organization, but usually only as *Black* or *worker.* The League prided itself on their ability to "reinterpret Marxism in the language of the community."[84] Yet in this way "the community" was seen as the Black community, and women were not perceived as a distinct group. This is in spite of a long history of socialist-feminism in the United States dating back at least as far as turn-of-the-century feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman and her challenges to the privatized home.[85] But perhaps the failures of the League are a failure of Marxism-Leninism generally and its' ignorance of the specific role that women and unpaid household labor play in reproduction of the workforce. It was not until the 21st century that Marxist-feminist Silvia Federici asserted that "fighting for waged work or fighting to 'join the working class in the workplace,'... cannot be a path to liberation. Wage employment may be a necessity but it cannot be a coherent political strategy. As long as reproductive work is devalued, as long as it is considered a private matter and women's responsibility, women will always confront capital and the state with less power than men, and in conditions of extreme social and economic vulnerability."[86]

Although Federici's observation is from 2008, she is examining trends and social conditions that began well before the time of the League. The Marxist-feminist critique of capitalism's exploitation of women in the home is *not incompatible* with the League's critique of exploitation of Black assembly line workers in the auto plant. Indeed, Federici even argues that

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[84]   cited in Robert Dudnick, "Black Workers in Revolt". A guardian pamphlet. Feb 15, 1969. In MSU Special Collections.
[85]   Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "A Feminist Challenge to the Privatized Home." in *Modern American Women: A Documentary History*, edited by Susan Ware (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 78-81.
[86]   Silvia Federici, "A Feminist Critique of Marx" 2008. Updated in 2011. Accessed online in November 2015 at http://endofcapitalism.com/2013/05/29/a-feminist-critique-of-marx-by-silvia-federici/

the first mid-20th century women's liberation movement, the African-American led Welfare Mothers Movement, harbored the sentiments of socialist-feminism with their campaign for "wages for housework" under the guise of Aid to Dependent Children and their declaration that "welfare" is a women's right. The potential for the League to develop a revolutionary program that included gender-specific issues was there. Yet perhaps without the subsequent theoretical developments in Marxism, a feminist integration into the League's platform was not possible. Unable to draw upon the ideas of later Marxists (like Federici), the leaders of the League never articulated an applicable Marxist-feminist line. But their reference to supporting ADC mothers and ELRUM's implicit connection between factory work exploitation and household reproductive work oppression point to a tangential awareness of women's distinct oppression. Bereft of a theoretical commitment to feminism, maybe the women in the League appreciated the ways that it did articulate a revolutionary strategy that implicated women indirectly.

An alternative interpretation is that the women in the League saw their labor activism as grounded in a history of working-class feminism that did not resemble the mainstream feminist movement.[87] In her seminal work *The Other Women's Movement*, Dorothy Sue Cobble posits that "a more class-conscious feminism would define itself as about the removal of class and race injustices as well as gender, and policies that protect working class institutions such as unions would be understood as important to the progress of women. In other words, the decline of organized labor would be seen as a feminist issue." In this way, perhaps the women of the League did not prioritize *class* or *race* as primary struggles *per se*, but instead saw their activism in the factories, hospitals, and communities as part of a larger movement for women's liberation.

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[87] "Labor feminists recognized multiple sources of inequality and injustice. They understood that gender equality is but one form of oppression and that it is not necessarily always the primary injustice bearing down on women. In some eras and for some people, class or race inequalities may emerge as more problematic or more in need of resolution than gender inequities." in Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement,* 223.

Indeed, Cobble also points out that "The history of labor feminism makes it clear, for example, that a work and family policy for low-income women is intimately linked to increasing worker economic and political power."[88]

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers was an organization fraught with ideological, institutional, and inter-personal conflicts. It included many women in its ranks, yet rarely confronted women's issues directly. In some ways this was the product of the masculinist Black Power-era and in other ways the product of an interpretation of Marxism that held that organizing factory workers, regardless of gender, was the primary form of revolutionary activity. Yet women played important roles in proto-League activities, helped spearhead efforts to organize outside of factories, and were included in efforts on the shop floor (sometimes at the expense of their physical safety).

Because of their gender, women faced discrimination at the hands of foreman, the UAW, and the League itself. Foreman sexually harassed them, making promises in exchange for sexual favors. Sex-discriminated jobs such as janitorial work placed them in front of forklifts where they lost their lives. They were physically abused by men within the League. Yet in spite of this, women supported the efforts of the League to better the working conditions of Black workers within the auto plants. Faced with dangerous conditions and a lack of access to the appropriate union privileges, the women of the League chose to, momentarily, put their class and race ahead of interpersonal gendered oppression with the hope that the success of the League would also be a success for Black women in the plants and the Black community as a whole. Certainly not reflective of what is remembered as "women's liberation" in textbooks, the women of the League crafted their own liberation that reflected their lives in the plants and in the Black

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[88]   Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement,* 228.

community.[89] The experience of women in the League of Revolutionary Black workers is

instructive on how class, race, and gender intersect within revolutionary organizations and the

necessity of embracing many different struggles in the liberation movements of today.

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[89] "Too much concern with specific labels like "feminist" has led to our missing the inherent feminism of Black women's activism on behalf of their race and their communities, say, on matters of welfare rights, community safety, police abuse, and education." Benita Roth. *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 76. I would add to this list: "working conditions".

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Friends and Foes within the City Walls:

The Relationship between the Magnates and the Cities in Medieval England as Reflected in the

Great Charter of Liberties

HST 482

Professor Emily Z. Tabuteau

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Abstract:

Contrary to popular belief, Magna Carta is by no mean an outcry for freedom and liberty in modern sense; rather, it is a promulgation of the interest of the English magnates. Their struggle for power needed the help of the towns and townspeople. The purpose of this essay is to examine how Magna Carta reflects this profound relationship between the English magnates in the countryside and the dwellers in the town, namely the magnates' recognition of cities' importance as well as the former's desire to repress the expansion of this importance.

The English Great Charter of the Liberties (1215) is among the most important legal documents of Medieval Europe. Also known as *Magna Carta Libertatum*, it was drafted on June 15, 1215 in the midst of the struggle for power between King John of England and a group of rebel magnates as a compromise to make peace between the parties. The Great Charter promised a series of restorations of the "ancient liberties" of the kingdom. including the protection of the church, the protection of the baronial rights against royal encroachment, the access to peer justice, due process of law, and the adjustment of feudal fines and duties which would be implemented and enforced through a council of twenty-five "barons." It is worth noting that this document contains evidence regarding the profound relationship between the magnates in the countryside and the dwellers in the town, namely the magnates' recognition of cities' importance as well as the former's desire to repress the expansion of this importance.

In terms of the text of the documents, the Latin text of the Great Charter comes from the Lincoln Charter of 1215[1] and the English text comes from David Carpenter's translation. Also, to clarify, by "towns" I mean "urban centers" in general. In order to make the discussion and comparison more perceivable, I refer to both English cities and boroughs as "towns" and the "citizens," "burgesses" and "men" from the towns as "townspeople."

Contrary to popular belief, the Great Charter of Liberties is by no mean an outcry for freedom and liberty in a modern sense; rather, it is a promulgation of the interest of the magnates and a major attempt to recognize their de facto privileges with a legal document. Although, at the time of the Great Charter, nearly nine-tenths of the population of England lived in the countryside as the tenants of the magnates[2], the Charter does not provide much information

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[1] David Carpenter, *Magna Carta* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), pp. 32, 34.
[2] Danny Danziger et al., *1215: The Year of Magna Carta* (New York: Touchstone, 2003), p. 19.

about the connection between these magnates and their tenants. *Au contraire*, the charter seems

to focus on relationship between these countable magnates and the king. Before 1215, there was

no de jure distinction among the magnates and their tenants; the magnates, the "barons"

(*barones*)[3], were legally but the king's leading citizens.[4] These "leading citizens" sought to use

the Charter to change this fact by legally empowering themselves with more exclusive liberties.

The regulation of inheritance is an example. Before 1215, feudal tenure was a personal

relationship that tied both parties together through the vassal's homage to his[5] lord and the lord's

grant to the vassal of a fief or office.[6] Surprisingly, as a document focused on the relationship

between the king and the magnates, the Charter says nothing about homage. Instead, several

clauses indicate the magnates' attempt to convert feudal tenure from homage-based personal

relationship into their hereditary liberty with a law code. For example, in clause two, if any of the

magnates or others tenants holding land in chief by military service (*tenetium de nobis in capite

per servicium militare*) dies and his heir is of full age, the heir ought to have his inheritance by

the "ancient relief" (*per antiquum relevium*).[7] Even though this practice was nothing new in

1215, the Great Charter thereby transformed it into a legal liberty. Also, the magnates certainly

had included the scenario of underage heirs into consideration. To prevent the king from taking

this advantage, clause three proclaims that the heir ought to have his inheritance when he comes

of age (*cum ad etatem pervenerit*) without relief or fine (*sine relevio et sine fine*).[8] To prevent the

royal agents or guardians from encroaching on the heirs' hereditary fief, clauses four and five

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[3] Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, p. 38.
[4] Ibid., p. 121.
[5] As almost all tenants were male.
[6] Mark Bailey, *The Decline of Serfdom in Late Medieval England: from Bondage to Freedom* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014), pp. 89-100, passim.
[7] Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 38-39.
[8] Ibid.

further put this liberty of inheritance under the protection of law.[9] Clause seven and eight, simultaneously made the widows' liberty to her "marriage portion and inheritance" (*maritagium et hereditatem suam).*[10] under the protection of the law. Legally, the king could no longer take advantage of the vulnerability of a widow. Under these clauses, the heir and widow received the inheritance from their kinship to the deceased lord, not from their own homage to the king. Thus, both the heirs and wives of the magnates also became part of the exclusive stratum.

Therefore, the magnates were the driving force behind the Great Charter. However, they could not ignore the importance of the towns. By the early thirteenth century, towns had become increasingly important. The Norman Conquest of 1066 was followed by a wave of urbanization in England. Between 1066 and 1230, more than 125 towns were founded in England, including Arundel, Boston, Chelmsford, Devizes, Egremint, Harwich, Kingston-upon-Hull, Lynn, Morpeth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Okehampton, Portsmouth, Reigate, Salisbury, Truro, Uxbridge, Watford and Yarmouth.[11] The rate of town foundation consummated in the fifty years between 1180 and 1230 with the addition of no fewer than fifty-seven new towns. Most of the towns founded in this period belonged to the magnates instead of the king. At the time when the Magna Carta was drafted, the number of towns had doubled since the Norman Conquest.[12] Economically, both the king and the magnates sought to play an active part to benefit from this rapid urbanization.

In their letter patent to found towns, the words "free" and "liberties" are prominent due to their need to attract dwellers. The burgesses, the townspeople of the boroughs who took up the

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[9] Ibid., pp.40-41.
[10] Ibid., p. 41.
[11] Danziger, p. 38.
[12] Ibid., p. 40.

king or the magnates' offer of burgages, plots of land in the new town, were to enjoy certain "liberties and free customs" accordingly.[13] They were to be free to sell, sublet, mortgage or pass on their burgages to their heirs. They were exempted from having to pay servile dues, from performing mandatory labor services and from paying toll at the market. By granting these "liberties and free customs" to their burgage tenants, the king and the magnates seemed to give up some profitable rights. As a matter of fact, they were the ultimate benefiters. They expected that by doing so the towns would flourish and they could bring in a higher rent income from new settlers and more money from tolls paid by non-burgesses. A letter patent drawn up in 1207 to establish Liverpool indicates King John's aforesaid attempt:

> "The king to all who wish to have burgages in the town of Liverpool, greeting. Know that we have granted to all who take up burgages at Liverpool that they shall have all the *liberties and free customs* in the town of Liverpool as enjoyed by any other free borough on the seacoast in our land. And so we command that you may travel there safely and in our peace in order to receive your burgages and to live there. Witness Simon de Pateshull, at Winchester, 27 August in the 9th year of our reign. (Italics added)"[14]

As for the magnates, some of them took an active part in benefitting from urbanization and commerce. Maurice Paynell, a baron who was previously under the Bishop of London's wardship,[15] created a new borough at Leeds; Richard de Argentein, another baron, was responsible for the foundation of Newmarket in Suffolk, the earl of Devon founded Honiton; the earl of Norfolk created Harwich. One of the most prominent magnate families, the de Clare, as earls of Hertford, Gloucester and Pembroke, possessed more than twenty towns.[16] Richard de Clare, earl of Hertford, and his son, Gilbert de Clare, were both members of the twenty-five

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[13] Ibid., p. 39.
[14] Ibid., p. 37.
[15] James McMullen Rigg, "Gaunt, Maurice de," *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 21 (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1885), p. 231.
[16] Danziger, pp. 40-41.

enforcers of the Great Charter.[17] William Marshall also married to one of the heiresses of the de Clare and succeed some of these towns, becoming one of the most affluent person of the realm. At the same time, markets proliferated. There were just two markets in Oxfordshire in 1086, but ten more by the 1220s. Initially, the markets emerged spontaneously; to make them function better, regulations were implemented to charters of both old and new towns. One of the regulation was to ensure that markets had to be held on different days in different places and thus the itinerant traders could adopt a circuit that kept them in business throughout the week. The driving force behind these regulations and the beneficiary thereof was no one else but the magnate class.[18]

The towns were as important politically as they economically. London is the only town mentioned by name in the Great Charter. This exclusiveness is well-deserved. By 1135, London was already referred to as the "capital" and the "queen of the whole kingdom."[19] Geographically, with both the bridge and the Thames River, London had long been the center of traffic in England between north and south and between east and west. In the second half of the thirteenth century, the moving of the exchequer from Winchester to Westminster confirmed London's status as the realm's capital.[20] The Londoners had been struggling for more political participation ever since. In the crisis of 1191, during King Richard's absence on crusade in the Holy Land, the townspeople of London had gained from the magnates the right to form a "commune," a self-governing association prevailed in contemporary Northern and Central Italy but unknown in

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[17] Matthew Strickland, "Enforcers of Magna Carta (act. 1215–1216)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed on 12/13/2015.
[18] Ibid., p. 42.
[19] Christopher Nugent Lawrence Brooke, *London, 800-1216: The Shaping of a City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 84.
[20] Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 117-118.

England.[21] In 1206, King John accepted the city's self-government by ordering the leading

citizens, the "barons," of the city to elect twenty-four consuls to form the executive body of the

city.[22] London had played an essential part in the rebellion against the king. And therefore, in

1215, around a month before the enactment of the Great Charter, John granted the aforesaid

"barons" of the city the right to choose their own mayor.[23]

The Great Charter indicates the magnate's recognition of the significance of the towns,

especially London. Clause 12 regulated the practice of levying scutage and aid as following:

> "No scutage or aid is to be levied in our kingdom, save by the common counsel of our
> kingdom, save for the ransoming of our body, and the making of our first-born son a
> knight, and or the marrying a single time of our first-born daughter; and for these things
> there is only to be a reasonable aid.
>
> *In a similar way it is to be for aids from the city of London.* (Italics added)"[24]

Clause 15 is a similar regulation. Both clauses 12 and 15 entrust the common counsel of the

kingdom the right to levy scutage and aid in the special occasions. Due to the fact that clause 12

mentioned scutage, it is reasonable to assume the other unmentioned yet designated beneficiaries

of this clause other than the named city of London are the magnates. Clause 15 was certainly

enacted for the "free men" as it specifies.[25] Although, most of the townspeople of London

belonged to the category of "free men," the drafters certainly recognized London's extraordinary

economic and political importance and felt the need to provide thereof with an exclusive spot in

the Charter. And therefore among the three groups of beneficiaries, the city of London was the

only group that was clearly identified.

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[21] Ibid., p. 118.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., pp. 117-118.
[24] Ibid., p. 43.
[25] Ibid., p. 45.

Clause 13 also names London as the direct beneficiary as the first part goes "…The city of London is to have all its ancient liberties and free customs, by both land and water…"[26] As both clause 12 and clause 13's first half therein specify London as the beneficiary, there may have been a section dedicated to the city of London itself in the early drafts of the Charter. The Charter also contains recognition of the merchants as a special class of people. The merchants around 1215 were mostly townspeople who benefitted from trade. Although some merchants were serfs, their status of being citizens of the towns exempted them from paying certain dues as well performing mandatory labor services the serfs resided in the manors ought to do.[27] Clause 20 of the Charter lays the rules of amercement. In this clause, the merchants are identified as a special group of people alongside the free men and the villeins and their means to support a living is neither "livelihood" nor "wainage" but "merchandise."[28] As "free man" and "villein" were social groups rather than professions, "merchant" being separately listed here indicates that the other than being a profession, it was recognized as a social group as well.

In addition, the Charter granted more privileges to the towns and the townspeople. Clause 13 not only grants "ancient liberties and free customs" to the city of London but also to "all other cities and boroughs, and vills and ports."[29] These towns did have "ancient liberties" and "free customs" to defend. Between 1100 and 1215, over seventy towns had acquired royal charters granting various privileges, sometimes similar to those enjoyed by the city of London.[30] In the charters, the towns were described as "cities," "boroughs" and "vills," the same terminologies used in the Great Charter. As for the "ports," Sandwich, Dover, Hythe, Romney and Hastings

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[26] Ibid., p. 43.
[27] Danziger, p. 38
[28] Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, pp. 47, 119.
[29] Ibid., pp. 43, 45.
[30] Ibid., p. 118.

formed the Cinque Ports for military and trade purposes. The recipients of these town grants were called "citizens," "burgesses" or simply "men." [31] They held properties by burgage tenure in return for rent and aforementioned freedom of alienation as protected by clause 37.[32] Before 1215, the towns were protected by different charters and the dwellers from different towns enjoy different privileges. The Great Charter hereby expanded the privileges enjoyed by town citizens in general by granting liberties and customs previously only enjoyed by the city of London, the most important town in the realm, to every town in England.

Furthermore, other than recognition and privileges, some clauses were drafted directly to benefit the towns and commerce. Clause 32 calls for a complete removal of fish weirs "from the Thames and the Medway, and throughout all England, save at the seashore."[33] Under this clause, London and other towns seem entitled as they gained a better trade environment at the expense of the magnates. Fish weirs existed as an obstacle to trade as they prevented ships from sailing up and down the rivers properly. Most of the fish weirs on the rivers belonged to the magnates.[34] Thus the provision of removal had a direct impact on the lords who had weirs on their own sections of river. Some years after the Great Charter's enactment, in order to comply with this clause, among the weirs destroyed were even those belonged to Richard, who was the second son of King John, earl of Cornwall, count of Poitou and king of the Romans,[35] a very powerful figure in both England and on the continent. Another clause aimed to facilitate commerce is clause 33 which called the provision to standardize measures:

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[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., p. 51.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., p. 119.
[35] Matthew Strickland, "Henry II", accessed on 12/13/2015.

"There is to be one measure of wine throughout all our kingdom, and one measure of ale, and one measure of corn, namely the quarter of London, and one width of tinted cloths, and russets and haubergets, namely two ells within the borders. Moreover, for weights it is also to be as for measures."[36]

The wealth of towns came from both commerce and manufacture. By standardizing measures of wine, ale, corn and cloth, this clause aimed to facilitate both factors to stimulate economic development of the towns.

One of the driving forces of this clause were the local merchants. The trade and consumption of corn and ale were local for the former being a crucial crop to sustain the English people and the latter having to be consumed soon after it was brewed. The merchants who were active in local trade could certainly benefit from the standardization of measure. Other than the local merchants, another driving force behind this clause were probably the magnates who had the assets and resources to trade in a larger and international scale. In terms of wine, with the loss of Anjou, a major wine producing region, after the English defeat of the Normandy Campaigns of 1202-04, most wine, in 1215, were imported from Gascony shipped from the port of Bordeaux.[37]

The different clothes mentioned in this clause, namely the "tinted" or dyed cloths, "russets" and "halbergets," were manufactured at many centers in England. A thirteenth century poem mentioned the scarlets of Lincoln, the halbergets of Stamford as well as the russets of Colchester.[38] High-quality cloths were imported mostly from Flanders, the center of the European cloth industry.[39] Wool, on the other hand, was the major good England exported to the

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[36] Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, p. 51.
[37] David Carpenter*, The Struggle for Mastery: Britain, 1066-1284* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 34.
[38] *English Historical Documents: Volume 3 1189-1327*, ed. Harry Rothwell, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, Ltd., 1975), p. 881.
[39] Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, p. 119.

continent, mostly to Flanders to supply its cloth industry. Credit and other trade goods flowed

between English and Flemish merchants as well, leading to considerable integration of the

domestic economies of the two regions.

The unique interdependence of these two economies made up the most intensive trading

in the vast regions of northern Europe.[40] As the cloth Flanders sent to England did not balance

the value of wool England exported to Flanders, the Flemish merchants paid much of the wool in

silver. The trade was conducted in such a large scale by the magnates that it became a major

factor that lead to the explosion of money supply in England in the early thirteenth century.[41]

Moreover, clause 41 creates a safer environment for both English and foreign merchants to

engage in commerce. This clause offers safe passage to merchants both entering and leaving

England and protects them from "any evil exactions according to ancient and right customes." If

the merchants came from "a land" that was in war with England, the clause stated that they

should be "attached without damage of the body and goods" and later treated the same way as

how the English merchants were treated in that place.[42] This was meant to protect English

merchants who operated in foreign lands. The use of "land" (terra) here indicates some of the

merchants were not from a kingdom and some English merchants were operated in this place as

well. This probably refers to the merchants from the county of Flanders, which had been

occasionally in war with England in the twelfth century.[43] The need to include this clause also

increased due to the hostility between England and France. Although, England lost Normandy,

Anjou and Maine to France after 1204, the magnates still had connections and sponsored

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[40] Edwin S. Hunt and James Murray, *A History of Business in Medieval Europe*, 1200-1550 (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 160.
[41] Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, p. 119.
[42] Ibid., p. 53.
[43] Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles the Good*, ed. James Bruce Ross (New York: Colombia University Press, 1959), p. 9-16, passim.

merchants in these areas. With England and France being hostile to each other, the magnates certainly felt the need to protect their clienteles and commerce from being harmed by this hostility.

Although, the magnates recognized the importance of towns and merchants, offered privileges and adopted other measures to proliferate trade, they, nonetheless, sought to suppress the town's expanding political role and to put towns under their control. Some details of the Great Charter suggest that towns got much less than they hoped for, indeed less than they had solicited in the Articles of the Barons. Tallage is one example. Tallage in England in the early thirteenth century refers to the extraordinary contributions the lords levied on their tenants.[44] The king and the magnates were entitled to collect tallages from the cities, boroughs, vills and ports they possessed. In article 32, "tallages and aids on the city of London, and on other cities which have such liberties" ought to be treated in the same manner as scutage and aid.[45] The king and the barons could not, under the Articles, levy tallage on London and some other towns without the consent of the common counsel of the realm. Although, London and other towns were not necessarily part of the group to give consent, as I will explain in the next paragraph, the requirement of consent, nevertheless, limited the king and the magnates' ability to levy tallage. However, in the clauses 12, 13 and 15, the passage regarding "tallage" was deliberately dropped in favor of the king and the magnates against the towns and only the aids on London required consent, with "other towns" being excluded from this treatment. The failure to prevent increment in town-farms is another example. Clause 25 stats that the king and the magnates ought to set the "farms," the fix payments, due from their "counties," "hundreds," "ridings" and "wapentakes" to

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[44] Mark Bailey, 47.
[45] "The Articles of the Barons," *The Magna Carta Project* (Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2015) accessed on 12/13/2015.

the "ancient farms."[46] In other words, this clause prevented the king and the magnates from rising the fix payments over their feudal properties arbitrarily. Whereas, it says nothing about the town-farms. The Londoners and the dwellers from other towns would certainly have welcomed that for King John and the magnates had been constantly increasing the town-farms.[47] In this case, the kings and the magnates stood together to suppress the demand from the towns.

The Great Charter excluded London and other towns in the common counsel of the kingdom. Clause 12 and 15 describes this institution as an assembly from which the king ought to obtain consent to levy scutage and aid.[48] Who made up this institution? Clause 14 asserts that archbishops, bishops, abbots, earls (*comites*), and greater barons (*maiores barones*) were to be summoned individually by letters and "all those who hold from us in chief" (*omnes illos qui de nobis tenant in capite*), were to be summoned by the sheriffs and bailiffs.[49] Thus this authority was only enjoyed by the magnates described. In other words, it is these magnates from clause 14, alongside with the king, decided whether or how much the other people of the realm ought to pay, including the townspeople.

Although the mayor of London was one of the twenty-five "barons" of the kingdom (*quinque barones de regno*) according to the security clause 61, there is no suggestion that he would be summoned either by letters or by royal agents to the common counsel.[50] The mayor of London certainly did not belong to the "archbishops, bishops, abbots, or earls" from clause 14; he could be one of the "greater barons" but there is no evidence in the Charter to suggest he is indeed one of them. Neither does clause 61 specifies if the mayor of London, even though as a

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[46] Carpenter, p. 47.
[47] Ibid., p. 120.
[48] Ibid., p. 42.
[49] Ibid, pp. 44-45.
[50] Ibid., pp. 63, 121.

member of the twenty-five barons, is regarded as a "greater baron." Assuming he was and the

London's consent in levying aid was heard in the common counsel, it is certain that the consent

of the townspeople from other towns were nowhere to be seen or heard in this assembly for the

Great Charter created no such mechanism to include their voice into consideration.

It is probably not strange that other towns were unseen in the common counsel because

they were not powerful enough to make a difference. But to put London's liberty tallage in the

Articles of Barons at first but to exclude London from the common counsel in the Great Charter

itself indicates that the king and the magnates' were deliberately trying to restrain London. As I

have mentioned before, London had played a major role in numerous occasions.

In 1135 during the accession of King Stephan, the Londoners even claimed their right

and privilege to choose the king.[51] During the reign of Richard, the king appointed William

Longchamp as one of the Chief Justiciars, who were entrusted much of the king's authority when

the king was outside his kingdom. In 1191, when King Richard was still in Cyprus fighting its

Greek ruler, the Londoners had joined with John and the magnates in deposing William

Longchamp, putting the archbishop of Rouen in his place.[52] This was the aforementioned

moment when the Londoners were granted their commune. The Londoners were well aware that

they were important. Thus, they thought their consent should be sought, along with the magnates,

when it came to taxation.[53] Subsequently, in John's reign, one of the demands from the city of

London stated that tallages ought to be abolished "[save when authorized] by *common consent* of

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[51] Ibid., p. 121.
[52] Roger of Hoveden, *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi et Gesta Regis Ricardi Benedicti abbtis*, ed. William Stubbs., vols. 2 (Rolls Series, London, 1867), pp. 220-221.
[53] Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, p. 121.

the kingdom and *of the city*. (Italics added)"[54] This illustrates that if the tallage was to be levied

on the city of London, the Londoner would need to take part in the common counsel to give

consent. Otherwise, the tallage would be against the people of London and thus should be utterly

removed. It probably also implies that the Londoners believed their representatives were entitled

to present in the common counsel along with the magnates to give consent to a tallage, a scutage

or an aid, whether they were supposed to be paid by London alone or by the entire realm

including London. For the king and the magnates, to agree on doing such a thing would result in

London, or even towns in general, even enjoying greater liberties. According to the Great

Charter of 1215, the magnates certainly did not intend to grant London's such wishes. It was

only in the Parliament of 1265 summoned by Simon de Montfront when the latter attempted to

stabilize the political situation were the townspeople's representatives called in for the first

time.[55]

Other than the denial of greater liberties, the Great Charter also contains a degree of

social prejudice against the towns and the townspeople. Firstly, discrimination against merchants

was not strange to England in late twelfth and early thirteenth century. The society of Medieval

England roughly divided itself between three social stratums, namely those who pray (*oratores*),

those who fight (*bellatores*) and those who work (*laboratores*).[56] The first two stratums made up

the magnate class; the last one is a conglomeration of various social groups who make up the rest

of the population, including some "free men" and all of the villeins mentioned in the Charter. As

I mentioned, merchants did not belong to any of these stratums. Benefiting from commerce

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[54] "A London Municipal Collection of the Reign of John," ed. Mary Bateson, *English Historical Review*, 67 (1902), p. 726.
[55] Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, p. 121.
[56] Henry David, *Medieval Europe* (Luton, England: Andrew U.K. Ltd., 2010), pp. 73-115, passim.

instead of from land, the merchants were considered extracting wealth from other classes of the

society. At the same time, towns were considered as places where vanities prevailed. Richard of

Devizes, a devote monk as well as notary from Winchester, shared this sentiment. Writing in the

1190s, he expressed his distaste of the vices found in London while painstaking advising against

his reader to live in London:

> "Well, be that as it may! You will arrive in London. Behold, I prophesy to you: *whatever evil or malicious thing that can be found in any part of the world, you will find in that one city.* Do not associate with the crowds of pimps; do not mingle with the throngs in eating-houses; avoid dice and gambling, the theatre and the tavern. *You will meet with more braggarts there than in all France; the number of parasites is infinite.* Actors, jesters, smooth-skinned lads, Moors, flatterers, pretty boys, effeminates, pederasts, singing and dancing girls, quacks, belly-dancers, sorceresses, extortioners, night-wanderers, magicians, mimes, beggars, buffoons: *all this tribe fill all the houses.* Therefore, if you do not want to dwell with evildoers, do not live in London. (Italics added)"[57]

The magnates probably did not share this religious monk's belief as intensely, but they did hold

certain prejudices against the towns and their dwellers. According to clause 6 of the Charter,

heirs ought to be married "without disparagement" (*absque disparagatione*).[58] Judging from the

fact that early clauses mentioned "warship," "guardian," "sheriff," "maintain the houses, parks,

fish ponds, ponds, mills and other things belonging to that land," it is right to assume the

beneficiary of clause 6 is the landed magnate class for other social groups would hardly have the

access to such things nor the need to regulate thereof. The heirs of the magnate class were thus

forbidden from marrying people whose social status were inferior to them. A merchant,

regardless how wealthy, could not marry into the magnate stratum; it is still possible for him to

become an *oratore* or a *bellatore*, but not through marriage.

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[57] Catharine Arnold, *City of Sin: London and Its Vices* (London: Simon & Schuster Ltd., 2010), p. 45-46.
[58] Carpenter, *Magna Carta,* p. 40.

The growth of cities and commerce during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries precipitated major shifts in social organization and interaction. In some towns in Northern and Central Italy, such as Florence, Bologna, Pisa and Genoa, the elite mercantile class nearly replace the entire magnate stratum which was previous filled by the feudal nobles from the contado who held fiefs either from the empire or from each other.[59] In England, the merchants did not form such a powerful stratum and such "usurping" did not occur. However, they were constantly an upward pressure to the magnate class. Twenty years later after the enactment of the Great Charter, the quarrel between King Henry III and the magnates gave birth to another statute in 1235. This statute is known as the Statue of Merton, or Provisions of Merton.[60] In this document which is regarded as the first English statute, the definition of disparagement and the punishment to marry disparately are identified as below in clause 6:

> "Concerning lords who have married those whom they have in ward to villeins or such as burgesses whereby they are disparaged, if such an heir is under fourteen and of such an age that he cannot consent, then if the relatives complain, the lord shall lose the wardship until the heir comes of age, and all the profit that he would have received from it shall be converted to the profit of him who is under age as the relatives arrange and provide, in return for the same inflicted upon him."[61]

What is the significance of this passage? Firstly, the clause gives a clear definition of what disparagement is. Heirs were, thus, considered disparaged if they were married either to burgesses or to villeins. An English merchant in the early thirteenth was mostly like a burgess; he could also be a villein if he was active in the countryside. Clause 6 of the Statute of Merton again confirms the rule laid down by clause 6 of the Great Charter that, regardless how affluent a merchant is, he could not become a member of the landed aristocratic class. Secondarily, it

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[59] Emily Kelley and Taryn E. L. Chubb, *Mendicants and Merchants in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2012), p. 150.
[60] Hugh Chisholm, "Statute". *Encyclopædia Britannica 25 (11th ed.)* (Cambridge University Press), accessed 12/14/2015.
[61] *English Historical Documents*, p. 353.

provides the measure of enforcement. If a guardian seeks to marry his ward to a wealthy merchant in exchange for money while the merchant receives political favor, it would be considered against the law and the relatives of the ward would be able to complain. The guardian would be, as a result, deprived of wardship. The need to include this provision into the statute, I suspect, is that even after the Great Charter, they were merchants who were wealthy and well-connected enough to be able to ascend the political ladder by marrying into magnate families. In another way, there were also magnates who had actively participated in commerce and needed the alliance of such merchants. But this reciprocal relationship posed as a threat to the status quo of the magnate stratum and thus the king and some magnates felt the need to stop this. To boot, the prejudice of the magnates against the towns and townspeople is also obvious in their ignorance of the mayor of London. Although, the mayor of London was one of the twenty-five barons in the security class, he was the only one that was not named.[62] One reason is that stating the title rather than the name was to emphasize on the fact it is the office of the mayor of London rather than the very major who was regarded as an enforcer of the Charter. This reason does not offer any explanation other than prejudice. Why was every other baron named then? Significantly, they did not believe the mayor of London, merely a burgess, was worthy enough to be named as if he was a great magnate just like everybody else.

In retrospect, what do we see from the Great Charter of Liberties (1215) about the relationship between the magnates and the towns? Firstly, the magnates knew towns, especially the city of London, were important both economically and politically and they need to their alliance in the former's struggles against the king. Secondly, the magnates wanted towns to be prosperous and were willing to offer "ancient liberties and free customs" as an expense to

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[62] Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, p.121.

stimulate the prosperity of the towns. In addition, the readiness of the magnates to offer towns

and the merchants liberties and protections and to adopt methods to facilitate trade indicates that

some magnates themselves were participants of large scale trade and that by doing so, they

themselves were benefited as well. However, the vagueness of clauses 14 and 61 regarding the

mayor of London and the exclusion of all other towns indicates the magnates were reluctant in

granting the towns representation in the common counsel of the kingdom. Provisions regarding

tallage were deliberately dropped. Farms regarding different types of fiefs were regulated with

the exclusion of town-farm. Furthermore, there was also a degree of social prejudice against

towns, townspeople and trading. This reciprocal yet collisional relationship between the

magnates and towns did not smother the gradual yet constant development of towns and trade.

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries witnessed the constant expansion of commerce along

with the empowerment of towns and merchants throughout Western Europe. The fact that the

representatives of towns were summoned by Simon de Montford to the common counsel in 1265

exemplifies this trend.

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